

Workshop #3: Workplace Practices (medium skills – rules of the road)

Employees who are successful quickly learned the key “tricks of the trade” or the workplace rules of the road discussed in this Lesson. Employees who don’t quickly learn these rules most often get in trouble. The interesting thing about these workplace rules is that nobody ever teaches them to you before you go to the world of work. Either you learn them through trial and error; or, not at all, in which case you will likely end-up failing in your job. In any case, for most new workers, it takes a long time, as well as repeated mistakes, before they understand the value of these workplace rules. In other words, they’re most often learned the hard way, by making mistakes. That’s too bad because these mistakes can be avoided with some basic instruction on what the key practices are. Failure to learn them before you begin your career often results in delayed advancement, lost opportunities or even getting fired. Fortunately, you can avoid most of these rookie mistakes if you study, learn and follow these workplace practices sooner rather than later.

While the listing below doesn’t cover all the workplace practices rules you may eventually learn, they are the most important. Plus, these initial explanations are just the beginning of the process of learning about them.

Workshop Topics

1. Being Professional at All Times
2. Leadership
3. Chain of Command
4. Teamwork
5. Loyalty and Integrity (responsibility and honesty)
6. Professional Communications and Time Management
7. Know How You’re Doing (self-assessment and performance ratings)
8. Workplace Relationships (office politics)

In addition to the discussion notes listed below, more content on each these topics can be found in “Part II: Workplace Practices” of the *Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment* book available at <https://wid.org/wid-e3/employment-empowerment/>.

Discussion Notes

1.) Being Professional at All Times

Being professional we mean being appropriate and mature in the workplace. It means being a serious and engaged worker at all times. It means paying attention to your responsibilities. It means doing your job on-time, doing it well, and in the right way. It means demonstrating a commitment to your organization and its mission. It means not letting your emotions over ride your sense of what should be done in a business-like manner. It means being polite, proper, respectful and nice to all you meet. It

means being likeable. It means being clear and specific in your communications. It means never losing your temper, even when the circumstances may seem unbearable. It means keeping a good attitude and positive outlook. It means being and staying properly dressed and presentable all day long. It means sharing information and credit with others, even when you might not want to. It means being loyal and having integrity and more.

2.) Leadership

The essence of leadership begins by understanding that it has four (4) types or categories. The first type or example of leadership is internal or within you (lead yourself). It's singular or personal. It's about you alone. It's how you direct yourself. Think about this form of leadership as the "boss" inside of you. It's that inner voice of responsibility which tells you to turn off the video game or TV and get to your homework. The second type of leadership is your ability to lead by knowing what you're supposed to know. In other words, do you have command of the facts or information which you are responsible for knowing? If you're in school, do you know your lessons? If you're an auto mechanic, do you know the latest technical facts about auto repair? The third type of leadership is an informal type of leadership. It's when a group of people or workers come together for a common purpose or task and have no assigned leader. It's when your teacher gives your project team or study group an assignment to complete. When you first gather with your group, who speaks-up about how to best proceed and get the activity started? Who helps the group move forward? The fourth type of leadership is the one most people think about when this subject comes-up. It's the situation where one person has been placed in charge of a group, team or unit. An assigned leader has been given the rightful authority to lead the group. Leadership in all its possible forms is best described this direct way. Good leaders seek to "fill the void and do the right thing." When something needs to be done or happen, they step-up and take action. And, the action they take is the right thing to do. In addition, a potential leader sounds like one (self-confident or courageous) looks like one (dressed for success) and follows the basic concepts around leadership offered here. So, learn more about this subject and practice your leadership skills every day. It will give you a competitive edge.

3.) Chain of Command

It's really important for you to know and follow your organization's chain of command. It starts with your immediate boss. Next up the line of command will be your boss' boss, all the way to the top. In the other direction, after you will be the person or person you supervise. The organization chart (commonly referred to as the "org. chart") is a diagram showing graphically where each employee fits into your company or agency. In addition to defining the employee chain of command, it may also define the relationship and authority or command of an organization's units or divisions. The organizational chart is valuable in that it enables everyone to know where they fit into the group as well as visualize the flow of authority and responsibility both up and down the chain of command.

4.) Teamwork

A team is two or more people working together who are dedicated to reaching the same objective or goal. Teams are important because they most often prove to be stronger, smarter and more efficient than individuals. There are some wonderful experiments which prove this point. For example, when you give an individual a complex task or problem to solve, give the same problem to a team. Then, compare their respective solutions. Given the various experiences, knowledge and perspectives of the team

members, nine times out of ten the team's answer will be better than the individual's answer. It stands to reason, two (or more) heads are better than one.

5.) Loyalty and Integrity

Employers tell us that loyalty and integrity are the two most valued qualities they look for and need from a worker. Loyalty is devotion to the organization's mission. Loyalty is an employee's dependability and support of the organization's leadership. Loyalty is keeping your boss well informed. Loyalty is supporting their will in an unselfish and consistent manner. Always, be loyal to the person you're working for because they need you and you need them. You're on the same team. You should also have loyalty to others in your organization, such as your fellow team members or co-workers as well as your organization's customers or clients. But, in a hierarchy of loyalty, your first loyalty is to your boss and your organization's chain of command (your boss' bosses). Integrity is doing your job in the right way with honesty. It's not wasting time or goofing-off. It's not shying away from what you're supposed to be doing or hiding what you haven't done. It's being attentive, hardworking and responsible – not "stealing" or "cheating" with your work time. That's stealing money and that's dishonest. Demonstrating workplace integrity or honesty means you tell the truth to your boss. A good boss knows that they cannot perform well, or accomplish their mission, without hearing the truth as you understand it. They want you to give them accurate information. They'll be relying on you to tell them what you believe to be true; and, will be very disappointed if you should do otherwise. If you should attempt to mislead, cover-up or deceive your boss on a work important matter, they will consider you untrustworthy and maybe dishonest. When you demonstrate these negative traits, the working relationship between you and your boss will probably never be the same. Or, it may simply end a good working relationship and even your job. If a boss is not being loyal or having integrity (stealing from the business) you are obliged to transfer your loyalty up the chain of command to your boss's boss. If the whole chain of command is corrupt, then you might have to report the truth to either your organization's Board of Directors or law enforcement officials.

6.) Professional Communications

How you currently write your personal e-mails and text messages should not be the way you write you professional electronic messages. Too often, new workers fail to understand the need to carefully write and edit their workplace electronic messages; and, as a result, show a poor, casual or even an unprofessional level of writing skills. What you say (verbally) just like what you write, is always a reflection of your professional skills. As a result, you should always be careful about speaking-out in professional settings. In general, you should far more careful and considered about what you say at work than you do in non-work or social situations. One key professional verbal communication strategy is to simply think about what you are going to say before you say it. Also, when tensions run high understand the importance of not using "red flag" words. Here are examples of steering clear of trouble by managing your "red flag" words. Knowing about the power of red flag words in confrontational situation is an important professional communication skill which can promote positive professional relationships. Here are red flag words (underlined) in the sentences below. Notice how cleaning these out of a sentence can change the whole tone of a tense conversation.

1. I need you to tell me. -- **Help me to understand.**
2. You must wait. -- **I'll try to help you as soon as I can.**
3. I can't help you. -- **Here's where you can get the help you need.**
4. Oh, that's easy for you to do. -- **Can you help me with this?**
5. If you would just do this. -- **Can I help you do this?**
6. I only want this. -- **Can we do this?**
7. We need this fast. -- **How soon can we do this? How can I help?**
8. I need you to listen. -- **What about these points? How could we respond?**
9. Look, I'm not finish talking to you. -- **Please, can I add one more thing?**

Practice your recognition of red flag words or statements and try to develop your skill to avoid conflict by communicating your points in a softer and more objective professional manner.

7.) Know How You're Doing

In order to be successful in your job you must learn how to take both a realistic and continuous look at your job performance. You should make the effort to objectively determine if you're performing well or not. Others are going to make these judgments about you. By doing this for yourself you can stay ahead of this process by achieving an early recognition of your weaknesses and try to correct them even before others notice them. It's always to your advantage to be aware of your weaknesses; and, in turn, start dealing with them before they become a serious issue or worse. Developing the willingness and skills to recognize your weaknesses before others do will give you a greater chance for workplace success, since early self-corrections and adjustments will be easier to make than having the boss impose them on you. Plus, it's better and even easier to make minor self-corrections to your performance as soon as possible. Don't wait for the drama and fear of having your boss tell you need to improve. Following a personal self-assessment strategy will not only help you coach yourself to improved performance, it will greatly impress both your co-workers and boss. Learn and adopt the practice of making self-improvements techniques a part of your professional practice.

Typically, your overall performance is evaluated in two categories. Most new workers believe it's just one category (the 1st question below) and this failure to understand that there are two categories (the 2nd question below) often gets them into some performance trouble. The two classic performance evaluation considerations are:

1. What have you done?
2. How did you do it?

By "what" is meant the actual work performed including its quality, quantity and impact. By "how" is meant the way in which you did it. To say it another way, if you were a great worker, in the sense that you got things done and achieve great results; but, you were unfriendly or uncooperative with your fellow workers and made people angry at either you or the company, you're not likely to score well on your performance evaluation because of "how" you went about your work. It's not enough to get the job done effectively, it's equally important to get the job done in a way which promotes good relationships and teamwork. Most often, before your supervisor or boss gives you a performance

appraisal on how well you did during a particular time frame he or she will ask you to submit a statement about what you think you accomplished during this time frame. In other words, they'll want your input. This is not the time to be shy. It's the time to be a good bragger. In order to give your boss the best possible statement on your performance, keep a diary or log of your accomplishments during your performance period. Don't wait until the end of it to try to remember what you did. Write your accomplishments down as they happen. Be sure to offer specifics (including positive outcomes and results) about your accomplishments your boss to read when they write your evaluation.

8.) Workplace Relationships (office politics)

Appropriate or proper workplace relationships are often described as "office politics". Office politics are the "do's" and "don'ts" of proper behavior in the workplace. They can vary, from workplace to workplace, so be alert for local variations to the rules or advice below. Being smart and performing well around office politics is every bit as important as your actual job performance. In fact, it's a vital part of your job performance. You'll be more likely to be successful if learn and practice them to your advantage. In order not to get tripped up by office politics, be alert for and follow these basic rules or commandments.

Learn how things actually work

Each work place or every office has its own peculiarities on how things get done or who really wields the power. An organization's actual power structure may even vary or change over time. And, it can be quite different from what the formal office organizational chart shows. For example, when I reported to my first job someone hinted that the real power in the office was not the boss, but his administrative officer.

Guard against being manipulated or controlled

Be wary of the co-worker who comes-up to you soon after you report for work and tells you a friendly secret about your boss or another co-worker. That friendliness may be an attempt to manipulate you to do or say something which either supports their agenda or serves to discredit you in front of your boss or others. Always be wary of advice or gossip which seems to suggest you say something or do something which seems wrong, as it likely is wrong.

Talk to people

You can safeguard your reputation and practice great office political skills if you make it a practice to leave your workstation (desk) and go to talk to the other people you work with in person.

Don't be a complainer

Nobody enjoys being around someone whose complaining. Watch yourself and when things are going badly or unfairly – don't give into temptation and complain about it in the workplace. Nobody cares. More than that, complainers are viewed as both trouble makers and drags on progress.

Gossip in the workplace

Most often the person gossiping is a weak performer or malcontent. Strong performers don't have to resort to this negative tactic. Especially if the gossip is designed to undermine another worker's reputation. If you hear gossip, just listen for the shortest amount of time socially acceptable, so as not to

upset the gossip, and don't reply or join in, just nod your head and then say, "Oh, really? I'm sorry but I've got to get back to work".

Be a peace keeper

When tempers flare or arguments rage, try and position yourself as someone who is more interested in finding a solution than giving blame. This not only keeps you above the fray, it marks you as a peace keeper or a leader.

Don't be an "apple-polisher"

This is someone who tries to win favor by extra compliments, being overly solicitous of the boss or key member of the office, or by being a "yes" person with the idea that if you agree to everything the boss says he or she will favor you. Well, this is so transparent that you must carefully avoid this type of behavior. It will always backfire on you.

Talk to your enemies

Invariably, someone will oppose you in the workplace. It's just the nature of the beast. Don't be shaken or upset when it happens. However, be sure to deal with it effectively. First, recognize when this happens and begin to learn as much as you can as to why this may have happened. Once you begin to understand why they are against you, develop your response. Next, try and respond to the issues they are concerned about. Put yourself in their shoes and be ready to give in a little or more in order to help solve the situation. You're not always right. Maybe you did do something to anger them. Try and make it right, if you can. Let them know if you made a mistake, that you are sorry and will do your best to correct it. That may end the situation. However, if you have a rival who, no matter what you say or do is determined to be against you, keep as close to them as possible. Be sociable with them. Regularly say "hello" and ask them how they're doing. Talk with them about things which they might be interested in discussing. Don't show either your anger or fear. Maintain a professional relationship.

Seek and hold the higher ground

In general politics as well as office politics, you're stronger and more professional if you seek to take and hold the higher ground in all your positions, arguments or efforts. The higher ground is the place where "right" or moral authority exists. It's the truth, best practice, and the best solution for the organization. It's not only the right place to be but it also makes your ideas and positions harder to discredit or take down.

Know the difference between "persevering" and being "stubborn"

There's a saying which says, "The best group or team decisions are compromises which no individual team member totally loves". What that means is whenever you're debating different positions, a good compromise is one that allows both sides to win a little while not completely losing. So know when it's time to let go. Persevering is different from being stubborn. The former is keeping up your effort when the goal or objective remains possible. Being stubborn is continuing to fight when the war is over and the peace treaty has been signed. Know when it's time to let go.

Social relationships at work

Lastly, it probably is NOT a good idea to either make close personal friends or to date someone with whom you work. This is a tough subject. So, be very careful with this one. Nothing can poison your workplace more than having a former angry lover in your office. It will make everyone uncomfortable, especially you. And, never, if at all possible, get into a romantic relationship with your boss. When it's over, there will be real misery at the workplace. It's a good idea to always avoid these temptations, if you can. If you can't, be prepared to find a new job elsewhere no matter how it turns-out.