

Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment

A Course for Career Success

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PREFACE

This book is intended to assist people with disabilities as they both consider and prepare for entering the world of work. Parents, family members, mentors, rehabilitation, employment and education professionals can also use the information in this book to support the employment quests of their students, customers or clients with disabilities.

Make it Work can be used as a standalone “Self-Help Guide” to prepare for competitive employment or as a textbook while taking an employment training course. Each of its chapters can be used individually or the book can be utilized as a complete text, depending on the reader’s or teacher’s goals.

This book is a guide about competitive employment for several groups: 1) young people with disabilities who will soon be leaving school and are preparing for their transition to work; 2) people with newly acquired disabilities who are looking to stay at, or return to, work; and 3) individuals with disabilities who have never worked before and now want to ready themselves for employment.

For the most part, this book is written to speak directly to people with disabilities. If you have a disability and want to use the lessons of this book, thank you for reading and I hope they serve you well. If you support people with disabilities – as a parent, mentor, or professional – read through this book knowing that it is meant for those you support. This book’s content may make you more effective when supporting the employment ambitions of people with disabilities.

This book contains important information about how to manage a disability in the workplace and tips on how to develop professional or workplace skills. “Professional skills” are the soft, medium and hard skills that employers want to see in their workers. Employers don’t just want someone who can do the tasks of the job (hard skills) – they want people who can do the job with the right techniques (medium skills) and with the right style or fit (soft skills). To be successful in finding, holding and advancing in a job and career, a person with a disability needs to learn these skills.

This book is also designed to help us face the basic or fundamental fears around entering the world of work with a disability – especially for the first time.

Fear is natural, but job seekers with disabilities shouldn’t let fear either discourage them or hold them back. Curiously, fear can either help or hurt us depending on how we react to it. Remember, fear gives us two choices: to “fight” or “flight.” Do we decide to deal with fears by taking action (fight and build up our skills) or choose to avoid the subject (flight and turn away from the subject)? Reading this book will give you the information and ideas needed to make the right choice.

The fundamental message of this book is that only the person with a disability can get the job or promotion he or she wants. Let the ideas and thoughts in this book empower people with disabilities to achieve competitive employment success.

The lessons of this book aim to provide the insights, information and techniques necessary to become powerful, both in employment self-confidence and professional or workplace skills. Practicing these lessons can impress employers with your employment potential.

Imagine this book as a guide book to a new world -- the “world of work.”

Going to work, for the first time, is like going to a new country. If you’ve never been to a country before, it’s a good idea to learn as much as you can about the country’s culture, values, language, and expectations before you go. Sometimes, a guide book is the best way to learn. If you don’t prepare properly for your travel, you might not have a successful trip. We can avoid having a bad trip to the “world of work” by learning the lessons of this book.

People with disabilities sometimes encounter low expectations and negative attitudes about their employment potential from others (teachers, relatives, friends, disability employment professionals and employers) but these obstacles should not stop or discourage job-seekers or employees. Instead, we must push beyond obstacles and move toward success. It is up to us.

This book covers key disability-related employment strategies which can disarm and dissuade people skeptical about the employment potential of people with disabilities. The ideas and strategies in this book are designed to provide the knowledge and techniques to dispel existing negative myths and thoughts about work potential which may exist in both yourself and in those who you meet.

We must recognize that there are valuable laws that make discrimination in employment against people with disabilities illegal. However, these laws alone are not likely to either get individuals the job they want or propel to the career they dream about. While we have laws prohibiting discrimination and requiring access, discrimination in employment is often hard to prove. Hence, legal action is the last resort. The first resort should be to build personal and professional skills and abilities that challenge negative perceptions and support career development. Win with your competitive job skills. Win with this book’s lessons.

It’s important to note that the idea behind this book is not to duplicate or replace existing disability employment efforts. Rather it’s to help augment or strengthen them. This book focuses on the first steps in the employment process. It’s a basic training which can encourage and motivate individuals with disabilities to become more open to their employment potential; and, in turn, become more engaged in their rehabilitation and education employment programs. This book’s content can be added to what is already being done in current disability employment programs. It can help make all our efforts stronger and more impactful.

Experts agree: in order to get the jobs and careers we want, EVERYONE (disabled or not) needs to learn how to become a competitive workplace professional. The first or fundamental workplace skill needed is self-confidence about one’s employment potential. A job applicant’s self-confidence can show itself through job applications, resumes and interviews. This is when employers begin to build their confidence that the applicant is the right person to hire. For job-seekers with disabilities, however, self-confidence may be more difficult to find and show – or may not be fully recognized by potential

employers. The lessons of this book are designed to help locate and build self-confidence by reducing fears and negative feelings about being worthy of employment. By learning and practicing the lessons in this book, job-seekers will naturally increase employment self-confidence; and, in turn, convince employers to have confidence when it comes to hiring and promoting them.

Success in employment and careers has already happened for millions of people with disabilities. It happens when they: 1) believe in themselves; 2) gain the skills necessary to make it happen; and 3) learn how to describe and present both their disability and talents in a positive and professional way. Employment success is theirs for the taking.

Let's "Make it Work!"

BACKGROUND

This book builds on the course content developed and taught to students with disabilities at the University of California, Berkeley and elsewhere.

While this information was created for college students with disabilities, what it teaches is important regardless of age, disability type or educational level. This disability employment book teaches everyone who wishes to become a successful competitive job applicant and employee what they need to know to gain jobs and build their careers.

Soon after this course began at UC Berkeley, the Kessler Foundation of New Jersey funded a grant to research the course's impact on the employment knowledge and outcomes of the students with disabilities. Three schools, each with a different instructor, taught the course during a two-year time frame. The schools were: UC Berkeley, Cal State Fullerton, and San Diego State.

As a result of this research, evidence was collected which shows the impact of these lessons on those who took the course. The table below shows the student learning advances (see class survey instrument in Appendix E, page 250). Key employment-related skills were measured both before and after the course was taken. The "before" versus "after" percentage changes or growth show the improvements or learning gains among the students studying this content.

How Students Felt About These Factors Before and After Taking This Course	Before - Positive	After - Positive
Believed disability is an asset to employers	31.6%	90.9%
Felt unprepared for work	51.6%	10.7%
Were able to answer "what work do you hope for?"	46.8%	92.3%
Knew workplace values	34.6%	76.3%
Felt comfortable in job interviews	19.9%	86.0%
Felt comfortable working with people	38.5%	87.1%
Felt comfortable speaking about accomplishments	24.2%	87.1%
Felt comfortable sharing thoughts freely	34.4%	88.6%
Understood what employers are looking for	32.5%	93.8%
Believed it would be hard to get job with disability	67.5%	19.1%
Able to demonstrate leadership skills	44.2%	84.6%
Felt comfortable discussing accommodation needs with Employers	26.6%	85.1%
Understood and were ready to respond to employers' fears about hiring persons with disabilities	28.2%	94.6%
Knew disability laws	26.3%	93.9%
Believed employers will want to hire them	29.1%	93.1%
Believed disability is a source of pride	65.5%	91.6%

These learning gains show tremendous improvement. To use education's traditional grading system, before taking the course, the students with disabilities had a collective grade "F" (well below 70%). After the course, their scores in these skills moved into the "B" and "A" grade range.

But, an even more important question is, "Did these students get jobs?"

Yes, they did.

In fact, the early data from the Kessler Foundation effort told us that they initially got jobs at more than twice the rate of other students with disabilities. More interestingly, they got jobs at the same labor force participation rate as ALL other college students (without disabilities).

If you (or the people with disabilities you work with) are not in college, you may be wondering, "Is this book for me?" The answer is yes. While we started this initiative at the college level, after reading this book you'll see that the content is valuable for all those with disabilities who are seeking competitive employment. This content has already been successfully adapted by local instructors for a wide range of disabilities and circumstances. You can adapt it to your situation as well.

Finally, here's what students with disabilities had to say after taking the course under the Kessler Foundation grant at three colleges.

- *Thank you so very much for this course. It was, without a doubt, the course that will have the most impact on my career. I am grateful to you for all the time and energy you put into the development of the course and assignments. And, the things I have learned here I will take with me the rest of my life. I am very grateful.*
- *I had the pleasure of taking your class on "Professional Development & Disability". Your class not only increased my confidence and ability to introduce myself and speak-up, but to go after and secure a competitive internship last summer!*
- *This is the second time I've taken this class. This time, I took it for no credit just because I knew how important this information is to me and my future. Thank you for allowing me to "sit-it" on it again.*
- *I'd like to thank you for the wonderful class and the valuable information you provided us during the semester. I wish I knew about this class earlier in my education career, but I am glad I had the opportunity to learn from your wealth of knowledge.*
- *The insights you shared were extremely valuable. I could not agree more with your comment on the imperative coexistence of both disability rights alongside disability responsibilities. I would love to share some of the information you address with the parents and youth with disabilities back in my home town. I think that high school youth with disabilities along with their parents need to understand and hear the realities associated with employment, the realities of the benefits system, as well as their own personal responsibilities to work if they can.*
- *Your encouragement and enthusiasm made me feel more self-confident. I really appreciated the course's approach to the subject. It was positive. It had a can do spirit. Thank you for the best class which will truly be with me as I move forward to a career after graduation.*

- *This was a great course and I learned a lot. I feel I have gained more confidence as a result of participating in this course.*
- *I loved how passionate you were about wanting us to learn about professional development.*
- *Thanks for all your support! I did go through final round interviews recently. I don't have a written offer letter yet, but the recruiter gave me indication that they will extend an offer and they're working on the terms. I'm also going through the interviewing process with another employer for a very different role. So at this point I think I probably will be accepting an offer within the next few weeks. Thanks again for all your help in my job search! I would like to keep in touch with you. As I said before, I'm deeply grateful for your support. Down the road, when I'm further along in my career, I would like to find a way to see what I can do to help other students with disabilities.*
- *This class offered me insight into how my disability can help me get a job. It gave us useful tips and strategies in order to get the job I want.*
- *This course taught me about a lot of disability resources that I didn't know about or would have ever found looking around on my own. The job hunt, interview and employment process is certainly different for people with disabilities than it is for others. Other than this course, there isn't a lot out there to guide us. This course fills a void of information and direction on the subject. For example, how to manage your disability in an interview was a new idea and very helpful to me.*
- *Thank you for pioneering and teaching this course. I especially enjoyed the readings. I wish the course were longer so we would have had more time to practice all the new skills that we learned.*
- *I really enjoyed the course. I feel as if I obtained the most important kind of information to help me succeed in the future. I think as a graduating senior, I feel really confident in my job prospects; and, also know that I am a strong candidate in the job market.*
- *Thank you for an amazing semester. I definitely will utilize the tips and resource that you have shown us in class for the real world! It truly was an amazing course! Thanks again!*
- *I wanted to take this chance to thank you for an amazing semester. This class has been one of the most informative classes at Berkeley. It has stimulated my mind and I feel it will help me greatly when I go into the real world.*
- *I wanted to say how much I enjoyed your course this semester! I learned so much I wasn't aware of about disability legislation and all manner of other things.*
- *I am so grateful I got recruited for this class! I learned so much.*
- *This class's content was VERY useful. As I go forward, I feel a lot more confident about looking for internships now and employment later.*
- *The Professor was extremely motivating and a great teacher. I learned so much and felt so much more confident about my work future.*
- *I enjoy all the instruction, especially the "Executive Presence" part with Peggy Klaus (see Part II, Lesson 1). Her ideas and techniques were absolutely liberating and compelling. I fully expect to follow her guidance as I prepare for my professional career (interviews and meetings). Wow! Great content!*

- *This was a really great class. What a great idea to actually help students with disabilities prepare more deeply and completely for their careers. The information was fundamentally important and represents a missing link in our transition process.*

If you wish to validate this content with other types and educational levels of people with disabilities, you might use the pre- and post-course survey appearing in the APPENDICES (appendix E) at the end of this book. For more on these findings, as well as the course materials developed under a grant from the Kessler Foundation of New Jersey, see: <http://interwork.sdsu.edu/c2c/>.

Please note that the instruction materials at the above website were designed for instructors to draw from when teaching employment related skills to individuals with disabilities. This website is not designed for students to take the course on-line. Plus, the instructional materials on this website were prepared several years ago. This book contains added content and may be more useful both for you or those you support.

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INTRODUCTION

What's missing in disability employment preparation programs?

As a longtime professional working in support of the employment of people with disabilities, I was excited when I arrived at my new job at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) in 2009. As the Director of the campus Disabled Students Program, I would have an opportunity to help students with disabilities prepare for their careers. UC Berkeley is recognized as the birth place of the modern disability rights movement and has some of our nation's most talented students with disabilities, so helping them launch their careers seemed like an easy task.

During my first few weeks at UC Berkeley, I asked every student with a disability I met the same question, "What are going to do after you graduate?"

The vast majority of the responses were vague or uncertain. The most common answer was, "I guess I'll go on to graduate school." But, I thought to myself, that's not a career.

It took several months before these students trusted me enough to tell me what they were really thinking when I asked them this question. Many students confessed to me that they felt their disability would make it hard for them to find jobs and careers. So, they feared even exploring the subject. Others revealed to me that they felt like they must stay in school as long as they could because they worried that when their school years ended they would be forced to spend their lives at home on disability support programs.

Collectively, they seemed to be saying, "Who would hire me – I'm a person with a disability".

I was shocked to learn that most of these talented and promising students with disabilities lacked the self-confidence necessary to effectively market themselves for employment. If they didn't believe in their employment potential, how could they ever "sell" themselves to a prospective employer? I knew from years of experience that if these promising students lacked self-confidence about their employment potential, employers would sense it and likely not hire them despite their potential.

Why did these promising students have self-doubts about their employment worth or potential? Well, when you think about it, how often do parents, teachers, family and friends ask our young people with disabilities: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" While this vital question is regularly asked of our nondisabled youth, it's too often avoided when talking with our young people with disabilities. Plus, the sad truth about the disability experience is that it's often filled with negative definitions, messages, labels and expectations at many levels – including around employment.

This lack of nurturing is not only discouraging for our young people with disabilities it's also discouraging for people who acquire a disability later in life. Far too often, friends and family avoid the topic of employment and returning to work when a disability is involved. We're all victims of the longstanding

stereotypes and prejudices that suggest the still lingering equation -- “D = IW” or “Disability equals an Inability to Work”.

What kind of an impact or signal do these negative thoughts have on our youth and adults with disabilities? I wanted to find out, so I asked the students. What they told me was that the negative messages they were getting about disability and employment suggested that they were neither expected nor welcomed at the workplace. And when this happens, it too often becomes the reality or a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So first we needed to turn this negativity around and create a positive conversation around working and a career. The process must begin with a focus on positive beliefs, thoughts and expectations.

As a result, my daily conversations with our students became filled with positive talk about their career expectations, goals and plans. I was amazed at how welcoming such a shift in focus was for our students. In short order, they began to change their perspective from one filled with self-doubts, to one centered on a budding self-confidence. This was the first step in a process of building career ambitions and planning.

However, more was needed.

Work-related experiences (school activities, clubs, sports, volunteering, summer jobs and internships) were the next step in the process. Our students needed opportunities to build up their self-confidence as well as their work related skills and experiences. So, I supported these efforts with a paid internship program.

The internship program gave our students the bridge experiences they needed to feed their newly found but tentative self-confidence and ambition for jobs and careers. Working with our State of California Department of Rehabilitation, we were able to place many of our students with disabilities in internship or summer paid work experiences. This not only boosted the students’ self-confidence about their employment potential, it also gave them successes and experiences which fueled their momentum.

Our summer jobs and internship program created a new “sense of possibilities” among our students. An excitement began to build around each student’s search. The students began to help each other by freely sharing internship placement information and experiences. We were changing the culture.

Even with positive coaching and work experiences, though, something was missing. The students still lacked the fundamental employment knowledge and skills necessary to be competitive for employment. So, I added a course of study to our program to build their employment skills. This course for credit led to this book.

The course of instruction was a response to the reality that the world of work is, quite literary, a new and unknown world to the uninitiated. So, if you have little experience in the workplace (internships help, but not completely), how can you be expected to know the intricacies and subtleties of workplace culture, values and “rules of the road”? The reality is that if you’re not informed about these subjects,

you're likely to make critical mistakes which can keep you from getting a job, much less sustaining a career. This knowledge or information was taught to our students to help them become truly competitive job seekers. This new course was called, "Professional Development and Disability". It was designed to deliver this needed instruction - and this book includes all the information we studied in our course and more.

There are numerous school- and community-based efforts designed to teach individuals with disabilities information about the world of work. However, as valuable as they are, they're rarely complete. Most often, they teach skills around "how to" look for work; "how to" prepare a resume; and/or, "how to" perform in that all-important job interview. These are important skills which this book also covers; however, these are more advanced skills which cannot be fully understood or practiced until the basics or fundamental skills are in place.

The more advanced workplace skills cannot be successfully performed unless an individual has developed a degree of self-confidence about their employment potential. Hence, before they effectively understand and demonstrate the more advanced work place skills, they must first have an observable self-confidence about their employment potential, as well as have a fundamental knowledge about workplace culture. Only when these more basic skills are in place will the more advanced skills – like job searching, resume writing and interviewing – take hold.

Again, this book's content is not intended to duplicate other employment programs. Instead it is designed to both compliment and complete them. The content in this book can enhance existing disability employment programs by adding a basic training strategy which can help these existing employment programs become even more effective.

Understanding this information represents a vital step in the employment process.

We can no longer assume that all youth and adults with disabilities have a sufficient level of belief and self-confidence in their employment potential to successfully move forward in employment programs. We need to be sure to teach the fundamental truths they need to know in order to be ready to make a full commitment to their employment quest.

The content in this book is offered in two parts. The first covers subjects like a new disability perspective, values, accommodations, incentives, disincentives, laws and more.

The second part helps individuals with disabilities understand the secrets and realities around the modern workplace's culture, values and practices. It teaches them how competitive employment works, including how to best search for, keep and advance in a career. Gaining this knowledge further builds their employment self-confidence.

This book can assist young people with disabilities who are in school; people who have recently acquired a disability; as well as individuals with a disability who have never worked before and who are now considering entering the work force.

It can also help parents, mentors, educators and employment professionals better support the employment ambitions and workplace intelligence of their family members, students, customers and clients with disabilities.

As valuable as this book may be, it focuses on only one of the three key elements necessary to make employment preparation efforts truly effective. While there are other key elements necessary to mount a successful career or employment program, I believe this element (comprehensive work place instruction) is the most over looked component in the process. A complete program, however, should attempt to support the following components.

- Create a supportive atmosphere (coaching, peer supports, mentoring)
- Promote specific job skills development (education, internships, summer jobs, volunteering)
- Deliver information on what it means to be a professional or competitive worker with a disability (this book)

Another barrier that the lessons of this book are designed to help us to move away from is our dependency on thinking that education about disability employment will convince employers to hire someone because they are a person with a disability. This is an old-fashioned and unrealistic expectation. The reality is that only the person with a disability can get a job for him or herself. People and organizations can help job-seekers with disabilities move forward, but they can't close the deal.

As a result, this book is dedicated establishing the thought that we need to create disability employment programs that focus on "product development" (creating great job candidates with disabilities) who employers will WANT TO HIRE. That's true employment empowerment!

Here's one harsh bit of reality or data to consider as you explore the idea of studying the lessons of this book. In 1971, Census Bureau data showed that 33% of our working age citizens with disabilities participated in the nation's labor force. Over the last 47 years this percentage has changed little. Today, we are still around the 33% level.

That's both incredibly disappointing and proof that something is missing from our disability employment policies and programs.

One last point: please know that this content can and has been successfully adapted by local instructors for various learning styles and levels. Hence, this book may be most helpful when used as a part of a local disability employment program effort.

Let's begin our "Course for Career Success"!

Part I

The Disability Factor

How to Position Yourself as a Job Candidate with a Disability

This book is divided into two parts.

Part I talks about how to develop and competitively present yourself as a person with a disability to the world of work.

Having a known or visible disability can often create negative reactions or understandings about your employment potential. This is especially true if you express yourself in ways which reinforce these stereotypes. People, including many employers, will make quick judgments about who you are and what your potential is when they learn that you have a disability. And, their impressions can often be negative.

So, building your professional skills must start here.

The lessons in this part of the book explore the various ways you might best represent your disability in the world of work. The ideas and approaches which follow can vary based on your style and personality. Accept these ideas as important considerations in order to present yourself in the best light possible.

Take these concepts as starting points for you to refine further in ways which are most comfortable for you. One word of caution, however: while you can adapt these techniques to your circumstances, don't stray too far from the basic truths and realities these practices represent.

Also, it's important for you to be honest with yourself. Step back and understand how you currently define and show your disability identity. In order to get an objective assessment, you might even ask people close to you to give you feedback on this side of your personality. So you might ask them, "If you were an employer, how would you respond to me as a job applicant with a disability?"

What may be working for you now, either in school or at home, may not work for you in the workplace.

Be prepared to analyze and adjust your disability strategy, in order to become more skillful and successful in the world of work. Fashion your approach in a way which makes you more professional.

Lesson 1 — The Disability Experience

Let's begin with this subject by considering the idea of labels. People have an inescapable need to give other people labels and, as a result, we all get them.

It begins the instant we're born. At that very moment of arrival, someone in the delivery room announces to the world, "It's a boy" or "It's a girl." And, the labeling process has begun.

As we grow older, more and more labels are given to us: She's tall for her age. He's short. She's a good sleeper. He's not.

In school, we continue to get labels: She's good in math. He's a book worm. She's a wild child. He's always late.

So, naturally, when a disability becomes apparent, whether it's from birth or later in life, that label is slapped onto a person's back.

Most often, the "disability label" tends to overpower other people's ability to see who people really are and what they can do.

"He's dyslexic." "She has epilepsy." "He uses a wheelchair." "She has Cerebral Palsy." For too many people, these labels say it all. All the other labels we had been given before, or may earn later, seem to be over powered by the disability label. This powerful label or identity tends to push aside all the other characteristics or abilities we have. The disability label takes center stage. A primary identity is most likely to become the "disability label."

Sadly, labels are for the benefit of the people we meet, not for people with the labels themselves. People find it far easier to identify, understand and categorize individuals if they can simply put a label on them, rather than to try and go deeper into their character, capabilities or potential. Unfortunately, it's often easier for people to simply say, "Oh, Jim – he's the blind guy", rather than, "Oh, Jim – he's the tall man with blue eyes who loves sports, is good in math, graduated from college, knows accounting, is a great project manager, can supervise people, etc."

So, labels are society's shorthanded way of bringing simplicity to the complex subject of understanding people.

There's a serious downside to this labeling shortcut that we all practice. That downside is that too often people accept the labels assigned to them and, in turn, allow those labels to overly define them and restrict who they really are. When we accept the broad labels given to us by others, it's very likely that we may be giving up our power to the label.

This is especially true about the disability label.

While society has made significant advances in accepting and integrating people with disabilities into many aspects of life, the unfortunate truth remains that the general public still holds negative attitudes, understandings and practices around the label "disability." Persistent negative attitudes have forced people with disabilities to deal with unnecessary barriers and challenges.

These unnecessary barriers start in peoples' minds, where nondisabled people seem to think about the disability label in both negative terms and outdated ways. When they see or learn that a person has a disability, their first thoughts (and sometimes final conclusions) are "People with disabilities are different, they're less able, or unable to perform tasks well." As a result, they think, "We should not expect them to be where nondisabled people are." That includes being in the workplace.

These thoughts may not actually be spoken, but they're "heard and felt" by people with disabilities who have learned how to recognize the negative looks and reactions people send their way. The instant a disability label is slapped on to a person with a disability, it often feels like that's all others can see.

It's both confusing and interesting to see how someone's focus and conversation shifts when they suddenly realize that this person has a disability. Often, their reactions and expectations go negative. One minute they seem to accept you as a person. Everything is fine. The next minute, when they "discover" that you have a disability, their mood changes. They are suddenly a different person. You can see their demeanor shift and change. It's as if you've moved from being a new acquaintance, potential friend or employee, to being someone they have to be careful with; or, should not expect to include in their life or workplace. But, you're the same person you were before the disability was observed. Your relationship may have been progressing nicely with the other person, then the disability enters the picture and it all changes.

What a difference the "disability label" makes!

Of course, other groups of people have similar labeling challenges. If you're from a certain minority, ethnic, religion or gender identity group, some people tend to only see that label and immediately associate you with negative or stereotype images and thoughts. They've put you into a box, wrapped it up and moved you off to the side of their sense of inclusion and equity. That's exactly how labeling and stereotyping leads to discrimination, at the individual and society-wide levels.

In most cases, these types of negative reactions have lessened over the years from what they used to be. Civil rights sensibilities have helped society move away from the dramatic knee-jerk reactions of the past. We are making progress towards a greater sense of the individual rather than just using their labels or identities. Still, most people will agree, we haven't achieved full acceptance for the more complete humanity behind the labels.

While the general public seems to have made some progress with minorities, religions, gender identity and ethnicities, there has been relatively slower progress around disability. The disability identity still creates, in too many peoples' minds, a biased reaction that usually expresses itself with negativity. They most often think, "You can't be a full member of society if you have a disability."

One obvious consequence of these traditional negative attitudes towards people with disabilities is a failure to provide full disability access in buildings, facilities, paths of travel, transportation systems, education, housing, internet sites, products, equipment, travel, voting, recreation as well as places of employment. The list seems never ending.

Everywhere we turn, some nondisabled architect, engineer, city planner or program operator assumes that people with disabilities will not be coming to their location, so they fail to automatically design public or private locations with access in mind. When this happens, people with disabilities get designed out.

In addition, we're still evolving away from longstanding design principles which utilized the specifications of an "average man" – in height, reach, strength, and ability – for designing buildings, facilities and products. Complicating access is the historical tradition which dictates that important buildings and facilities be designed to impress or humble those entering their spaces. Since Greek and Roman times, both public and private buildings needed to have long flights of stairs leading to grand entrances in order to show to those entering the power and importance of the building's occupants. It was felt by those in these buildings that they could gain an advantage over those entering them by having people "look up" to both their entrances and authority. This design style can still be found in our buildings today. The problem with this classical design style is it perpetuates inaccessible design for people with disabilities. These early design principles have evolved a great deal to include others, but they are not yet fully and routinely adjusted for people with disabilities.

As we think about these design traditions, it has been observed that if it weren't for inaccessible buildings, programs and negative attitudes around disabilities, the word disability wouldn't have the negative meaning it has today.

In other words, if building and program designers would always follow the idea or definition that the "general public" automatically includes members who happen to have a disability, then we'd be well on our way to full inclusion for people with disabilities. This principle of design is called "universal design." It teaches us that when designing building or programs, we should design them for everyone who is part of the "general public" – including people with all types of disabilities. So buildings should have ramps and elevators for people with mobility disabilities, Braille signs for people who are blind, and visual cues for people who are deaf. Programs, meanwhile, could include accommodations such as sign language interpreters. Unfortunately, we're not quite there yet. We are making progress but have a way to go.

This failure to routinely and always design our buildings and programs for a "general public," which includes all its members (including people with disabilities) continues to perpetuate an artificial separation or discrimination that need not exist. Society has a serious shortcoming when it comes to understanding that people with disabilities are a major portion (15%) of the general public.

We must understand that these negative and illogical attitudes about disability are deeply ingrained into society's consciousness. These negative attitudes have their tradition in both world history and religion. During earlier times, when societies were rural and based on agricultural or manual occupations, not being physically or mentally "fit" meant that you weren't able to contribute to the community's well-being. You were considered "sick" or an "invalid" (words of those times) and must be protected and held back. You were neither expected nor encouraged to move about in the community or participate in any of its activities, including work.

In addition, most of the world's major religions have, at times, depicted disability as something to be cured by a miracle, as an object of charity or a curse on the family for prior sins. Not too long ago, one of the world's major religions thought that seizures were a sign of being possessed by the devil. These myths or misconceptions still hold great power over how people think about disability.

The historical drag of these long-held practices, beliefs and traditions about disability continue to haunt us today. These are powerful forces to overcome. These longstanding beliefs linger in peoples' minds and express themselves in the present-day biases, stereotypes and negative attitudes about people with disabilities.

The human crime of all this negative thinking, history, and practice is that we are losing the potential contributions of a large segment of our population. Plus, their civil and human rights are being limited, which is a stain on our democracy.

Also, think about the economic losses these exclusionary practices represent for the nation when people with disabilities are blocked from working. Many nonworking people with disabilities are forced to seek disability benefits payments to survive. Add to these costs the further economic losses of unrealized pay checks and income taxes, and the numbers quickly grow.

Curiously, they're even some seemingly positive thoughts which present more attitudinal barriers on top of the negative labels and traditions described above.

For example, there are the "super-human" amazing stories about unbelievable feats and accomplishments of some people with disabilities that we hear about from time to time. This is when nondisabled people marvel at the heroic and unimagined accomplishments of people with disabilities who have done something against "all the odds."

"Wow, look at what that person with a disability has done, they're amazing!"

These are the "inspiring news" stories you may read or hear about in the media, like "Blind man climbs a Mount Everest," or "Paralyzed man swims the English Channel." Sure, these are admirable accomplishments, but why does the news only tell these amazing stories when the important news is about people with disabilities being average – living average lives as workers, parents, home owners, volunteers, community leaders, etc.

As a result of all these too low and too high extremes, disability discrimination remains a drag.

It makes no sense. It's wrong. It's illegal. Yet, it lingers.

All of this can be very discouraging for people with disabilities as they think about working and a career. It can make it all seem impossible.

We must recognize these harsh realities and commit ourselves to dealing with them at every turn. We must know that all these labels, negative messages and inaccessible attitudes can be surmounted. The looks, the obstacles, the condescending words, the pity, and unequal treatment can be beaten back. We must constantly remind ourselves not to allow these negative forces drag us down or hold us back.

The real danger of all of this is that it tends to force the person with a disability to accept or internalize the negative notions about who they are.

So, if you are a person with a disability and have negative feelings about yourself, understand why this happens and never blame yourself or feel inadequate for being discouraged. As we've discussed in this Lesson, these are longstanding and deeply held traditions which are gradually changing and will dramatically change for you when you become determined not to give in.

Don't be discouraged.

Don't let ignorance win.

Lesson 2 — Creating a New Experience

What can we do about this negativity and oppression? Can we do anything? Well, discrimination (and that's what this is) is most oppressive when you let it happen. If left unchallenged, negative attitudes and practices surrounding society's concept about disability are confirmed.

Negative attitudes will only be reversed when the oppressed person or group decides not to accept or to comply with the stereotypes imposed on them. People with disability must teach society a new lesson about their potential.

Imagine that you were a woman in the 1950's. During that time, society expected you to be a house wife and not to work; or, if you did work your occupational choices were severely limited. There were many unhappy and unfulfilled women who were forced by society into these stereotype roles.

During the 1960's, and continuing today, women decided that society's attitudes about their role were wrong and they have been leading a movement to teach society new values. Women decided to take control of the conversation and redefine their roles. Their struggle isn't over, but it's well underway and we see strides forward every day.

The same journey has been undertaken by minorities and other oppressed groups or classes of people.

People with disabilities have begun a similar journey dedicated to teaching society the truth about who they are and what they can do. Just like the efforts of women and minority and oppressed groups, the struggle isn't over, but there is progress toward change.

As we look at other social movements, the lesson to be learned is each person with a disability has a responsibility, an opportunity, to make a statement about a new disability reality – their disability reality.

In other words, you don't have to accept existing negative attitudes or expectations or discriminatory practices. You don't have to let others define who you are and who you want to become. You can and must control your destiny. You can and must educate those around you about your true potential.

Regarding your employment potential, you must build up your self-confidence, have a plan and get busy achieving your plan. You must learn the lessons of this book. You have the power to make it happen when you're determined.

The beauty about this strategy is that it not only gives you power to control other people's thinking about you, it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. In other words, if you want to become an engineer, manager or a teacher, your determination and hard work will likely lead you to success. If you wish it, it will happen! Conversely, if you don't wish it, it's far less likely to happen. Let's be frank, if you're not determined, you're not likely to succeed.

You have the power to control your destiny because you, not society, should control and define who you are and who you want to do. Your personal power is how you define yourself to others through your words and actions. Your personal power is how you present yourself to others and how you expect them to perceive you.

By practicing this self-determination or personal power, you can begin to beat back those negative perceptions and stereotypes about your disability. You can "will" yourself to success. Be positive and push back the negativity that may come your way. It's amazing how people respond to your determination. They most often embrace it because they admire your zeal, tenacity and will power to take control of your situation.

With the right zeal, motivation, and presentation, you will no longer appear "disabled" to them as they usually understand the meaning of this label or word. It may change the entire perception of disability as well.

For example, if you use a wheelchair, chances are when you enter a room other people see the wheelchair before they see you. Moreover, while you're in the room the wheelchair might be all they see when they look at you. Plus, the wheelchair, not you, establishes their expectations about you. And, you can bet that their expectations are not totally positive.

In such a situation, you must begin to practice using your personal power to define yourself in a more positive and complete way. You are not your wheelchair. You are a competent, talented and interesting person who happens to use a wheelchair. You have a personality, intelligence, ambition, experience, and sense of humor. It's up to you to let those parts of yourself fill the room and override society's inability to see beyond the wheelchair. You need to (and can) beat back the negativity in the room by pulling the attention away from your mobility device and putting it on you with your personal power (personality, determination, and passion).

Attitudes are powerful – both theirs and yours. However, one of the beautiful aspects of human beings is that we can learn when we get new information. In the example described above, the nondisabled person assumes when they see the person in the wheelchair that he or she is "confined" to a wheelchair and "unable" to do many things. In addition to having been taught to think like this by society, they assume that if they were similarly "confined" to a wheelchair, they couldn't work in their jobs. And, more importantly, they assume that they (and by extension you) couldn't do the job you may be seeking with them.

How wrong they are!

This is a teaching moment. In the example above, if we take advantage of this teaching moment, the person in the wheelchair might fight back by simply saying, “Hi, my name is Jill, and it’s so nice to meet you.” Then, the person using a wheelchair should keep the conversation going in a friendly and self-confident manner until the point is made about the person – not the wheelchair. By transforming herself into a likeable, knowledgeable and friendly person, people are more likely to begin to see Jill as a complete person, rather than just a “disability label.”

Plus, by being proactive and presenting herself in a positive and powerful way, Jill is helping to further advance the equality of not only herself, but also the millions of other people with disabilities who will profit from her example.

So, if you have a disability, stop accepting society’s negative disability related expectations about you. Know they will be coming your way, especially in the world of work. Develop a personal strategy for taking the power back through the force of your personality. Teach your audience and society a new lesson about disability and who you are. Speak up about your interest, skills, experiences, and you will begin to push away those artificial barriers.

And, never let other people’s beliefs about you make you afraid, mad and hold you back. Believe in yourself. Develop your personal power in a positive way and you will change the conversation.

In later Lessons, we’ll explain more on how to do this. For now, commit yourself to developing your personal power to change the negative conversation.

Lesson 3 — A New Perspective for the Workplace

Whenever we start a new activity, sport or job, if we want to be successful, we must prepare ourselves.

For example, successful athletes don’t just take to the sport’s field and compete without studying, preparing and practicing the sport. They first learn the rules of the game. Then, they get in shape or proper condition and practice the game’s various plays or skills. Finally, and most importantly, they assess their mental readiness or toughness to compete.

It is this last item, your “mental readiness or toughness to compete” which is the most important place to begin your journey toward becoming a successful employee who happens to have a disability. It’s fundamentally important that you develop your mental toughness to compete and win.

Once you develop positive and correct attitudes about yourself (mental toughness), all the other preparation and practical steps will be easier to master.

The ideas below are designed to help build a positive perspective on disability while rejecting society’s outdated myths and stereotypes about disability and employment. These ideas are the way things should be, not necessarily the way things are now.

The considerations listed below can help you better prepare yourself for the road ahead. And, as you think about these new perspectives on disability, let them become your foundation for teaching others who you really are.

With these concepts in mind, you will become a more interesting and powerful job candidate for employers to consider. And, in the process, it will help to shift society's misconceptions about workers with disabilities – one person at a time.

1) Disability is normal

Say this short sentence to yourself: “Disability is Normal.” Say it again. Say it out loud. And, once more – “Disability is Normal.”

Let that sentence wash over you for a few thoughtful and reflective moments. “Disability is Normal.” After you say this to yourself a number of times, how does it make you feel? What's your reaction? How does it impact how you think about disability and about yourself? If you're able to embrace this idea, that you're normal and valuable, just like everyone else, how might this principle begin to impact your self-confidence? How might it impact the self-confidence of people with disabilities every?

If you have a disability, this statement might be very hard for you to accept because so much of your life experience has told you that “you are different” and possibly worse. For example, when you may see the signs that says, “The disability entrance is in the back”, this message emphasizes that the main or “normal” persons' entrance is different from the special or separate entrance for you. In many ways, most of society's messages to you are that you are different and not included in the mainstream or not normal.

So how can “disability be normal”?

When you were growing-up with a disability, did your teachers or relatives ask your friends or brothers or sisters who were not disabled, “what are you going to be when you grow up?” Did they ask you? If not, how did you feel when they didn't ask you this question?

When you were at school and sports or other class events and activities were happening, were they open to you?

Maybe you even took a “special” bus to school, while others took the “regular” bus.

What's “normal” about that?

The fact is that in many cases, disability takes extra time, effort and expense.

As a result, we can sometimes look at disability as a “drag.”

So, how can “disability be normal”?

Well, in fact, disability is a very common characteristic or trait of human beings. Did you know that at least 15% of the world's population has a disability? Well, it's true. This means that over 1 billion of the world's 7 billion people have a disability. That's more than three (3) times as many people as there are in the United States. So, disability is not rare: in fact, it's quite a common. It's so common or prevalent that it should be considered a normal part of the human condition. It's like any other groups or

segments of the human condition. It's like being tall or short (there are more disabled people in the world than people over 6 feet tall).

Take any segment of society – your class, your school, your community, your state, your country, the world. Where groups of human beings exist, you will surely find people with disabilities among them. It's both a normal and naturally occurring phenomena in society. So, why can't we view people with disabilities as a normal part of the human condition and, in turn, always count them in and not out?

If we could begin to think this way, to always expect people with disabilities to be among us, we would begin to normalize both our expectations and readiness to include them fully in all that we do. Such an attitude (a new attitude) to make disability normal must become part of our new perspective.

Accepting society's perspective that disability is different from the normal range of the human condition or experience not only sends society the wrong message, it takes your power away.

Now, how do we turn that negative around?

Well, this nation, every state, and most localities have passed numerous disability nondiscrimination laws, as well as pursued numerous public education programs designed to change this exclusionary thinking. However, these laws and efforts may not help you when you present yourself for employment.

So, it's important for you to believe in yourself as a "normal" person, so that others will likely follow your lead and include you.

Don't just believe it, know it. The truth is that you are a normal person.

Disability is a normal part of the human condition.

Let's begin to think this way. It can build your self-confidence to see yourself, not as a disabled person looking for a job but, as a job candidate who, like all other job applicants, may be tall or short, male or female, have a disability or not.

Be prepared and confident about this fundamental truth.

Not only should you feel this way about yourself; but, you should also act this way in your life – be normal.

It's normal to:

- Go to school
- Work
- Travel and take vacations
- Participate in recreation and sports (even through "adaptive" recreation)
- Exercise full citizenship -- VOTE
- Have friends, a partner and, maybe, a family

Make disability a normal part your life.

2. Diversity includes disability

Let's begin this topic by recognizing and promoting the idea that diversity in the work place is not complete until it includes workers with disability. Diversity, by definition, must include people with disabilities.

As you know, employers have widely embraced the idea that having a diverse workforce gives them a better workforce and, in turn, a stronger company. Both practice and research have demonstrated that when employers include women and minorities, they get a broader perspective within their organizations which results in better performance and productivity. A more diverse workforce means better work teams, more ways of looking at problems and more experiences to consider when solving problems.

Plus, having a more diverse workforce can increase an organization's ability to better serve and market to the groups they represent. In other words, organizations can perform better and make more money when they utilize the insights of their employees who are women and minorities in crafting how to market to these publics. If an organization's workforce is limited in just one perspective – let's say mostly white males – fewer life experiences are involved in the organization's discussions on how to reach other segments or publics in the marketplace (women and minorities). A monolithic work force, containing just one perspective or category of workers, tends to reduce the richness of the organization's ability to think more broadly and "outside of the box."

With the awareness and attention currently being paid by employers to the value of diversity, you should consider preparing yourself to promote the idea that disability (including your disability) is an important addition to employers' diversity efforts. Having workers with disabilities in their organization can help them expand their diversity capability. If you have a disability, you can help them reach those goals.

Given that around 15% of both our nation's and world's population report having a disability, you can remind a potential employer that people with disabilities represent an important market share. If you can help an organization more effectively reach and better serve this additional 15% of the public, that is an added value to your job candidacy. And 15% of the nation's population represents a very large market share for any organization, especially if they haven't thought about it before. According to the American Institute for Research, people with disabilities spend \$480 billion each year. In comparison, African Americans spend \$501 billion, and Hispanic Americans spend \$582 billion. (People with disabilities are a part of every other population group too – including African Americans and Hispanic Americans). Given these numbers, imagine the power of your suggestion that a company can sell their products or serve 15% more people in the marketplace. This can be a great selling point for around the idea of hiring workers with disabilities who can potentially help a company's diversity and marketing efforts. When an organization overlooks this part of the population (a significant market share), the organization or company will be less competitive in the market place.

If you are job applicant with a disability, your connection to this “disability market” is a valuable selling point for why employers should hire you. With your life experience, understanding, knowledge and insight about people with disabilities, you can help their organization reach out and better relate to the disability public. Your disability identity connection can help the employer develop better products and services for people with disabilities, engage them, and bring in more customers and sales. That can be a powerful message in an interview – one that can land you a job and build a career.

Perfecting your message around this aspect of diversity, however, will take some effort on your part. As you prepare yourself to represent the disability constituency and its market share, you must first study the disability community more fully, so that you can truly describe yourself as valued added to an employer’s disability diversity capability. You must prepare yourself for this role. Do your research. Do your homework and learn “how to” enhance your ability to represent people with disabilities within a company or organization.

There are many ways to do this. For example, get involved with community disability organizations and learn more about what other people with disabilities are feeling and saying. Learn about disability demographics (numbers); disability culture; disability organizations; how to best be approach or market to people with disabilities; and more. In order to be credible in this way, you need to learn as much as you can about your disability community. Begin to develop this capability as a positive asset to your employment candidacy.

More details on this subject can be found in Lesson 12 below.

3. Having a disability is an asset

As we discussed earlier, disability is often viewed by an employer as a limitation, inability or liability.

When people think about disability, they think first and sometimes only about related “functional limitations.” They think about the things people with disabilities can’t do. They think if somebody is in a wheelchair, blind or deaf you can’t perform in a job because they can’t walk, see, or hear.

But if you have a disability, that’s just the cover of your book. It’s not the story inside. And, we all know, “you can’t judge a book by its cover.”

So, let’s consider the story inside the book. Have you ever thought about the fact that managing a disability has likely given you skills and experiences that may have made you a better person? And, perhaps, a better job candidate? Or that the experience of handling a disability develops skills which might be useful in the workplace? And that you might be able to brag about those skills when presenting yourself for a job?

Often, having a disability teaches a person new skills or makes certain skills better or more complete. A disability can challenge you to plan more carefully; to develop other strengths and capabilities more completely; to problem-solve in more complex ways; and to help others better accept and understand disability by educating them about it.

For example, managing a disability often forces you to plan your activities of daily living more carefully. If you're in a wheelchair, you can't forget or ignore the morning alarm because you can't sleep in and later expect to jump out of bed, at the last minute, and rush to work. You need to have a disciplined and well-timed morning routine which cannot vary. You must be organized and practice time management skills.

Plus, if you have attendants supporting you, you must recruit them, interview them, train them, supervise them, evaluate them, pay them, and even fire them when necessary. These skills are similar to being a workplace supervisor.

When you encounter disability discrimination in its various forms, you have to advocate for yourself and calmly explain to others the facts about what you can do which they don't seem to understand. These are vital communication skills designed to influence or "sell" others. They also translate perfectly to the workplace.

If you think about it, many disability-related experiences and tactics can be translated into workplace skills.

These might be:

- time management
- setting priorities
- program or project management
- supervision
- payroll and bookkeeping
- educating and persuading people
- determination and hard work

Now, this isn't to say you're a seasoned professional or expert in these skills; however, your disability experience has taught you some valuable lessons and given you some noteworthy experiences which can translate to a job and the workplace.

So, having a disability is like having a job. It's likely to have developed and improved these and other skills. This way of evaluating your skills is similar to the way veterans evaluate their military experience in terms of civilian jobs. Or how a stay-at-home parent might share their experience after managing a household and raising the kids.

Think about all the different experiences and skills around managing your disability which you have developed. Categorize them into workplace talents like maturity, discipline, judgment, as well as the listing above.

As we will reveal later in this book (Part II) these qualities are the top skills which employers want. Don't ignore or underestimate the value of the disability experience as an asset to your candidacy for a job.

4. Accommodations or adjustments

Often, having a disability means finding yourself in situations – especially in the workplace – where you need to request a disability-related accommodation. You begin by describing to your boss how you can't do something that the job requires you to do because of a disability and that you need assistance, new equipment, or a rearranging of your job duties or work times to perform the job itself.

To most employers, the subject of an accommodation for a worker with a disability sounds rather special and different as well as requiring extra effort and expense. The reality is that most accommodations are relatively easy to provide and lead to better job performance by the employee. For example, voice dictation software usually costs under \$200 – a relatively small expense for most organizations – and a more flexible schedule that allows working from home won't cost any money at all.

Let's imagine that you have landed a job and now need to request an accommodation. Since your employer is probably covered by a law on this subject, they're likely to be very careful to respond to your request appropriately. However, you may still feel awkward or sense uneasiness in the conversation. You may feel like you're imposing on your boss and this request is making you may feel vulnerable because you are different from the other workers. Plus, there is a power differential between the boss and you, so asking or "telling" the boss to do something for you is often a hard conversation to have.

Sometimes, these feelings are so powerful that they cause people with disabilities not to ask for needed accommodations. They don't want to upset either the boss or their co-workers. They don't want to feel "special" and "different." They want to do their jobs without the fuss of asking for disability-related job accommodations. They want to be a "regular" worker, just like everyone else.

The fact is that every worker, disabled or not, asks or requests accommodations all the time. And the ones that aren't directly related to disability are often granted by a supervisor without any of the negative feelings that can surround a disability-related accommodation.

Why?

Well, that's because these other accommodations aren't called disability accommodations. They're thought of as routine work adjustments, performance improvements or enhancements. These are things are regularly granted to workers so they can be productive.

For example, in the modern economy many new workers also get new chairs (especially if the organization has worn-out or uncomfortable ones). They call these special chairs "ergonomic chairs." They fit the individual size of a person and improve their workplace performance by reducing repetitive injuries and related workers' compensation costs. That's a job accommodation. Other examples of these normal or typical workplace accommodations are when workers adjust their work hours for child-care needs or work from home to keep a doctor's appointment, meet the plumber or cable guy, and more. These are all workplace accommodations, adjustments or performance enhancements.

In many ways, they are the same as disability job accommodations.

So why is there tension around a disability workplace accommodation when there is none for these other similar workplace adjustments?

The answer is anchored in years of negativity and fear about disability. It's that old bias and prejudice about disability not being normal and outside the mainstream.

Well, it's time to move disability accommodations into the mainstream of work place adjustments. Think about it. What are disability accommodations anyway? They're ways to make a worker more productive. So, let's start to describe the subject of disability accommodations as one about productivity improvements.

Nothing warms the heart of a boss more than an employee who says, "I think I can improve my productivity and performance if I could use this device, technique, or work place adjustment." Disability accommodations should be described as methods for improving a person's productivity. For more information on this subject, be sure to read the Lesson 7 on "Accommodation Strategies" below. For now, start thinking about disability accommodations as common, routine, everyday work place adjustments designed to make you even more productive for your boss and company.

5. Familiarity overcomes fear

As we know, disability often generates a mild form of fear or apprehension in our nondisabled friends.

When this happens, the nondisabled person may "pull back" and look for ways to get away from the situation (like not hire you). You need to understand this reaction and develop the skills needed to counter it.

This "disability fear" reaction comes from several places. It can come from either (or both) the historical or religious traditions mentioned in Lesson 1. Remember, for all of recorded history (and that's a long time), disability was feared as either a drain on the community and/or an object of pity or charity. These longstanding traditions linger in our minds.

Another possible source of "disability fear" is more selfish or self-centered. When some people encounter people with disabilities, they worry about how to react and what to say and not say. They worry about being politically correct. They're thinking, "If I say the wrong thing, I'll be embarrassed". So the easy way around this fear is to limit the nondisabled person's exposure to the person with a disability. In other words, the less time with them, the less opportunity there is to make a mistake. If this fear is haunting the nondisabled person, you'll likely find them person anxious and reluctant to engage in a conversation (like the job interview).

A third source for "disability fear" may be based on the nondisabled person's sense of their jobs duties. It's not their job. They may feel that haven't been prepared or educated on how to interact with people with disabilities. There are "special" rules, resources, and techniques for serving people with disabilities and they don't feel like they know them. When this fear arises, the nondisabled person may want to

move you along swiftly (send you on your way) to the “disability office” before their incompetency shows.

And, lastly, the fear around disability rights may be another potential source for a nondisabled person’s reluctance to engage or talk with you. This is especially important in work or employment related situations. If you’re a job applicant with a disability an employer may want to move you along quickly (but legally) to get away from you and the laws that protect you. They don’t want to get a disability complaint or law suit.

Nondisabled persons’ fears about interacting with people with disabilities need to be recognized, understood and then carefully handled. Learn to recognize these behaviors. And be prepared to respond to them because your interests may depend on your ability to calm, educate and encourage these ill-informed people on how to get past their fears and apprehensions.

Here are some techniques to try.

First, try to understand that these nondisabled people need your help. They’re a lot like a drowning person. They feel like they’re about to drown in their fears and need to get out of the water as soon as possible. So become the lifeguard: throw them a life ring when they need your help to work through their fears and apprehensions. Don’t get mad or be impatient with them, as it will most likely be in your best interest to manage the situation in a more positive way. While it may feel natural or normal to want to “fight” this disability discrimination (let them drown), try to remember that it’s more likely ignorance and self-doubts that generate the behavior, rather than a mean-spirited desire to put you down, insult or to overtly discriminate against you. Instead of getting defensive or angry, respond to this situation in a professional and logical manner.

Now that you better understand their fears, begin by being pleasant. Try to calm them down by smiling. You may not feel like being nice and friendly, but familiarity and personality (your “likeability”) can help to disarm their negativity. So, be nice or cordial. Maybe say something nice about the weather, about the other person, about anything. Even thank the other person for their willingness to try to help you. If something humorous can be said, make them laugh. Even consider apologizing for bothering them: “I’m really sorry to bother you, but I really need your help.” Be sincere. Try and make a personal connection. Remember that “familiarity overcomes fear.” These techniques are likely to help the other person to begin to see you, not the disability. There’s a general truth in the idea that once people begin to know each other on the personal or human level, the apparent differences or fears between them begin to fade away. With such a shift, a more positive interact becomes possible and even likely.

So, when encountering these situations, lead with your human warmth, personality, and good will. Help them to get to know you and not your disability. Help them to get to that place where you’re just two people talking with each other.

The rewards you’ll gain from utilizing this strategy are worth the extra energy you’ll need to respond to these challenges. In addition, these techniques will also enhance your professional skills.

Familiarity overcomes fear.

6. Self-advocacy in the work place

As a person with a disability, you face barriers and discrimination all the time. No doubt, you've been encouraged and taught how to self-advocate for yourself. And, most likely, you've had to self-advocate for yourself numerous times in a variety of situations or settings, and sometimes in an assertive or confrontational manner.

The point of this topic is to offer you several finer points about self-advocacy. These finer points will seem worthwhile when you pursue your self-advocacy in professional or workplace situations.

First of all, what are we self-advocating for? Are we seeking "equality" or "nondiscrimination?" What's the difference?

Well, the principle of equality represents equal opportunity and treatment. If one class of people gets an opportunity or advantage, another protected class should get an equal opportunity or the same opportunity. For example, in public accommodations (theatres, hotels, restaurants, shops, etc.) they can't prevent protected classes (women, minorities, etc.) from entering.

But, equal opportunity is not going to help much when the subject is disability access. For example, you may be welcomed to enter a theatre, hotel, restaurant, or shop – however, if there is a flight of stairs at the entrance, but you can't walk up those steps, you're still discriminated against by that business.

The subject of disability rights is more than equal opportunity. It's about nondiscrimination practices.

Under the disability "nondiscrimination" legal principles, it may be necessary for a business to take a specific action or make changes to the way that a building is built or operated. For example, the building owner may need to create an accessible entrance, possibly by building a ramp or installing a lift.

So, we're about more than equality of treatment – we're about equality of access and services. That's the end goal. However, to reach that goal, the real legal principle is "nondiscrimination." Be sure to understand the difference and learn how to explain it clearly so that others can understand and better meet your needs for access.

Self-advocating for equal access and services at a community movie theatre is one thing. Here you might simply file a complaint with a city official about the lack of access (say, accessible seating) or even talk directly with management as a first try. However, it may be very different when it comes to self-advocating for yourself in the work place. First, this is a professional environment, meaning you have to work with these people and you don't want to unnecessarily anger them, especially your boss. If you do, it might hurt your employment situation.

So, how can you professionally assert your nondiscrimination needs in a workplace situation?

For starters, try not to make the subject confrontational. Don't get visibly upset or angry. Don't make harsh and threatening demands. Don't immediately file a disability complaint with the Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or threaten to sue. Sure, you are likely to be angry and disappointed as well as right, but do not openly display that anger in the work place. To do so may reflect how you feel, but it might negatively affect your workplace standing. To keep you in good standing with your fellow workers as well as the boss, you must bring up and pursue the subject in a professional way.

Think about shifting your self-advocacy tactics. When you need something, do you sternly “tell” someone what you need, or do you politely “ask” someone? Do you “push” the person to do what you need, or do you “pull” them towards your way of thinking? Have you heard the old saying, “you get more with honey than with vinegar”? In other words, how do you both preserve positive relationships and get what you need at the same time?

In a professional situation, the smoother way – the way that keeps a good working relationship in place, while still making your point – is to be diplomatic. Shift your disability advocacy style from “telling” people what they should do to enlightening people about what will work better for everyone (including you).

Okay, suppose you use a wheelchair and one day you arrive at work and find that the hallway to your desk is partially blocked with boxes or supplies. Or you’ve been given a new assignment that requires you to perform certain tasks which, due to your disability, you cannot do. Such situations may create barriers to you doing your job. Both examples may even represent a disability related discrimination practice or situation.

How should you deal with these challenges in a professional way? Well, begin by attempting to identify solutions or fixes to the problems. Think for a moment, before you speak up, and try to devise solutions or accommodations which seem to be the most cost-effective ways of achieving the desired results. With regards to the boxes now blocking your path of travel, identify where else they might be stored. If it’s a new work task that you cannot perform because of your disability, identify specific accommodation strategies, equipment or techniques that will enable you to do your job. In short, devise solutions to the problems even before you present them to your boss or co-workers.

As we may know, bosses love employees who alert them as soon as possible to work-related issues or problems and, at the same time, have developed thoughtful solutions to resolve these problems. After all, that’s why your boss hired you: to help solve workplace problems.

This strategy accomplishes several things. First, it shows your maturity (professionalism) by not getting angry as soon as these challenges arise. Second, it demonstrates your problem-solving skills. And, third, it shows your sense of teamwork by not singling out the inconsiderate person (your boss or co-worker) for putting the boxes in the hall way, or the boss for thoughtlessly giving you a new task which your disability prevents you from doing. Rather, you chose to focus your energy on creating a better performance solution for the organization – which also solves your accessibility needs. The worker who placed the supplies in your way will thank you someday for your professionalism (he owes you a favor for not getting him in trouble).

So, our goal or strategy is still to self-advocate in the face of disability discrimination. However, our tactics are adjusted or fashioned for the workplace. We are seeking to achieve our rights both in a more workplace-appropriate manner as well as in a way which showcases our skills and professionalism. In this way, your self-advocacy skills are working for you and you have demonstrated them in a way which preserves and might even improve your workplace performance.

Of course, if this strategy fails and the disability discrimination persists, there are always the formal complaint procedures which are discussed later in Lesson 10.

7. Dignity of risk

Given the history of society's attitudes and perceptions around disability, it's not surprising when we hear it said that "we must keep them safe from injury." Or, that we must protect persons with disabilities from getting hurt.

This becomes a problem when employers or program operators say, "I can't let people with disabilities in because they might hurt themselves." Sure, they're thinking about safety. Thoughts about safety are anchored in the principle that it should always be the first consideration. "Safety First" signs may be posted or just flashing on and off in the program operator's head.

Now, that's not to say that "safety" is unimportant in the work place. It's very important.

But, there's a difference between not wearing your hard hat in a construction site versus being told that you can't be hired because, "if there's a fire, we can't get you out of our office building." While this may or may not be true, if it were applied universally – for example, on airplanes – all wheelchair passengers would be barred from flying. Yet, they aren't. We see people in wheelchairs flying in airplanes all the time.

What's the difference?

Well, at the construction site, EVERYONE wears a hard hat. It's a proven fact that in construction sites, things fall from above and hit people on the head. The wearing of a hard hat is a no brainer. So, people in wheelchairs can work in construction on tasks they can perform (like being the architect), as long as they wear their hard hat.

In an airplane or office building, rather than excluding people with disabilities from either flying or working because of safety concerns, we might modify the situation with enhanced measures to facilitate emergency evacuation. There may be evacuation chairs and a "buddy" system in place specifically designed to get a person with a disability out of a burning building. We might have "safe zones" or shelter in place locations where people who cannot evacuate the building during a fire (for example, because they can walk down the stairs) can wait for rescue by the fire department.

When a disability is in the picture, too often people try to "protect" people with disabilities from "dangerous" situations. This is a form of paternalism or the suffocating thought, "let me take care of you." This paternalism can be stifling and against the idea of disability rights. People with disabilities

should have the same right to assume reasonable risks (for example, a potential fire in an office building or on an airplane ride) in order to participate more fully in life.

Now, people with disabilities have a right to reasonable accommodations around safety considerations. That's where we should focus our "safety first" sensibilities: on seeking to create reasonable accommodations in dangerous situations. In other words: reduce the risks through reasonable accommodations, as best we can, without unreasonably denying the opportunity to participate. And, after these reasonable safety considerations or accommodations have been implemented, allow the possibility of declaring a "dignity of risk" to balance risks with opportunities. Remember, no one would be able to fly in an airplane or work in a tall office building if we wanted to establish an absolute level of safety for everyone.

Without having a right to take reasonable risks, we may lose the opportunity to succeed in life.

We can be both safe and reasonable.

8. With rights come responsibilities

Under federal and many state laws, our nation has determined that people with disabilities have a civil right to participate in education, employment, public accommodations, transportation and communications. These activities cannot discriminate based on a disability.

Not too long ago, before 1990 (the year that the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed), it was legal for most private sector employers to look at a job candidate with a disability and say, "I don't want to hire you because you have a disability." Now, they can't: it is against the law and if they get caught doing it, they may find themselves in court facing discrimination charges.

That's pretty powerful stuff.

People with disabilities have only recently gone from being blatantly denied jobs because they have a disability to being protected from disability discrimination by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Washington, DC.

Having rights like that is a pretty exciting development. Having the EEOC available to back you up can give you a sense of power, especially when discrimination and disability-related negativity come your way.

Along with rights, however, comes responsibility.

Let me tell a story. One of my heroes was a gentleman named Justin Dart, Jr. He was a hero to many and instrumental in the fight to get these rights for people with disabilities made into law. I heard him speak many times about disability discrimination and for disability rights laws. What most impressed me about his speeches was the fact that whenever he invoked the concept of these rights, he always paired the word "rights" with the word "responsibilities."

What did he mean when he coupled these two words together ("rights" and "responsibilities")?

What he was telling us is, “yes” we must have legal rights for people with disabilities; however, people with disabilities hold an equal responsibility to pursue those rights correctly.

That is to say don’t abuse these disability rights. Don’t make demands about your disability rights without making a commitment to do the right thing and to do your best to meet your responsibilities to perform.

Part of the reason that he paired the concepts of “rights” with “responsibilities” was he recognized that these rights depend on the good-will of the public. If we (people with disabilities) are not responsible in the way we use them, or if we abuse them, we could lose public’s support or the good-will that created them in the first place.

We must always use our disability rights responsibly to preserve these rights for future generations.

In addition, these rights were fought for by our disability rights leaders of the time. Many brave and heroic men and women with disabilities endured hardships and discrimination to win these rights for everyone. They helped to draft legislation and held protests across the country. The best way to thank them for all that have done for us is to honor their memory by exercising our rights in a responsible way.

In a work context, these rights should not be used to either get out of work or to hide your failure to perform. If you meet your responsibilities to perform, then your rights will be better respected.

Out of respect for these rights, always do the right thing. Let’s commit ourselves to safeguarding these rights with the dignity and respect they deserve.

As we end this Lesson, there is much more to consider about leaving the old disability attitudes behind and replacing them with a new disability perspective. Feel empowered to think further and even disagree, adjust or expand your beliefs around these thoughts. Think about these subjects as you get ready for the world of work. The whole point of this Lesson is to challenge you to re-think who you really are and how you want to communicate yourself to others.

Lesson 4 — Key Disability Values

Building on the “new perspective for the workplace” topics outlined above, let’s consider these additional disability values or ways of thinking. These values can help make you a more powerful and confident person both in general as well as in the workplace.

1.) Define yourself

As we know, there are many different disability categories. They include visual impairments; blindness; hard of hearing; deaf; cerebral palsy; multiple sclerosis; intellectual disabilities; amputee; mobility impaired; learning disabilities; speech impaired; psychiatric survivor; brain injured; stroke; autism; and more. This list goes on.

Plus, there are dozens of definitions for the word “disability.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers this one: “a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person’s ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and

interactions.” The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 defines a person with a disability as “a person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment”

Most, if not all, of these disability names and definitions approach the subject from the perspective of what a person can’t do, rather than from either of the perspectives of what they can do or do in a different way.

Disability definitions assume that the way people without disabilities usually do things is the right, typical or only way.

If you can’t walk up stairs, by definition, you are disabled. But what if you were in a wheelchair and there were no stairs in your way, just ramps, wide entrances and elevators everywhere? What happens to the definition of disability then? Are you still “mobility limited” in such an environment?

What if you are a “neuro-diverse” person (on the autism spectrum) and you tend to concentrate on one aspect of your environment while ignoring or failing to recognize the social cues of the people around you? Is that a disability which should be viewed as “abnormal” or is it just a different way of sensing your environment? And can it be further described as an enhanced ability to concentrate and observe things more completely than others might?

What about people with dyslexia who either can’t or have great difficulty reading the printed word? When their books are in electronic format and they can use assisting software programs, they can usually read and learn as well as everyone else. Plus, as a result of dyslexia, they might be able to observe patterns more readily and “see” or imagine things in the abstract better than those who can easily read the printed word.

The point is that people with disabilities are individuals with different styles, techniques and capabilities. They shouldn’t be confined to the definitions society has traditionally imposed upon them.

In addition, the disability way of doing things can even represent a strength or quality like those suggested in the examples above.

Unfortunately, current disability definitions hamper society’s ability to understand these deeper meanings.

So, it’s important for both people with disabilities and society to begin to understand disability in a more complete way – beyond traditional disability terms and definitions. Accepting disability-related differences and styles as normal variations of the human condition and even, sometimes, as strengths is the greater truth.

This thought process starts with you. Just as we normalized disability and disability-related job accommodations in Lesson 3 above, we might begin to also think and talk about our individual (disability) differences in these new ways. This is how we do things. We do things in individual ways or

styles. Be positive, not negative as traditional definitions suggest. And, sometimes, our ways of doing these things differently brings added strengths and capabilities to situations (including a job).

Learn how to become an effective communicator about your disability-related differences and strengths. Then, in order to help educate those who need to know the deeper truths about your disability, talk about your disability accurately, carefully and at the right time in these more positive ways.

Define yourself.

2.) Self-determination

Self-determination is you (not others) making choices and decisions about your life.

Self-determination is believing that individuals (you) must and can control their success and destiny.

Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities which help people set goals for themselves, as well as take the initiative to reach these goals. It is about being in charge. It means making your own choices, learning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for your life.

Being self-determined leads to higher quality of life.

Being self-determined leads to more positive post-school outcomes, including employment, independent living, and community inclusion.

Practicing self-determination also means that you're ready to accept responsibility for the consequences of your decisions or choices.

The development of self-determination skills is a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout one's life. Self-determination is important for all people, but it is especially important – and sometimes more difficult to learn – for young people with disabilities.

Well-meaning individuals sometimes try to "protect" youth and adults with disabilities by making decisions for them. They believe that people with disabilities can't think for themselves and they need our help.

Self-determination involves having self-awareness, assertiveness, responsibility, creativity, pride, problem-solving and self-advocacy skills. To take charge of your own life, you must be able to set goals, evaluate options, make choices and then work to achieve those goals.

Let's focus on two subjects associated with self-determination.

The first one is anchored in the part of the self-determination definition which states, "Self-determination is believing you can control your own success or destiny."

Have you ever noticed the fact that people with disabilities with similar abilities often end up achieving very different employment outcomes?

Let's imagine that there are two people who have the exact same disability. They share similar backgrounds, experiences and even attended the same schools while earning the same grades. Yet, they achieved very different career results. One has a successful career and the other doesn't work at all.

What made the difference?

Of course, there may be many reasons for their different outcomes; however, success most often happens when someone embraces the self-determination sentence above which says, "You can control your own success or destiny."

In our example, the successful person was motivated by this value and chose to think about it every day. She used this principle to keep going, growing and working hard to make it happen. The other person may have decided that it was all just too hard and let the negativity around the subject of disability and employment become her reality.

As a result, one is both financially and occupationally well-off while the other isn't.

Even though our example is made-up, in real life it happens too often. During my many years working in disability employment programs, whenever I asked people with disabilities who are successfully working, "How did it happen for you?" they always tell me the same thing: "I was determined to succeed."

Values are important.

The other subject around self-determination worth noting is associated with personal behaviors or conduct. As mentioned above, self-determination also means, "You are ready to accept responsibility for the consequences of your decisions or choices."

How does that work when one of the symptoms or limitations of your disability may make it more difficult for you to follow and obey laws, rules or expected behaviors? Does your disability excuse you from these requirements? Is that just the way you're built? Can you say, "It's not my fault, it's my disability"?

Consider these key facts of life.

If it against the law or a rule to do something, yet you do anyway, a disability is not a good excuse to avoid the consequences of your behavior. If having disability was a good excuse for disobeying rules, where would that end? If it was an excuse, how could you ever be ready for a life in society with full and equal citizenship?

And let's remember that we've already recognized that part of the reality of having a disability is the necessity of taking extra time, expense and effort around adapting or accommodating ourselves.

Think about it this way -- if you can't walk, does that excuse you from attending school because you can't get there? Or does it prevent you from leaving your home to go out to eat or see a movie? No, you are expected to and should want to take personal responsibility to get a device (maybe a walker,

wheelchair or scooter) in order to be able to get yourself to school and into the community. It helps you live a full and integrated life.

Similarly, if a disability makes it harder for you to obey rules, it is up to you to find accommodations for this part of your disability. It's your responsibility to try to find ways to manage or control these types of disability-related behaviors or limitations. Only in this way can you participate in life as you need and should.

For example, if you have behavioral "triggers" which create situations where your bad behavior will likely appear, try to identify and avoid them whenever possible. If you start to feel angry or that you want to lash out, move to a space where you can take a "time-out" and wait for the feelings to pass. And always try to find a person or professional who can help you build accommodation strategies around this part of your disability. Don't just let it happen. Take the time, expense and effort necessary to find a better way forward.

With that in mind, what about the most dramatic example of excusing bad behavior because of a disability? It's called the "insanity defense" (a legal principle) or "not guilty by reason of insanity." In such a situation, a person's psychiatric disability must have been so severe that, at the time, they lacked the ability to know what they were doing. The fact is this defense is often the hardest to prove and even if your lawyer can prove it, you're still likely to end up in either in jail or a psychiatric hospital for a long time. This is not what we're talking about here. What we are talking about here is showing bad behavior which you know is happening (or which you know may happen soon), yet you've chosen not to manage it.

While a disability may be the reason for the bad behavior, it's most often not an excuse. It's almost always your responsibility to try to manage yourself and find the necessary accommodations to follow rules and behave yourself as expected.

While in school, you may encounter more patience and understanding about such disability-related limitations or behaviors; it will be different in the workplace. They're not likely to be tolerated there.

Follow the values around "self-determination." Take charge of your own life. Set goals, evaluate options, make the right choices and work to achieve your goals.

Your workplace success or failure will largely be determined by how well you embrace the values around "self-determination."

3.) Disability pride

Being a person with a disability means that you're a member of a specific minority class or group. And, often, minority groups find it both necessary and advantageous to form associations with others of the same group or category. They do this in order to better represent their interests and needs as well as to become stronger as individuals by learning from each other. People with disabilities have followed this same path and organized themselves into numerous national, state and local groups.

The reason behind the creation of these disability organizations leads to an important point relative to your professional development. As has been discussed earlier, for many years nondisabled people have

held low expectations and negative attitudes about disability and employment. It wasn't until the middle of the 20th century that things began to dramatically change, and significant progress began.

During the early years of the 20th century, well-intentioned nondisabled people decided it was time for society to become more supportive of their fellow human beings who were “handicapped” (the term of the time). They want to help “the handicapped” have access to the built environment, education, employment and other basic human experiences. These well-intentioned nondisabled people spoke “on behalf” of people with disabilities. They followed a strategy of trying to achieve these advances based on public education and awareness programs.

These early efforts made some progress and created many new opportunities. However, the most important accomplishment of this beginning movement was the creation of higher expectations for equality among people with disabilities themselves. With these higher expectations, people with disabilities realized that it was important for them to take over the lead in their struggle. They wanted to take control over the policies being decided. They wanted to take the lead in the effort and no longer be “helped” by their nondisabled advocates. The new principle that resulted was called disability “self-advocacy” or “consumerism.” People with disabilities speaking up and deciding for themselves what their new policies and programs should look like. They were the consumers or customers of these programs and they should take control and lead the movement themselves. This change in leadership was marked by a shift from “paternalism” (being taken care of by others) to “consumerism” (taking care of yourself).

And, this taking of control of your destiny is a point of pride or “disability pride.”

Following this important value, you should always strive to advocate for yourself. It's the right thing to do. Moreover, it's your duty. No one is in a better position to make the case for you than you. By taking charge of your situation, you're building your self-confidence and leadership capabilities. And, doing so will make you a stronger and more attractive job candidate.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with asking others for advice when making decisions. Listening to others can give you more ideas and information upon which to make your own decisions.

Making your own decisions is being proud of yourself as a person with a disability. When people see your pride, they will admire you for it.

So, have and show pride in your disability identity.

If you're not yet connected to a disability group or organization and you think that might offer you support, consider connecting to a disability group which matches your interests. It will not only help you to build your disability pride and self-determination – it can also help you to better represent the disability perspective in your job. For example, being organizationally connected with other people with disabilities puts you in a better position to help a potential employer understand how they might more effectively “sell” or “offer” their products and services to 15% of the general population. (This idea will be covered in more detail in Lesson 12 below.)

Here is a listing of disability organizations for you to check out and possibly connect with:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_disability_rights_organizations You can also search online for disability organizations in your local area (there may be more than you think)!

Lesson 5 — Discrimination Threat and Performance

As we've discussed, disability discrimination can be either subtle or obvious. In its subtle or less-obvious form, it can be much harder to evaluate and manage. For example, a job interviewer might be smiling and polite with a job applicant with a visible disability; however, this interviewer may seem to be less engaged or involved as one might want or expect. Or, the employer may say something seemingly innocent which may suggest a bias against a disability. For example, if you're a blind job applicant, they might say, "do you realize that there is a great deal of reading to do in this job?" Is that discrimination? Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

How you respond to such situations will determine your success in either the job interview or in other professional situations.

Being aware that such negative disability related comments can (and do) happen all the time, the question becomes, "What to do about it?" – and, "When to do it?"

There are no hard and fast rules.

Some might immediately challenge such behaviors. Others might choose to ignore them for fear of reducing or even destroying any chance of getting the job. It's hard to know what to do and when to do it.

One thing that you want to be aware of in such situations is that how you react has a direct impact on your performance, especially in an interview. Having a feeling or fear that someone is not treating you fairly can have a significant impact on your ability to perform in most professional situations.

Think about it.

During an interview, your attention and concentration should be totally committed to focusing on how to answer the questions you're being asked. The minute your brain begins to focus on the possibility that the job interviewer, employer or co-worker is making comments or asking you questions which suggest a bias or discrimination against your disability, you will begin to lose focus on the task at hand. Research shows us that such reactions often diminish your ability to perform. And this fact is important to know, especially when you are engaged in the all-important job interview or professional meeting. During these times, you will want to be at your peak performance.

This reaction to potential discrimination threats is called "stereotype threat." Sometimes, these situations or comments might be called, "micro-aggressions" or small negative comments.

Whenever you feel threatened by discriminatory thoughts, comments, looks, actions or feelings, your brain goes on high alert. You become hyper vigilant about this apparent discrimination and begin to

dedicate much of your attention and brain power on devising strategies to defend yourself. Research conducted by Dr. Claude M. Steele (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvwvbiwRkg>) shows us that in such situations, your performance will significantly fall off.

Now that you know about “stereotype threat” and how it can diminish your performance, what can you do to protect yourself from its negative effects? First, recognize when it’s happening to you. Know that it’s normal and to be expected. In fact, it happens to everyone, whenever they’re made to feel like an outsider or not welcomed. So, as a person with a disability, be alert to identify when you feel these emotions entering your being. When you do, know how they can adversely affect you and your performance.

Dr. Steele recommends a technique to lessen the negative performance impacts of “stereotype threat” by putting these small discrimination signals (micro-aggressions) aside to try and maintain your peak performance. He suggests using a three-strike rule when faced with these situations. This strategy will help to keep calm and, in turn, be at your best.

The three-strike rule is simple. The first time someone says something that suggests discrimination based on disability, “let it go” (strike one). Don’t react. Don’t even think about it. Put it out of your mind, for the time being, so your performance is not negatively impacted. The second time the same person sends another seemingly negative signal or says something that might offend you again, “Let it go” (strike two). The third time this happens, be prepared to stand up for yourself as you should (strike three and you’re out).

By tempering your response in this gradual way, you help to calm the feeling of “stereotype threat” building inside of you and the related hyper-vigilance it creates which reduces your performance. So, don’t give up your responsibilities to defend yourself, but do it in a way which helps you get better professional results.

Also, by allowing someone two strikes (two apparent wrongs) you may find the threat naturally melting away. In fact, the three-strike rule allows for situations where *you* might be wrong (possibly “misreading” the seemingly negative comments). In which case, you didn’t have to confront that person and jeopardize the relationship. Plus, your performance was kept higher longer. This is an important strategy to practice, especially in an employment setting.

You might also consider evaluating the particular relationship and circumstances, as sometimes it might be wise to consider avoiding the “three-strike” strategy altogether. In other words, the situation is too important to call the person “out” on strike three.

This may be the exception to the rule while you’re holding out hope that you can get what you want from the meeting or encounter. If you stay calm and away from any confrontation, regardless of the number of times threats seem to come your way, you might still achieve your goals. Remember, you can always go back to that person, after the event, and discuss your concerns once the outcome has been decided. Be flexible in your response to “stereotype threat” in order to achieve the best possible results for you.

Lastly, consider the idea that some people are more hyper-vigilant around disability discrimination than others are. Observe yourself and measure your level of vigilance or alertness around disability discrimination. Then, consider the impact this hyper-vigilance and “stereotype threat” may have on both your professional performance as well as in other relationships. Adjust your level of vigilance based on your preference for either making a point in the moment or getting better outcomes for yourself.

Lesson 6 — The Disability Message You Want to Send

As we’ve discussed, disability often conjures up all sorts of fears, biases, stereotypes, and misconceptions. As we make progress towards full equity and inclusion for people with disabilities, society is steadily moving along the path of positive disability awareness, acceptance and respect. While on this journey, different people, in different situations and at different times, will display different levels of understanding and support for disability rights.

This journey is going to take time before we all reach the finish line (full acceptance without any reservations). As nondisabled people become increasingly aware about disability rights, they find themselves struggling between the old myths and misconceptions about disability and the new truths about disability equity and inclusion. Think about it – half of your mind knows that disability rights should be honored and the other half has trouble with that concept because you sometimes think that people with disabilities are unable to do things (like working).

As mentioned earlier, one of the results of this conflicted thinking is something called “political correctness” – or knowing that there is a right thing to say, but not knowing exactly what it is or feeling the opposite.

You’re just not “there” yet.

This conflict tends to make nondisabled people both fearful and reluctant to engage with or talk to a person with a disability. This fear can be summarized this way: “if I don’t know what to say, or if I’m afraid I’ll say the wrong thing, I better not say anything at all.”

This reaction is common and widespread, even in the world of work.

To see an example of the fear around being politically correct, watch the movement of a person with a visible disability (such as a person using a wheelchair or a blind person with a guide dog) through a crowd of nondisabled people. Watch those people move out of the way or even turn away from the person with a disability passing by, not even saying “hello” when they might otherwise.

Now, they may be just getting out of the way. But, having talked to these folks after observing these situations, I’ve learned of their basic fear of having an interaction with the person with a visible disability because they’re not sure what to say. So, they calm their fears by moving away and avoiding the whole subject.

This response is anchored in fears around being political correctness or saying the wrong thing.

So, imagine if you're a nondisabled job interviewer or supervisor of an applicant or employee with a disability and you have these fears, you might express them by either avoiding or limiting your interactions with the person with a disability.

Hence, we need to recognize these fears and develop a professional strategy to respond.

One way to begin is simply to smile. It's amazing how effective a smile can be. Smiling sends the message that "I'm not angry." It signals that you want to be friendly towards the other person and not confrontational. So, be sure to smile and that will begin to calm the other person down.

Remember, they may simply be afraid because they don't know how to act. It might seem silly or unreasonable, but it's often the case.

Another strategy to beat back the "I'm afraid I'll say the wrong thing" fear is to be ready to let the person say the wrong thing. This strategy relates back to Lesson 5 above, on "Discrimination Threat and Performance." Remember, being hyper-vigilant to apparent acts of discrimination can affect your performance. Here, too, you might let it go and let people feel comfortable saying the wrong thing without being corrected by you.

You can correct them by example -- by being friendly and supportive and helping them to see you in that way. By doing this, you're more likely to educate them about disability equality. And you're more likely to do so in a way which will more positively promote your full acceptance.

It's amazing how much disability discrimination comes from fear around "political correctness" and saying the wrong thing.

Change this unintended discrimination with your friendliness, warmth and personality.

Lesson 7 — Accommodation Strategies

In addition to the idea of normalizing the concept of disability related job accommodations, as was discussed in Lesson 2 above, a job applicant or employee with a disability must be completely prepared around his or her specific job accommodation needs.

Imagine that you are an employer and a job applicant with a disability enters the interview room. You have a number of promising job candidates to consider. You have work that needs to get done back at the office, so you need to get the new person hired as quickly as possible. As the employer doing job interviews, you are very mindful of your boss who will examine how well you did selecting the new employee. So, who you select reflects on your own performance. You're also thinking about how your organization's budget is stretched, so you need to be cost-effective with this hire. Plus, who you select must fit in well with your other employees and customers. If this new hire doesn't fit in well, you are going to lose some respect from your boss, co-workers and customers. If you don't pick well, your job standing and promotion potential may suffer. As the job interviewer or employer, all these thoughts are racing through your mind as you interview and consider all the job applicants you are interviewing.

So, it isn't just the job applicant who's nervous in a job interview.

Then, a job applicant with a disability comes into the interview room. With all the other pressures facing the employer, how do you think the employer might react when you simply say, “I need a disability-related job accommodation”? Most likely, the employer’s first reaction will be, “this is a problem.” And, when there is a problem lacking any clear solution, people may get nervous and want to avoid the subject. If this is going to be your announcement (“I need a disability related job accommodation”), you need a well-conceived plan to meet these fears and negative reactions immediately. So, let’s plan your strategy to respond effectively.

The first thing to do is to recognize the employer’s perspective on this subject and devise your strategy to help them through the conversation as easily as possible.

As we’ve mentioned, one of THE most appealing characteristics of a job candidate or any employee is the person’s ability to solve problems. If you think about it, that’s the main reason why employers hire people -- to help them solve problems and to get things done.

Employers want to hire job applicants or employees who present problems along with suggested solutions in the same sentence or statement.

Knowing this, as soon as you announce your disability accommodation or performance enhancement needs, you must be prepared to describe them with specific job accommodation solutions which are likely to work in this particular job setting at a reasonable cost. Be sure to include the name of the equipment or describe the technique clearly and in full detail. If you need equipment, indicate the manufacturer, make, model, where it can be found and what it costs. Answer immediately any and all possible questions about how this can work. When you bring this subject up, you must be ready, confident and complete.

In order to do this in a professional manner, you must prepare yourself, in advance of your revelation to the employer, by consulting with others about workable accommodation solutions for this particular job. Don’t just give general accommodation ideas or solutions. Describe job-specific accommodation solutions which fit well with the job in question.

One great resource that you should contact (it’s free) is the Job Accommodation Network (JAN).

Ask them to help you build your job specific job accommodation statement. Call them on 1-800-JAN-7234. When you call them (you can also contact them online at <http://askjan.org/>), be ready to describe two things: 1) your functional limitations (what does your disability prevent you from doing, like standing, walking, speaking, hearing, etc.); and 2) what are the specific or known duties of the job you are applying for (i.e. computer work, customer service, physical duties, etc.). Then, tell them which duties you need help with (reasonable accommodations). With this basic information about your situation, they will help you define your specific job accommodation needs. Do this and you will be prepared to both calm your possible new boss and show him or her how great of a problem solver you are! You’ll reduce their anxiety about considering you for the job because of your clear and precise statement. Such a strategy will likely minimize the employer’s fears around this subject.

So, ask JAN about any job-related needs you might have. They're the best.

Also, be sure to update or prepare a new job-specific accommodation statement for every job interview you have. One size may not fit all.

Certainly, there are other resources for developing your job accommodation statement or answer. Local rehabilitation, education and disability agencies can help, as well as your area's Center for Independent Living (more on these agencies in Part II, Lesson 6).

Practice your job accommodation speech within the context of you wanting to be as productive as possible in the job you're seeking. They are productivity boosters, aren't they? That's how you should promote them to your possible new employer. If you describe your job accommodation needs in this way, you may find the subject more welcomed.

There are two additional benefits about the subject of job accommodations and workers with disabilities which you might express.

Your disability-related job accommodations are more than just for you. They are also for other possible employees with disabilities who might follow you (including existing workers who may become disabled). The reality is that people in this nation (and the world) are moving in this direction. They are learning about the need to reshape their understanding and environment to fit everyone, including people with disabilities. The experience of providing for your job accommodations will help to further educate your employer, co-workers and even customers about this subject. The result of your efforts to become a working member of society will add one more example moving us all forward. So, in a sense, you are not just representing yourself – you're representing other people with disabilities who will follow you.

The second overall point about job accommodations is that it works both ways. When you receive needed job accommodations, you are not only gaining better access to your job; your new employer, co-workers and customers are also gaining "access" to your knowledge, ideas, and performance. It's a win-win situation for both you and your organization.

And, finally, understand what is meant by the term "interactive process" which is an important concept in the disability job accommodation discussion with an employer.

The "Interactive process" is a key legal term associated with disability rights. It says that when discussing and resolving disability-related barriers or accommodations, the person with a disability should be consulted and their ideas seriously considered in the resolution of the matter.

Therefore, whenever disability-related job accommodations are under consideration, you need to be prepared to participate effectively in the "interactive process."

So, calling JAN or asking another job accommodation specialist to help you decide what disability related job accommodations you will want to ask for will help you to be more fully prepared for this conversation.

Lesson 8 — Disclosure Strategies

Now that we understand more about both the employer's realities around choosing who to hire and how to best present your job accommodation needs to an employer, let's talk about "when" you should disclose your disability-related job accommodations.

This subject is anchored in a truth about what employers are looking for in a prospective job applicant. Sure, they want a problem-solver and productive worker, but they also want an employee who has a sense of "loyalty and integrity." They want a worker who tells the truth and who do so with honor and good character.

These values are not only important during a job interview; they're also among the key skills to general workplace success.

In the workplace, you can't always be the worker with the best ideas or be the best performance, but you can always display "loyalty and integrity." You can always tell your boss the truth, as you understand it, and do so with a sense of duty and honor.

So, on the subject of disability disclosure and the need for disability job accommodations, do the right thing at the right time. Do it with "loyalty and integrity."

Here's how.

Generally speaking, there are two ways that disability disclosure can unfold. It depends on whether your disability is visible (can be seen or observed) or invisible (not apparent or obvious).

If it's visible, as soon as you enter the interview room the employer or interviewer will see your wheelchair, white cane or hearing aids, etc. If this is how you present, know that as soon as you enter the interview room the employer is likely already asking himself or herself many questions about your visible disability. And, you must realize, they cannot ask you many of these questions out loud because it might be against the law to do so.

Here are some of the unasked questions the employer or interviewer is quietly asking themselves:

1. *How can this person do this job with that disability?*
2. *If I had that disability, I don't think I could do this job. Can they?*
3. *I've heard that disability accommodations are expensive – aren't they?*
4. *If I hire this person, what will my boss, fellow workers or customers say?*
5. *If I hire this person, would I be able to fire them, if necessary? Would I be stuck with them?*
6. *Oh, a person with a disability – doesn't that mean more laws, more costs, more potential liabilities (law suits)?*
7. *I have other job candidates without disabilities waiting for an interview, why don't I just get to the next applicant?*

These are potentially job-killing interview questions which you will never hear asked in an interview. The reasons you will never hear them is the job interviewer understands that they are, at least, politically incorrect; and, more than that, against the law (see Lesson 10 below).

Even though you aren't asked these questions, answers will likely emerge in the mind of the employer. Unfortunately, though, the person thinking these questions will imagine the answers without your input. This will probably result in answers which are likely not going to be in your favor – or at least, probably not accurate.

Hence, if you enter the interview room with a visible disability, you have no alternative but to “take the bull by the horns.” That is to say, be sure to weave answers to the employer's unasked questions above into your answers to the general interview questions asked. So, if you have a visible disability, you must begin your disclosure strategy immediately and in this way.

The best way to start answering these unasked questions is to be friendly and likeable. As mentioned earlier, there's an interesting truth about discrimination. The more you get to know the person you're discriminating against, the quicker you will back away from these negative thoughts and behaviors. People don't discriminate (generally) against people they know and like.

Then, in a friendly way, begin to respond to those unanswered questions by disclosing facts about your abilities which tend to reject the negative disability thoughts generated by those unasked questions listed above.

Later in this book, we're going to talk about how to best prepare for a job interview. More will be revealed about how to prepare your answers to the unasked disability questions listed above. For now, if you have a visible disability or when you might reveal an invisible one, make note of the importance of responding to these unasked questions on your own.

On the other hand, if you have an invisible disability (that is, the employer can neither see nor knows about it, unless you mention it), your strategy will be different. The difference will be around either timing or deciding if there really is a need to mention it at all.

The timing question stands on one key principle or revelation. That is if (and when) you see the need for a disability-related job accommodation. If you have an invisible disability and you don't perceive any disability-related job accommodations are needed in the job you are interviewing for, then there seems to be no need to disclose or bring it up. You might skip the subject for now.

However, the moment may arrive when you recognize the need for a disability-related job accommodation. That's the correct moment or time to mention this subject. Think about the “loyalty and integrity” values which are so important to an employer. If you realize that disability-related job accommodations are needed, you must not delay the discussion with the employer. If you do, you might tarnish your reputation around honesty in their eyes. You may lose the job if you wait too long to bring up the subject because the employer may realize you've not been forthcoming on something very important.

If you're not sure you will need a job accommodation, but the question still enters your mind, that may be a signal to consider addressing the subject immediately. Again, if you delay and the employer later learns about your needs and senses you delayed talking about it, their opinion of you may go down.

Again, be guided by the values of "loyalty and integrity."

These are the general strategies around disability disclosure in employment. While these are broad rules to follow, each person or situation is different. Whenever you're not sure what to do, ask someone you trust for advice. When it's time to disclose a disability-related job accommodation to an employer, remember to follow the guidelines of being able to describe specific accommodation strategies and doing it with a sense of "loyalty and integrity."

Lesson 9 — A Brief Disability History

People with disabilities are an important part of our Nation's history. For example, a person with cerebral palsy signed the Declaration of Independence (Stephen Hopkins of Delaware); another was elected to four terms as President of the United States (Franklin D. Roosevelt), and millions more made both big and small contributions to our country in every field and occupation.

While this type of history is important, that's not the history we're going to review in this Lesson.

Rather, in preparation for the next two lessons (11 and 12) we're going to learn something about the social and legal rights history of disability as it relates public policy. We should understand that various disability-related laws and policies didn't just appear out of nowhere.

For most of human history, progress in this area has been slow.

Over the centuries, the phases we've gone through can be captured in six (6) different stages of development. Each one built a foundation for the next one. Even today, some parts of the world are at different stages than others. Plus, sometimes we go backwards as well as forwards. And this progression or journey isn't over yet. We still have more to accomplish before we cross the finish line. Here's one way to capture this history in very broad terms. These are my six (6) phases or stages of civilization's disability social development.

1. Discarded and Ignored. A period when societies lived or died based on the ability of every member to contribute to their survival. Communities needed warriors to defend the group, hunters and farmers to provide food, and builders to create shelters. If you could not contribute to these basic needs, you were unable to contribute to a community's survival. This meant people with disabilities were seen as a drain or drag on the community. They were ignored and excluded. The most dramatic examples of this include ancient Sparta (400 BC) when babies born with physical disabilities were thrown into the sea because they had no value. Some more recent examples of this are the Nazi regime (1933-45) when certain people with disabilities were eliminated from society because they were inferior to a "master race" culture; and, local city "ugly laws" enacted in the United States (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ugly_law)

2. Pitied. As communities moved beyond mere survival, they were in better and more understanding place to care for their individuals with disabilities. The models during this stage were based on both social and religious principles of showing pity for the less fortunate, and doing the right thing through volunteer and charity efforts.
3. Given Equality. The next phase was based on encouraging nondisabled people to do good works and open their businesses and places of employment to people with disabilities. We ask people to voluntarily change both design principles and program practices to give people with disabilities access. In employment, employers are asked to consider “hiring the handicapped” but can say no if they didn’t want to. Equality is a nice thing to do but not a legal right.
4. Demanded Equality. This period or phased was marked by laws and regulations which made it a matter of public policy to design buildings and programs in an accessible manner, as well as not to discriminate against people with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation and communications. The hallmark legislation of this era in the United States is the “Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.”
5. Earned Equality. With rights come responsibilities. It’s not enough just to have legal rights. We can and must take up our responsibilities to fully participate in society (including independent living, self-determination, and competitive employment). Rights are protections from unfair or unjust actions, but success still needs to be earned.
6. Normalized Equality. In the future, the world will arrive at the natural conclusion that disability is a normal part of the human condition; and, therefore, people with disabilities must be logically and routinely included in the concept of the “general public.” With this routine full inclusion of people with disabilities in everything, the word “disability” will cover fewer and fewer people. As science and technology advances, a time may come when all people with disabilities can fully participate in all that society has to offer. Then, the word disability may lose its historical meaning and equality will naturally or normally happen for all.

The value of understanding disability history in this broad way is that we can better understand and appreciate where we’ve been, where we are now and where we need to go in the future.

With such a broad historical frame work in place, we should now focus more precisely on the disability-related social and legal history in the United States.

Did you know that before 1975, it was legal for local public schools to tell students with disabilities and their parents, “I’m sorry, we can’t serve you in our public school because of your disability”? Also, did you realize that before 1978, it was legal for private sector employers who were government contractors to say, “I’m sorry, I cannot hire you because of your disability”? And, did you understand that before 1990, it was legal for other private sector employment to say the same thing? It’s hard to imagine that just 20 to 40 years ago these rights in education and employment did not exist.

How did we break these longstanding discriminatory practices in the U.S.?

The journey began after the American Civil War, when thousands of permanently injured soldiers returned home to find no public programs to help them continue their lives as persons with disabilities

or disabled veterans. In response to this social challenge, numerous local charitable efforts were begun to assist some of these disabled soldiers. It was the humble beginnings of a civic sense of responsibility to address the disability needs of this category of people (civil war veterans) with disabilities.

The next advance was fifty years later during the time World War I. This war produced thousands of military service members with disabilities. This time, and for the first time, the federal government stepped in and passed a law authorizing rehabilitation services for these disabled veterans.

Soon after this program took effect, the U.S. Congress passed a “Civilian Rehabilitation Act of 1920,” which established the beginning of our state-federal vocational rehabilitation program for citizens with disabilities. This first civilian rehabilitation program only served people with physical disabilities.

Years after the passage of the “Civilian Rehabilitation Act of 1920,” this program was expanded to serve people with mental illnesses or psychiatric survivors.

During these early years, the only way (there were no laws) to get employers to consider hiring individuals with disabilities who were “rehabilitated” was to encourage, educate or promote the idea that “it was good business to hire the handicapped.” A concept called “selective placement” was advanced. Under this principle, the person with a disability should be placed in a job where their disability did not affect their ability to perform that job.

Next, in 1948, after World War II, the first disability-related nondiscrimination rules advancing the employment of disabled veterans in federal government jobs were made into law.

During the 1950’s, things started to move more quickly. The vocational rehabilitation program was expanded to serve people with intellectual disabilities, and the Social Security Act was amended to create disability payments.

In 1968, the “U.S. Architectural Barriers Act” was passed. This law required certain federal public buildings to include accessible design features for people with disabilities. Formal accessible design standards were first devised to support the law’s implementation.

In the 1970’s, the courts declared that treating Kindergarten through 12th grade students with disabilities differently (not letting them into public schools) was a denial of the equal protection and due process provisions of the U.S. Constitution.

And, in 1973, Section 503 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were enacted. This law (503 & 504) took the next step (a giant leap forward) establishing both greater employment and accessibility rights for people with disabilities.

In 1975, the U.S. Congress implemented Public Law 94-142, “The Education of the Handicapped Children Act,” which finally required local public schools (K-12 only) to provide a free and accessible public-school education to students with disabilities. The six major requirements of this law (now titled “IDEA” or “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act”) are to provide:

- Individualized Education Program (IEP),
- Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE),
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE),
- Appropriate Evaluation,
- Parent and Teacher Participation, and
- Procedural Safeguards (Due process).

The advances of the 1970's (above) were driven by the advocacy and hard work of people with disabilities themselves.

During this time frame, people with disabilities started to organize a consumer's movement taking charge of their programs and policies. It was a time of race-related civil rights and women's rights campaigns. People with disabilities were soon to follow these examples and join the action.

There a wonderful PBS documentary which tells the story of the birth and early years of the disability rights movement, called "Lives worth Living." If you want to learn more about your disability history, be sure to watch it. See the movie's trailer here: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/lives-worth-living/>

This disability rights or consumer's movement promoted the following principles, which remain important to us today.

- Call us "people with disabilities," not "the disabled" (people-first language).
- End paternalism (being taken care of) and embrace empowerment (taking care of ourselves).
- People with disabilities promote the principle "nothing about us without us."
- Disability is not an aberration, a problem to be solved, or an illness to be fixed or cured – it's a human identity that needs to be acknowledged and accepted.
- Having a Disability is cultural experience. We have a disability culture to define, document and embrace. We promote disability pride.
- Disability limitations only exist because of negative attitudes, inaccessible places and programs.
- Negative attitudes need to change, not us.
- Our goal is not equality; it's nondiscrimination. Equality suggests similar treatment. Nondiscrimination means accessibility or the eliminated of these artificial barriers (steps with no ramps; printed matter with no electronic or Braille copy, etc.)
- With rights (access) come responsibilities to exercise full citizenship (including working when possible).

These strategies continue to be relevant today.

Lesson 10 — Disability Employment Laws

Now, let's learn more about the key details around our current disability rights laws. We will review just the key or relevant employment laws that are important to our quest for a successful career. These are:

- 1) the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and,
- 2) the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Before we begin, there is one important caution to consider. It is ALWAYS important for you to read or study these laws and regulations yourself. Don't rely on what others may tell you these laws say. Most often, what you hear will be inaccurate, incomplete, out-of-date, or self-serving. And, there's nothing more frustrating than trying to pursue your disability rights when you don't accurately know what they are or how they really work. So, study them yourself. Do your own research and go to the federal government's enforcement agencies directly, as they are your best sources for accurate information.

I. The Rehab Act of 1973, as Amended

Title V, of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in:

- programs conducted by Federal agencies;
- programs receiving Federal financial assistance;
- Federal employment; and,
- Federal contractors employment practices.

The standards for determining employment discrimination under Title V of the Rehabilitation Act are the same as those used in Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

There are three key sections of the Title V of the Rehab Act which you'll want to become familiar with. These are: Sections, 501, 503, and 504.

Section 501:

Section 501 prohibits discrimination and requires affirmative action and nondiscrimination in employment by Federal agencies of the executive branch of our U.S. Government.

This means that all our Federal government agencies are required, under Section 501, to actively recruit, hire and advance people with disabilities in their recruitment and hiring efforts. In other words, they must take affirmative action to both reach out to and encourage people with disabilities to apply for their jobs; and, in turn, give them every consideration. They must not discriminate against a disability, if the job applicant with a disability is otherwise qualified for the job. And, to this end, the agency's employers must be prepared to provide reasonable accommodations to enable either that job applicant or employee with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job which they are otherwise qualified to perform.

This law is enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The key legal terms that have been underlined in this Lesson are further defined below in the "Definitions" section.

It's worth noting that, as a result of Section 501, the Federal government represents a great career possibility for people with disabilities. In addition to having this extra responsibility to engage in affirmative action to hire people with disabilities, the Federal government offers thousands of interesting job possibilities and special hiring authorities like Schedule A. Here's more about the Schedule A hiring authority for people with disabilities:

https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/abc_applicants_with_disabilities.cfm

For more about the jobs our Federal government is currently offering see www.USAJobs.gov/

Section 503:

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination and requires employers with federal contracts or subcontracts that exceed \$10,000 to take affirmative action to hire, retain, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities.

This law is enforced by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) within the U.S. Department of Labor.

Over recent years, Federal contracting has become big business. It's become so huge, it's being called our "fourth branch" of government, after the traditional three branches of the Federal government (executive, judicial, & legislative).

There are more than 1 million private employers or companies with Federal contracts or subcontracts covered by Section 503.

Section 504:

Section 504 says, "No otherwise qualified disabled individual in the United States, shall, solely by reason of a disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency, or by the United States Postal Service. Federal financial assistance includes any federal money, resources or benefits received."

Section 504 defines a covered employer as "any State or its political subdivision, any instrumentality of a state or its political subdivision, any public or private agency, institution, organization, or other entity or any person to which federal financial assistance is extended (granted or given)."

Examples might include public and private educational organizations, housing, transportation, and much more.

Each individual Federal agency has its own set of Section 504 regulations which apply to its own programs.

Requirements common to these regulations include reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities; program accessibility; effective communication with people who have hearing or vision disabilities; and accessible construction and alterations of their buildings and facilities.

Each agency is responsible for enforcing its own regulations. Section 504 may also be enforced through private lawsuits. It is not necessary to file a complaint with a Federal agency or to receive a "right-to-sue" letter before going to court.

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. The law also requires an employer to provide reasonable accommodation to an employee or job applicant with a disability, unless doing so would cause significant difficulty or expense ("undue hardship") for the employer.

The ADA covers employers with 15 or more employees.

As noted earlier in this Lesson, the ADA's nondiscrimination standards also apply to employers covered under Section 501, 503 and 504.

Also, as noted earlier, employers may not ask job applicants about the existence, nature, or severity of a disability.

Applicants may be asked about their ability to perform specific job functions. A job offer may be conditioned on the results of a medical examination, but only if the examination is required for all entering employees in similar jobs. Medical examinations of employees must be job related and consistent with the employer's business needs.

Definitions (some of the key terms underlined in this Lesson are further explained here)

Person with a disability: an individual with a disability is a person who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or,
- has a record of such an impairment; or
- is regarded as having such an impairment.

Qualified: a qualified employee or applicant with a disability is an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodations, can perform the essential functions of the job in question.

Essential functions: consideration shall be given to the employer's judgment as to which functions of a job are essential; and, if an employer has prepared a written job description before advertising or interviewing applicants for the job, this description shall be considered evidence of the essential functions of the job.

Accommodations: reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to:

- Making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities.
- Job restructuring, modifying work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position;
- Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies, and providing qualified readers or interpreters.

An employer is required to make a reasonable accommodation to the known disability of a qualified applicant or employee if it would not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business. Reasonable accommodations are adjustments or modifications provided by an employer to enable people with disabilities to enjoy equal employment opportunities. Accommodations vary depending upon the needs of the individual applicant or employee. Not all people with disabilities (or even all people with the same disability) will require the same accommodation. For example:

- A deaf applicant may need a sign language interpreter during the job interview.
- An employee with diabetes may need regularly scheduled breaks during the workday to eat properly and monitor blood sugar and insulin levels.
- A blind employee may need someone to read information posted on a bulletin board.
- An employee with cancer may need leave to have radiation or chemotherapy treatments.

Undue Hardship: an employer does not have to provide a reasonable accommodation if it imposes an "undue hardship." Undue hardship is defined as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of factors such as an employer's size, financial resources, and the nature and structure of its operation. An employer is not required to lower quality or production standards to make an accommodation; nor is an employer obligated to provide or pay for personal use items such as glasses or hearing aids. An employer generally does not have to provide a reasonable accommodation unless an individual with a disability has asked for one. However, when an employer believes that a medical condition is causing a performance or conduct problem, they may ask the employee how to solve the problem and if the employee might need a reasonable accommodation. Once a reasonable accommodation is requested, the employer and the individual should discuss the individual's needs and identify the appropriate reasonable accommodation (the interactive process). Where more than one accommodation would work, the employer may choose the one that is less costly or that is easier to provide.

Key Features of Disability Employment Protections under Federal Laws

<u>Law</u>	<u>Section 501, Rehab Act</u>	<u>Section 503, Rehab Act</u>	<u>Section 504, Rehab Act</u>	<u>Title I, ADA</u>
Who is covered	Federal employers	Federal Contractors--\$10,000	Received Federal Financial Assistance	All Employers with 15 or more employees
Requires	Affirmative Action & Nondiscrimination	Affirmative Action & Nondiscrimination	Nondiscrimination only	Nondiscrimination only
What is covered	Employment	Employment	Program access & employment	Employment
How to obey	Reasonable accommodations	Reasonable Accommodations	Reasonable Accommodations	Reasonable Accommodations
Not required when	Undue hardship	Undue hardship	Undue hardship	Undue hardship
Who enforces	EEOC*	OFCCP/DOL**	***Individual federal agency	EEOC*

*EEOC, see: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/disability.cfm>

**OFCCP/DOL, see: <https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/pdf/pdfstart.htm>

***Individual federal agencies – visit agency’s website and search for “disability complaints”

In summary, these two laws (Rehab Act of 1973 and Title I of the ADA) establish the framework for disability rights in employment.

In addition to knowing our disability rights, it’s important for us to consider the subject of when and how to effectively pursue these rights. It’s one thing to have rights; it’s another to be clever, smart and appropriate on how to pursue them, especially in an employment situation.

As we’ve discussed in earlier Lessons, disability-related employment discrimination is often the result of fear, misconception and a lack of knowledge. Fear about working with people with disabilities (“will I say or do the wrong thing”); misconceptions about their potential to perform in a job (“if I had their disability, I couldn’t do this job”); and, a lack of knowledge on how to provide reasonable accommodations (“I’m not sure how to do it or how much this will cost my company”). Thus, disability

discrimination in employment often can and should be corrected early and artfully by addressing directly these fear factors – rather than going immediately to court.

Remember that employers are very aware of these disability laws and are generally fearful of getting sued. So, if you begin to sense their fear about your ability to do the job, respond to that fear with facts, examples, and explanations on how you can do that job. In other words, instead of letting a line get drawn into the sand, where thoughts about confrontation and lawsuits are entering the situation, help them to solve this problem by adding more positive information about your capabilities. Remember, employers want to hire people who have communication skills, marketing skills and can solve problems. By showing these soft skills in this situation, rather than getting upset, you will impress them.

And here's one more good reason for being prepared, friendly and ready to use your persuading skills rather than your suing skills. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) employers win most of the disability discrimination cases brought against them by workers with disabilities. The reason why is that it's very hard to prove discrimination against an employer. Employers know these laws and how to protect themselves. They are likely to defend themselves by saying, "well I found another job candidate who had more skills," or "you didn't have all the skills or experience I was looking for."

In addition, once you've sued an employer for disability discrimination, you jeopardize your ability to get another employer to consider you for employment. The other employers you approach next may learn about your prior legal action and, as a result, want to stay as far away from you as possible.

So, you can win the battle against discrimination by filing a complaint. However, be careful not to lose the war. After all, what you want is to get a good job and have a successful career.

Lesson 11 — Social Security Work Incentives

This Lesson is about how to manage your Social Security disability-related payments in a way which best supports your ambitions to work.

First, the big picture.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, adults with disabilities experience a poverty rate of 49.7%. This means, if you're an adult with a disability you have about a 50% chance of being in poverty. The overall poverty rate for all adults (nondisabled) in the United States is 13.3%. That's a big difference.

Social Security benefits are important and necessary for many people with disabilities, especially those living in poverty; however, they may come at a price.

First, the payments are low and may ultimately mean a life of poverty.

Plus, in order to get payments, you have to "prove" you're unemployable. If that's the case, so be it.

If it isn't, or might not be, consider the financial and other benefits of working.

Social Security disability-related benefits can be a life-saving resource to help you through a time in your life where you need the support; however, if you can work, you will always be better off financially with a job.

Let's begin by reviewing the basics about both SSI and SSDI.

SSI (Supplemental Security Income)

SSI is authorized under Title XVI of the Social Security Act.

SSI is a needs-based program. That is to say, you must be seen as unable to work because of disability and you have little money or financial resources in the bank to support yourself. SSI's resource limitations are \$2,000 for an individual; and, \$3,000 for a couple. This means if you have more than \$2,000 (if single) or \$3,000 (if a couple) in your checking or savings accounts, you are likely to be determined not financially eligible for the program.

If you get in, SSI provides a monthly payment which varies from state to state (the federal monthly payment is currently \$750 per month and there are some state variations, e.g. California is higher because the State adds to that amount which in 2018 raises the monthly amount for an individual to \$910.72). This monthly payment is designed to help you pay for all your living expenses (food, clothing and shelter, etc.). In today's economy, this level of benefit is a "poverty-level" existence.

SSI automatically qualifies you for Medicaid (in California, it's called Medi-Cal) insurance, a medical insurance program, which will give you access to medical care.

SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance)

SSDI is authorized under Title II of the Social Security Act.

SSDI is an entirely separate program from SSI. Even so, some people may be eligible for both at the same time. In order to be eligible for SSDI, applicants must demonstrate a qualifying prior work history. And, that work history must have paid Social Security taxes (FICA) for a certain number of years (generally five to ten years).

If enrolled in SSDI, you will get a monthly payment which is determined by a formula based on your average lifetime earnings. The most recent national average for SSDI monthly payments was \$1,171.

In addition, upon SSDI enrollment, you may also be eligible to receive Medicare Part A (to pay hospitals) and Part B (to pay doctors) as your medical insurance.

These descriptions of both SSI and SSDI are general because actual benefits are based on individual factors and State variations; hence, for more details about your situation ALWAYS call or visit your nearest Social Security Office.

There is a "bible" on these Social Security programs which you may wish to review for more details on both SSI and SSDI, as well as the work incentive programs listed below. It's called the (SSI/SSDI) Guide to

Work Incentives or “Red Book” (because it has a red cover) and can be viewed here:

<http://ssa.gov/redbook/>.

You should also keep up with the news around the future of these programs. They may change significantly. That’s possible because these Social Security programs are dependent on the U.S. Congress’ willingness to keep the money flowing to support the current levels of eligibility and benefits. And, the reality is these programs are spending more money while supporting an ever-growing number of individuals. Over the last 10 years, both SSI and SSDI have seen a sharp rise in the numbers of people using the programs. These upward trends are expected to continue. As the financial costs of these programs rise, mounting pressures are building in the U.S. Congress to do something. And, that may mean less money and more difficult eligibility in the future.

Now, we could count on the U.S. Congress to keep the programs going as they are currently designed by raising Social Security and other taxes to get the additional money needed to support the ever increase number of beneficiaries; or, we must worry about the real possibility that these programs may significantly change. Many people believe that significant changes are needed to these programs in order to control their ever-increasing costs.

While it’s quite likely that significant changes will occur during the next several years, during your life time, (the next 20 to 30 to 40 years) more dramatic changes to these programs are a real possibility.

The question you must ask yourself is, “In whose hands do I want my future held?” Do you want your economic security in the hands of politicians, or do you want it in your own hands – if that’s possible?

So, when or if you come to that fork in the road between SSI/SSDI enrollment and working, think long and hard about what’s possible for you and which direction is better for you over the long term. If you believe working is possible, consider the merits of developing your professional or workplace skills as soon as possible, thereby taking personal control over your economic future.

If you must enter either SSI or SSDI, well you must. Go ahead, and let’s be thankful that these programs are available.

If you become or are currently a recipient of either the SSI or SSDI programs, keep alert for the possibility of your employment potential improving. At that time, the SSI and SSDI work incentives below will become important employment resources.

SSI/SSDI Work Incentives

As an SSI or SSDI recipient, here are some important work incentive tools available to you in order to help you make the smoothest transition possible from benefits to work.

As noted above, in order to receive SSI or SSDI, you must be unemployable or not able to work at all. So, when you start working both benefit levels and eligibility can be impacted.

The Social Security Administration offers you the work incentive tools listed below to both encourage you and protect you for a time so that you can test your ability to work. Having these work incentive tools allows you to both test and better understand your employment potential.

Here they are.

General Income Exclusion and Earned Income Exclusion

Remember that we noted that the national average payment in 2018 for SSI was \$750 (each State may be different). If you decide to try working, when you report to your SSA office that you're beginning to earn income, you can expect your \$750 monthly payment to be adjusted or reduced slightly.

When you begin to earn income, under SSA's work incentive programs, before these reductions are applied, you can automatically deduct something called a "General Income Exclusion" (\$20) as well as an "Earned Income Exclusion" (\$65) from your monthly earnings. So, if you work and earn \$400 in a month, you get to immediately deduct the combined general and earned income exclusions of \$85 ($\$20 + \$65 = \85, then $\$400 - \$85 = \$315$) leaving \$315 to report as earned income.

From this amount, the Social Security Administration will reduce your monthly check by \$1 for every \$2 you've earned. So, in this example, your monthly check of \$750 would be reduced by one-half of \$315 – or by \$157.50.

Still, you've made more money that month by working. You've made \$592.50 in a reduced SSI payment (reduced from \$750, so $\$750 - \$157.50 = \$592.50$).

Plus, you've earned \$400 at work, for a grand total of \$992.50 ($\$592.50 + \$400 = \992.50).

But, more deductions from your earned income are possible.

Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWEs)

Under this additional earned income deduction or incentive, you may also be able to deduct more from your employment earnings: any disability-related working expenses that you incurred, such as medicine needed in order to allow you to work, can be considered "Impairment Related Work Expenses" (IRWEs). You can only deduct these and other disability-related work expenses if you are not reimbursed for them (for example, by your health insurance). There is no comprehensive list of disability work related expenses, so follow the idea that because of your disability, these additional expenses were necessary in order to enable you to work and may be deducted as IRWE's.

Be sure to collect and be prepared to submit each month all your receipts for these IRWE expenses to the Social Security Administration (SSA).

So, if you spend \$200 a month on IRWEs, you may also deduct that amount from the \$315 of countable income above.

In this example, we're now down to \$115 of earned income ($\$315 - \$200 = \115) of which one half, or \$57.50, is to be deducted from your monthly SSI check.

So, in this example, utilizing the IWREs in combination with the other deductions, you will get a reduced SSI check for \$692.50, plus your \$400 of earned income for a combined \$1092.50.

Here's the complete calculation

EXAMPLE with DEDUCTIONS

Your SSI Monthly Check	\$750.00
Your Monthly Pay Check	\$400.00
Subtract Both Automatic Deductions (\$20 +\$65)	\$85.00
Subtract Your Monthly IRWE Deductions	<u>-\$200.00</u>

Your Benefits <u>Base</u> Amount	\$115.00
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(Job Check = \$400 minus both \$85 and \$200 = \$115)

SSI Benefit <u>Reduction</u> Amount is half of \$115 <u>Base</u>	\$57.50
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(SSI is reduce \$1 for every \$2 of \$115 Base or a \$57.50 Reduction)

SSI Monthly Check	\$750.00
Actual Benefit Reduction (Calculated Above)	- <u>\$57.50</u>
Actual Monthly SSI Check	\$692.50

(\$750 minus \$57.50 equals \$692.50 or Your Adjusted SSI Payment)

<i>Actual Monthly SSI Check</i>	<i>\$692.50</i>
<i>Actual Work Check</i>	<i>+<u>\$400.00</u></i>
<i>Actual Total Monthly Income</i>	<i>\$1092.50</i>

Blind Work Expenses (BWE)

If your disability is blindness, you have an alternative IRWE to use. It's called the "Blind Work Expenses" (BWEs) option. If you are blind, you should use this option (not the IRWEs) as it offers more things to deduct. If you are not blind, you cannot use BWEs (instead use IRWEs above). Expenses that can qualify include: a service animal, including the animal's cost of food and upkeep; transportation to and from work; licenses, fees, or taxes; attendant care services; meals eaten during work hours; medical and non-medical equipment or supplies; and, other work-related equipment or services. Remember, you must be blind in order to use this listing; and, you must also collect receipts and not have been reimbursed for these expenses by either insurance or another entity.

Both the IRWEs and BWEs must be approved by your Social Security office before these deductions can apply. Be sure to work closely with them.

Student Earned Income Exclusion

If you are under the age of 22 and a full-time student in school, you can utilize the "Student Earned Income Exclusion" work incentive to help protect your SSI monthly payment. Under this program, you can make up to \$1,820 per month (not to exceed a total of \$7,350 for the year) and not have any of that earned income affect or reduce your SSI payment. (These amounts were for January 2018 and go up each year). This is an especially attractive program designed to encourage full-time students who are under 22 years of age to seek out those all-important summer (or school year) jobs and internships.

Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

Okay, now that you have an earned income from working, and in view of the SSI asset limitation of \$2,000 in your checking and savings accounts, you may be wondering, "how do I remain eligible for the SSI program with the extra money piling up in my checking and savings account?" Well, consider opening a "Plan to Achieve Self-Support" plan, or PASS plan, with the Social Security Administration. PASS is a special savings account that you can use to deposit either your earned income or SSDI monies (if you are doubly eligible for both SSI & SSDI) for either job-related or career-related expenses (e.g. going to additional school, starting a business, etc.).

Please understand that if you're on SSI, you cannot put that SSI money into your PASS account (you can only put in your earned income or SSDI). But, when you put earnings into your PASS account, these monies will not be counted as income which would otherwise lower your SSI monthly check. Plus, your new PASS savings account can protect you from being disqualified from SSI's basic requirement to have no more than \$2,000 (individual) or \$3,000 (couple) in your savings and checking accounts. You must ask Social Security if you can set-up a PASS account and you must complete a written plan outlining how you expect to use these PASS funds to further your work ambition (start a business or further education).

Section 1619(a)

Section 1619(a) allows SSI recipients who are working to continue to receive SSI payments even when their earned income (gross wages and/or net earnings from self-employment) is at the level which would otherwise stop those payments (that means you're earning more money than is usually allowed). This threshold is called SGA or "Substantial Gainful Activity." Section 1619(a) eliminates the need for the

trial work period or extended period of eligibility under SSI. If you are blind, this section does not apply to you because current law doesn't apply the SGA requirement to individuals who are blind.

To qualify, you must:

- Have been eligible for an SSI payment for at least 1 month before you begin working at the SGA level;
- Still be disabled; and
- Meet all other SSI eligibility rules, including the income and resources tests.

Under Section 1619(a), your eligibility for SSI will continue for as long as you meet the basic eligibility requirements and the income and resources tests. The SSA will continue to figure your SSI payment amount in the same way as before. If your state provides Medicaid to individuals on SSI, you will continue to be eligible for Medicaid.

Section 1619(b)

If you have a disability and return to work, you can make a significant amount of money and still keep your SSI-linked Medicaid without additional expense (even if you earn enough money that your SSI is reduced to zero). The exact amount of money you can earn under the "1619(b) –Medicaid while working" policy varies depending on the state you live in (in 2018, the earnings thresholds ranged all the way from \$27,322 in Alabama up to \$66,812 in Connecticut). If you make more, many states also have "working disabled" programs where you can keep still keep your Medicaid with some amount of premium payments required by you. Note that under the "Individual Threshold Amount" provision, if approved, you might be able to make more than your state's regular earning limits under 1619(b).

Ticket to Work

Social Security's "Ticket to Work" Program is a free and voluntary program available to people ages 18 through 64 who are blind or have a disability and who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. The goals of the Ticket to Work Program are to:

- Offer beneficiaries with disabilities expanded choices when seeking service and supports to enter, re-enter and/or maintain employment;
- Increase the financial independence and self-sufficiency of beneficiaries with disabilities; and
- Reduce and, whenever possible, eliminate reliance on disability benefits.

The beneficiary does not need an actual paper Ticket to participate. Under this program, eligible beneficiaries with disabilities who are receiving monthly SSI/SSDI cash benefit payments are entitled to participate by signing up with an approved service provider of their choice. This can be an Employment Network (EN) or a State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency. Ask the VR or community employment agency you might want to help you get to work if they accept the Ticket to Work offered by SSA. If so, they will coordinate and provide appropriate services to help you find and maintain the employment you seek and at no cost to you. These services may be training, career counseling, vocational rehabilitation, job placement, and ongoing support services necessary to achieve employment.

Trial Work Period

The Trial Work Period is an employment incentive for SSDI beneficiaries who want to try working again. The trial work period lets you test your ability to work or run a business for at least 9 months. These months need not be consecutive. During this trial work period you will continue to receive full SSDI benefits.

Reinstating Eligibility without a New Application

If you have been made ineligible for SSI payments due to working, you may be able to restart your SSI cash payment again without starting all over with a new application. Ask SSA about how you can restart your SSI benefits and/or Medicaid if your work has ended. If your cash payment and Medicaid benefits ended because of your work and earnings and you stop work within 5 years of when your benefits ceased, the SSA may be able to re-start your benefits.

Medicaid Buy-in

Many states also offer a program referred to as the Medicaid buy-in program. Earning limits differ from state to state, but as an example, in California, participants with a disability can earn up to \$56,000 per year and still remain eligible for Medicaid. Participants pay a premium based on their earnings and receive full-scope Medicaid coverage. In California, the Medicaid buy in also provides an additional savings vehicle. Participants can save unlimited funds in a recognized retirement vehicle such as an IRA, 401K, or 403B without triggering SSI asset limitations. This is one great way to build up savings in excess of the \$2,000 asset limit for those receiving SSI linked Medicaid.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges of using any of these work incentive programs is understanding them and following the rules. This lesson is designed to get you started understanding the work incentive associated with SSI and SSDI. At least now you know there are several important work incentive programs that you might consider using. As always, consult the Social Security Administration office for the details about how these might apply to you. Don't hesitate to contact them!

And, if you live in a state which has on-line personal benefits calculators, you don't even need to know all these facts – you just need to go to and use these websites to determine the potential impact working might have on your benefits. They are called Disability Benefits 101 or DB101 websites. Here are the states with DB101 websites: AK, AZ, CA, KY, MI, MN, MO, NJ and OH. You can find these state's website links here: <http://www.db101.org/>

ABLE Act

Lastly, there is a related program offering under "The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act" which may be helpful. This law allows people with disabilities to put private or personal funds into a special tax-advantaged savings account (called an ABLE Account) for future approved disability-related expenses.

ABLE Accounts allow people with disabilities to work, save and invest to build a more economically independent future for themselves and their families. ABLE is the first piece of legislation that specifically recognizes that there are added costs to living with a disability.

ABLE Accounts are operated at the state level, although many states also allow non-residents to open accounts through their program. Investments in the accounts grow tax-free, and the accounts themselves can reach a maximum of \$300,000 or more, depending on the state they are based in. These funds are NOT counted as assets for the purposes of SSI unless they reach more than \$100,000, and *all* funds in an ABLE account are not counted as assets for Medicaid and other means-tested programs (check current program rules in your State).

Qualified ABLE expenses include:

Education - including tuition for preschool thru post-secondary education, books, supplies, and educational materials related to such education, tutors, and special education services.

Housing - Expenses for a primary residence, including rent, purchase of a primary residence or an interest in a primary residence, mortgage payments, real property taxes, and utility charges.

Transportation - Expenses for transportation, including the use of mass transit, the purchase or modification of vehicles, and moving expenses.

Employment Support - expenses related to obtaining and maintaining employment, including job-related training, assistive technology, and personal assistance supports.

Health Prevention and Wellness - Expenses for health and wellness, including premiums for health insurance, mental health, medical, vision, and dental expenses, habilitation and rehabilitation services, durable medical equipment, therapy, respite care, long term services and supports, nutritional management, communication services and devices, adaptive equipment, assistive technology, and personal assistance.

Other Approved Expenses - Any other expenses which are approved by the Secretary under regulations and consistent with the purposes of this section.

Assistive Technology and Personal Support - Expenses for assistive technology and personal support with respect to any item described in clauses (i) through (vi).

Miscellaneous Expenses - Financial management and administrative services; legal fees; expenses for oversight; monitoring; home improvement, and modifications, maintenance and repairs, at primary residence; or funeral and burial expenses.

For more information on the ABLE Act and ABLE Accounts go to: <http://ablenrc.org/about/what-are-able-accounts>

Lesson 12 — How to Represent the Disability Community

In Lesson 2 (above) on “A New Disability Perspective,” we offered the idea that “diversity includes disability.”

Given the value employers are placing on investing in a diverse workforce, hiring people with disabilities should become an increasing part of their strategy. The reason why employers are interested in hiring a more diverse workforce is that they’ve come to understand that having workers from minorities, different genders, ethnicities and religious backgrounds means their organization’s workers have different life experiences and various perspectives which can improve problem solving and planning. Research shows that the more diverse an organization’s workforce is, the better the organization’s performance and, in turn, the higher their profits.

Think about the richness of having these different experiences and backgrounds on a team.

Also, a diverse workforce better matches the make-up of the customer market companies and organizations are designed to serve.

In the spirit of diversity, employers are increasingly understanding that this consideration needs to include people with disabilities.

Fifteen percent (15%) of the population consists of people with disabilities. That means 15% of possible new job applicants can be recruited from this constituency, as well as 15% of potential new customers or participants with disabilities can be found.

Therefore, you as a person with a disability might be able to tell your employer that, if they hire you, you can help them to broaden their diversity to include more people with disabilities.

A word of caution about this possibility.

Don’t feel like you must take this role on for yourself. It’s completely optional.

If it doesn’t seem right for you to represent yourself in this way, or if you choose not to, that’s perfectly fine. It’s not necessary to assume this role in order to become a competitive professional. It’s extra credit.

Also, don’t even mention this possibility unless you are both ready and prepared to perform this role.

If at this point you want to skip this idea, just remember the potential of this additional role. Someday in the future, you may decide the time might be right for you to help your organization in this way.

When and if you want to develop this capability, this Lesson will help you to prepare yourself to represent the disability perspective.

When and if you are ready, here’s what you might do to prepare yourself for such a role:

First, know some basic facts.

- As you learned earlier, data tells us that about 15% of the population in the USA reports a disability. Learn more about these numbers here: <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org>
- The total after-tax annual disposable income for working-age people with disabilities is about \$490 billion, which is similar to that of other significant market segments, such as African Americans (\$501 billion) and Hispanics (\$582 billion). Disposable income is what people have left to spend after they pay their taxes.
- Discretionary income for working-age people with disabilities is about \$21 billion, which is greater than that of both the African-American and Hispanic market segments combined. Discretionary income is what people have left to spend on things they want to buy after necessities (rent, food, debt, etc.).
- And, when you add in the spending power of their families, all these numbers double. For more information visit: <https://www.air.org/system/files/downloads/report/Hidden-Market-Spending-Power-of-People-with-Disabilities-April-2018.pdf>
- Companies and organizations can reach this market share by following three important steps. These are: 1) design buildings, programs and products in an accessible way; 2) market to the population (target to and include people with disabilities in advertising); and 3) hire people with disabilities (like you) for this added element of diversity and for internal advice on this subject.

Next, study the company's history and current approach to this subject. You should seek a better understanding as to what extent the organization already understands, embraces, and implements a full-service model which includes hiring and outreach to people with disabilities. Ask questions about this part of their operations. Gather current information before you address the subject. If everything is working fine, then your approach should be to compliment them about what they are doing and offer your support around what is happening. Be a good team player. Be a smart employee.

Once you have studied the organization's current efforts, survey the political considerations around how best to pursue the idea (always in a positive way). Be a source of ideas on how this might happen. Remember, bosses like employees who identify problems along with suggested solutions.

Be sure to suggest the economic, social, and public relations value of such an effort. Plus, positive action in this area can be viewed as a demonstration of the company's enlightened policies and sense of corporate civic responsibility.

Remind everyone that the need for an organizational effort to improve its service to customers with disabilities is not just a company-specific challenge. It's part of a broader shift in public attitudes about the equity and inclusion of its citizens (and customers) with disabilities. Outmoded ideas and limited expectations about the potential of people with disabilities to actively participate in all activities are fading away. More positive attitudes are emerging. It's time for us all to re-think our attitudes and efforts to include people with disabilities more completely.

In fact, to miss this opportunity may be to fall behind your competitors.

In addition, suggest items from the following list which may best suit your company's situation. And be alert to add other suggestions, ideas or considerations not specifically mentioned below.

Study of your operations — In order to make sure they are accessible, first conduct a preliminary survey or review your company's physical access to both employees and customers with disabilities, as well as look at their accessibility policies and procedures (reasonable disability job accommodations and program access). Include a review of the organization's web presence or site to people with different disabilities to see how accessible it might be (for example, to blind people who use screen readers or to people with learning disabilities).

Identify disability resources which can help you answer your technical assistance questions on physical, program and web accessibility standards. Learn something about the basics regarding what physical as well as programmatic access means by reviewing accessibility considerations (see <http://www.access-board.gov/gs.htm> and <http://www.ada.gov/civiccommonprobs.htm> for guidelines).

With regards to digital or internet access to people with disabilities, it's getting more and more important because so much business happens this way. Ask people with disabilities (especially those who are blind and visually impaired) to test your websites and give you feedback on what might be improved

Develop a plan — Think about who should be consulted or involved in this overall effort. Suggest which parts of the organization should be included in a team to study this suggestion. Be specific. Here's a design to consider as you sketch out your initial plan.

- Seek Top Level Commitment – The first positive step in such an effort is to get the company's leader to make a clear written or spoken commitment supporting better access for customers and employees with disabilities. This can best be accomplished by the head of your organization making this objective an organizational priority. Can it become a part of the organization's strategic or long-range plan? With the leadership's backing, progress is more likely to follow.
- Begin with Your Organization – Given the prevalence of disability in all segments of society (about 15%), it's fair to say that people with disabilities are already in your organization. Many may have invisible disabilities and may feel compelled to hide their disabilities from the organization, for fear of not being understood or even discriminated against. A good place to start is within your organization. Develop the organization's disability culture by welcoming these employees with both a statement and positive supports. Make your office or workplace disability-friendly as an example in support of the broader effort.
- Display a Welcoming Place – People with disabilities look for signals and signs indicating whether or not they are welcomed by an organization. In addition to the positive and welcoming attitude that needs to be learned and practiced by employees, company advertising should show people with disabilities as part of its customer base. This can be

done by including a person with a disability in your advertising and making statements around their full inclusion. See: <https://www.oath.com/2018/05/17/oath-national-disability-leadership-alliance-and-getty-images-l/>

- Use People-first Language -- People with disabilities are people first. Whenever referring to them, place the noun before the adjective. For example, use the term “people (or students) with disabilities,” not “the disabled.” Still, be flexible with language: if you are interacting with an individual with a disability, follow their lead on how they prefer to be identified.
- Meet the Disability Community – Identify key local groups of people with disabilities to meet with and get their input for your efforts. Consider calling on your area’s Center for Independent Living, local disability rehabilitation organizations, and other community disability groups to learn their disability perspective. In addition to building bridges with these organizations, they may be able to offer you additional recruiting sources for new job candidates with disabilities to consider.
- Create a New Perspective – Help your organization to consider a new perspective about disability, one which is more up-to-date with society’s advances. If we can embrace the ideas and practices outlined in Lesson 3 above, then we’ll all be in a far better place to make meaningful progress.

The presentation — Before you decide to bring this subject up, outline what you might say about it to your boss and others in your organization. It’s just like preparing for any business presentation: develop your talking points before you make your case. Make an outline of the key facts (data) and potential benefits to your organization as they attempt to reach out more effectively to this segment of the population. Study demographic numbers. How many people does your organization serve each year? Do they know how many might have disabilities? Consider the legal risks that may exist if the organization is not meeting its nondiscrimination requirements under applicable disability laws (local, state and federal laws). If the company or organization is not responding as they should, point out the legal risks (that’s called “risk management”) and the value of being proactive before someone sues them. Understand that being proactive or having a plan to make things accessible is always a great legal and public relations defense. Make your presentation a business case, not just a social cause. And be prepared to enlighten or educate your company on some of the new thinking or perspectives on disability which are becoming the new reality. These relevant concepts are explained further in Lesson 3 above (Disability is Normal, Diversity Includes Disability, Having a Disability is an Asset, Accommodations or Adjustment, and Familiarity Overcomes Fear).

If you can help your fellow employees to understand and embrace these new ways of thinking, as well as offer a specific plan, the negative labels and stereotypes traditionally associated with disability won’t interfere with your efforts to successfully represent the disability demographic.

Both you and your organization are likely to profit from such an effort.

Lesson 13 — The Emotional Response — Why Choose Work?

This book was originally written for a course on job readiness for students with disabilities. The most important lesson I learned when I began teaching the course was the high level of anxiety and fear that the subject of employment brings up for most students with disabilities, as well as persons with newly acquired disabilities.

The first time I taught this competitive job readiness course, after much of the content had already been discussed, one of my best students in the back of the room leaned back in her and flipped her pen up into the air and said to herself (I happened to be able to read her lips) “I’ll never be able to do all of this!”

“Whoa,” I thought, “were the other students in the class also feeling this frustration?”

I had to remind myself that I had a long work history and wasn’t in-tune with their fears on this subject because I both knew and was comfortable with what it takes to make the school-to-work and return-to-work transitions. I was projecting my confidence in this subject onto the students, imagining they shared it.

But, they didn’t.

Also, I began to realize that after more than a dozen of our prior classes, all the material I had shared (and is contained in this book) was piling onto their shoulders.

Pressure!

Added to all of this was the burden of breaking the chains of the old disability model around low expectations and disability employment.

More pressure!!

Let’s understand that most young nondisabled people who have never worked before will be fearful about leaving the safety of school and going on to find a good job.

Whenever you approach a new task, you always wonder if you can do it. Whether it’s to move up from grade school to high school and then to college, it’s natural to have some self-doubts about your ability to succeed in your new environment.

Your career represents one of the most important activities of your life, so why wouldn’t it produce a deep emotional response? If it doesn’t, maybe you’re not really thinking about it clearly.

This natural emotional response, however, has the potential danger of seriously delaying and deterring you from taking any needed actions.

Let’s start by understanding that an employment quest is going to produce a level of anxiety, whether we have a disability or not. The trick to this unavoidable fear is to recognize it and learn to how to manage it.

So, let's start by saying that it's normal and to be expected to be afraid of it all. And, therefore, these fears need to be respected and dealt with or else they may shut us down.

Another example of how this core fear played out when I offered this course to our students was the course registration process. During each semester, while the course was open for registration, I began wondering why students weren't signing up for it. They should be signing up, I thought. After all, they needed it and it will totally help them.

The core emotional fears showed themselves during the course registration process as "avoidance behaviors." In other words, they didn't sign up for the course as they should.

Once I began to understand what was happening, I had to personally encourage them to register for the class. During my sales pitch it was clear that it was needed in order to over-ride the effects of their basic emotional fears and the resulting avoidance behavior. So, it takes more than a great course of study or program to make it work. We must find ways to help our students to confront and manage these fears.

One of the most predictable emotional responses I got from students with disabilities when the subject of their career arose was these basic fears and even tears. Often the students began to cry when we discussed this subject.

I kept a box of tissues on my desk.

When this happened, the most comforting thing I could say was, "It's okay to cry." I told my students. Sometimes you need to cry so as to get those fears out of you. It's an important step in the right direction.

One more thing to realize about the emotional response is that these fears are really anchored in the fear of failure. What if no one likes me? What if I don't graduate? What if I can't get a job?

When failure is possible, the mind and body ready themselves for action. In a state of fear of failure, our body releases adrenaline into the blood stream and our instincts give us two primal choices.

These are: "fight or flight".

Do we run from the thing that is scaring us (flight) or do we stand up to it and fight it? If we run, we reason that we'll get away from what is frightening us and it will go away. While this might be true if we were facing a bear in the woods or a lion in the jungle, it's not the better choice when it's the subject of this book.

Yes, we need to pick the "fight" option when we find ourselves afraid and avoiding the subject of our work futures. And, in this case, "fight" means to fight this fear head-on and take positive steps or actions to meet the challenge. If you've read this book to this point, you should be very proud of yourself for choosing the better option.

So, emotions aren't bad, nor are they to be denied. They are to be expected and embraced. Use your emotional energies in a constructive way. They can help to motivate you, drive you to action and encourage you along the way.

Another point as we consider the emotional response around work is the all-important question, "Why choose work?" Or, "Why is work important to me?"

It would seem like, given all the negativity that exists around disability and employment, you have a good excuse not to seek a job and career. Maybe, nobody is pushing you. In fact, some people in your life might be signaling or even suggesting that it's not possible for you.

Let's start by outlining the value and importance of working.

- Working can bring greater meaning and purpose to your life. This is especially true if you have a cause or passion that can be best followed by having a job or career.
- Working is more likely to give you a greater sense of accomplishment, even if it's just a daily feeling of accomplishment and a job well done.
- Working gives you extra money to buy things you want, maybe even own a home and support a family.
- Working can make you a proud and contributing member of society.
- Working can expand your circle of friends and improve your social life.
- Working demonstrates to family, friends, and even the general public, both your abilities as well as the abilities of other people with disabilities.
- Working can make you feel better about yourself.
- Working often leads to a healthier lifestyle than not working.
- Working can give you better control over your economic security than being on public support programs.
- Working is the fullest expression of disability equity, inclusion, independent living and empowerment.

Certainly, working is work – so, it's likely to be harder than not working. But, then again, physical fitness or wellness requires exercise and a good diet -- and that also takes work. So, in the short run, not working (or not exercising and not eating well) may seem easier, but it may not be easier over time.

Working or not working will always be your decision to make. And, at times, working may not be possible. Your health and personal circumstances may prevent you from working. If that's the case, always be thinking about and looking for a chance to reconsider the working question should things change or improve.

Hopefully, these thoughts about the value of working are things to think about as you manage your emotional response to this important question, "To work or not to work".

Lesson 14 — Voices of Experience

It's one thing for teachers, counselors, parents and even this book to tell you what you should be doing in order to better prepare yourself for a job and career. It's another thing to hear from people just like you – former students with disabilities who have made it work.

So, let's end "Part I" of the book by considering some advice from former students with disabilities who have already successfully made their transitions from school to work.

At the end of our semester long "Professional Development and Disability" class, we ask former students, who are now working successfully, to come back and tell us their advice as we prepare for our transition to employment. We ask them to tell us what they recommend we think about or prepare for as we begin our employment journey.

This book splits their comments or advice into two sections. Below is the first part of their advice. These bits of advice focus on items related to the "disability" side of the subject. Remember, this course covers two key elements. These are: 1) "The Disability Factor"; and, 2) "Professional Development Skills". At the end of Part II you'll read the rest of their advice on professional skills.

Here's their advice to you on the disability factor.

"I should have better prepared myself emotionally, physically and mentally for working."

These former students with disabilities tell us that they would have better focused themselves on what they offer an employer, as an individual, rather than getting too distracted with their disability side. They told us that their life experience in education had centered so much on the disability factor, that when they left education, they weren't as well prepared as they should have been to demonstrate their potential and capabilities as individuals. Sure, the disability is a relevant factor in their lives, but it shouldn't become the leading factor. That's because that is not what employers want to talk with you about during a job interview. Employers are looking for people who know themselves as complete persons: people who know exactly what they can do for them. Employers are looking for people who can describe their knowledge, skills and abilities with self-confidence. Thus, the former students' advice to you is that you develop a better understanding of your capabilities, and how to describe them clearly to employers. Don't be meek. Don't get overly distracted by the disability experience and the negativity that it sometimes creates. Be strong, self-assured and project your personal power.

"I wish I had been more self-confident about myself."

Now that these former students with disabilities are working successfully, they have come to realize that they had the potential to make it all along. Looking back, they now know that their lack of self-confidence was a mistake about themselves. They can't even believe that they had such serious doubts about themselves.

They also re-assured us that self-doubts always arise whenever you go from what is familiar to a new situation. For example, when you were leaving middle school or grade school, you probably had self-doubts about your ability to be successful in high school. And, the same may have happened when you moved up from high school to post-secondary education. If your family moved from one city to another,

you may have had self-doubts that you would make new friends; or, you may have had other related doubts when you started a new sport, hobby or even class. Self-doubts, self-doubts, and yet more self-doubts are often a matter of routine in life.

So, don't be afraid. Think about how you have already made successful steps in new schools, sports, subjects, or with friends – how you pushed forward, even if you had some self-doubts. So, why not into employment?

The former students also warned us that when you let any naturally-occurring lack of self-confidence show, others see it clearly and, in turn, cannot easily develop confidence in you. It's like a contagious disease. If you show a lack of self-confidence, others catch it from you – about you.

So, be alert and manage your lack of self-confidence when you head to the world of work.

How do you manage it if it's "just not there"? When asked this question, our experienced former students, now working, said, "well, it's simple, just fake it!" Yes, they told us to fake it. Pretend you have self-confidence. Show it even when it's missing. That will do several things: first, it will become contagious with others (employers will be more likely develop confidence in you) and the act of faking it will hasten its arrival!

"I needed people to talk with who held an expectation for me to go to work after school."

Negativity is a real drag. If all you are hearing from those around you is "we don't expect you to go to work", then you'll start believing that about yourself. Find people who see a potential in you to become employed and draw your energy from their encouragement. When we asked these former students with disabilities who are now working what was the single most important influence in their success, they told us it was when a family member, friend, teacher or other significant person told them they expected them to go work. When they heard that from someone they trusted, they began to really believe it about themselves. When they heard it from multiple people, it was even better. So, don't let the negativity stop you. If that's what is coming your way, keep looking for someone to tell you that they believe you can – and should – go to work.

"I needed to better understand how to translate my education accommodations to the workplace."

Our returning working students admitted that when they left school, some of the accommodations they had for the classroom did not work in the workplace. For example, some of the former students talked about their classroom note-taking accommodations (others took notes of class lectures for them because they couldn't). When these former students arrived at the workplace, they knew they dare not ask their new supervisor to take notes for them in staff meetings. That would have been a disaster! So, they had to develop a new workplace-appropriate accommodation strategy. Many found various technology devices which worked perfectly and gave them an accommodation that nobody noticed.

So, plan ahead. Study your current classroom accommodations and think about how practical they might be in the workplace. If you're not sure, talk to a counselor or assistive technology expert for

advice. Or, call the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) for free advice (1-800-JAN-7234 or <http://askjan.org/>).

“I wish I had found someone to talk with about the many questions I had about work, as they arose.”

As you can tell from the size of this book, this subject has much to be considered. This book gives you a great start: it’s a road map to find your way forward. However, each situation will have complexities that even this long book may have not explained. So, the advice that these former students had on this reality was to find an experienced worker, in your field, who you can call to ask about the questions and concerns that will arise. It might be a bonus to find a person who also has a disability, but if you can’t, any quality seasoned worker will be good. This type of support person is often called a “mentor.” Their role is to be ready to talk with you and give you some good advice on how to handle a new situation that seems difficult or awkward.

“I wish I had prepared and practiced my disability capabilities and accommodations speeches before I went to talk with employers.”

Discussing key disability-and-employment subjects – like describing how you, as a person with a disability, can add the disability perspective to an organization, or exploring your accommodation needs – is tricky. Our working former students cautioned us to actually write down our “talking points” on both subjects and ask others to listen to our presentations – just to be sure the message is precise and easy to understand. If you’re not well prepared on both subjects, you can do far more damage to your job candidacy than help. NEVER, think, “oh, I can talk about it effectively when it’s time.” Because, when it’s time, you’ll be under pressure and nervous – and, if not well rehearsed, you’ll flop. Be prepared!

This is the end of Part I.

The next section (Part II) will cover what you need to know and practice in order to become both a successful competitive job applicant and employee. Everyone heading for the world of work can benefit from these tips for success, including people with disabilities. As you learn them, your self-confidence will continue to grow – and you will be getting ahead of your competition for jobs and careers.

END OF PART I

Part II

Professional Skills

How to Become a Competitive Job Seeker and Employee

In this part (Part II), we will be reviewing the key “professional” or workplace skills that everyone must master in order to be successful in finding and holding a job.

As we begin, let’s define what it means to be professional. Most people think it just means getting paid for doing work. But it means much, much more.

Here’s our beginning definition of “professional”:

- ✓ *It means 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...*

With this definition in mind, the rest of this book will further explain these elements and more.

What follows in this Part (Part II) is a summary of the “best practices,” or proven techniques, which will help you distinguish yourself in the world of work. Remember, both getting and advancing in a job means that you have to compete with others for either the job or a promotion. It’s not enough just to be able to do the job well. You must know how to behave and act in the workplace and be liked. The truth is most people who fail in getting and advancing in the job miss out not because they aren’t good at it, rather because they didn’t fit into the group or didn’t know or practice these broader and softer workplace rules.

These workplace or professional skills are the insights you’ll need to know in order to successfully navigate the world of work. These are the skills you’ll need to become competitive.

Being professional also means that you have all the basic skills necessary to be both “efficient” and “effective” in a job. Being efficient means that you know how to get things done with little wasted motion, time or effort. Being effective means that you know how to successfully complete your work tasks in a logical, organized, pleasant, and timely manner.

Learning about these key professional skills will also improve your workplace intelligence – and the smarter you are about the workplace culture, the more successful you will become.

It’s important to note that this part of the book is not intended to teach you everything about these various topics. Nor is it intended to present a complete listing of every professional skill that may be needed. Instead, it’s intended to be an introductory discussion on the key topics you need to understand, learn and begin to practice.

The truth is, no matter how long you work, you should never stop improving your professional skills. Improving and advancing these professional skills is a life-long task. If you work at it, you will get better and better as time goes-by. The good news about the reality of this life-long learning process is that you should not allow yourself to become overwhelmed or discouraged by either the number or complexity of these skills. The important goal for this part of the book is for you to become both aware and familiar with them. With this introduction, you can then begin your life-long learning on how to continuously improve your skills. This part of the book is your “basic training” on essential workplace or professional skills. With this basic training, or knowledge, you’ll begin to gain an edge on your competition for the job and career you want.

This part of the book divides these professional skills into seven subject areas or categories. They are:

- 1) Workplace presence or “soft skills” (marketing yourself)
- 2) Workplace practices or “medium skills” (work place rules of the road)
- 3) Workplace job skills or “hard skills” (your ability to do a specific job)
- 4) Workplace patterns (understanding individual and group differences)
- 5) Workplace job seeking strategies (how to go about finding and winning a job)
- 6) Workplace pathways (resources to assist you with your employment)
- 7) Workplace planning (developing and advancing your career plan)

In this part of the book, we’re going to go beyond the disability factor. What I mean by that is we’re going to discuss those workplace realities and skills that everyone needs to learn, understand and master – disabled or not. The ideas and information in this part of the book represent proven workplace techniques and advice for everyone entering or already in the world of work.

It’s important to say that some people with disabilities, because of their functional limitations, may experience challenges or difficulties practicing some of these professional skills or techniques. When you read about a professional skill discussed in this part of the book, you might find yourself reacting by saying, “I just can’t do that because of my disability.” Before you give up on a particular skill, try to approach the subject with an open mind and consider these three possible ways or accommodations to attempt to demonstrate the skill.

When you face a professional skill that you think you can't do, the first strategy is take a deep breath (calm yourself) and consider the merits of trying to get as close as possible to the workplace expectation or practice that is being described. For example, when talking about "workplace presence," you will be encouraged to gesture or move your hands and arms in unison with your speaking voice. If you can't move your hands or arms because of a disability, you may worry: "is all lost with regard to this skill?" No, it isn't – unless you give up right away.

In other words, don't give-up right away. Instead, try the three-step strategy below when you feel you cannot do the professional being skill described.

1. Try the skill or practice being described. Who knows, with practice you may be able to even accomplish the skill or maybe get closer to it than you thought possible. If after reasonable attempts or practice, it's just not possible, that's okay – now you know that you've tried and are ready to move on to the next two steps.
2. The next step is to consider either an accommodation or alternative technique to demonstrate the skill being described. Use your imagination. Ask others you trust for ideas on possible adapted techniques or technologies that may help you to achieve the workplace skill being discussed. For example, if you're trying to improve your gesturing skills (moving your arms and hands as you talk) and your disability makes it impossible, consider the possibility of moving your electric wheelchair, or even just your eyes or facial expressions, in ways that mimic the idea of gesturing.
3. If neither step #1 nor #2 work, the third step (or strategy) to consider is an artful way of letting others know that you value the skill; however, due to a disability, you can't perform it. This strategy does two important things. First, it tells the other person that you know about the skill (that shows them your understanding about being professional) and, second, it clearly explains to the other person why that skill is not being practiced by you. This makes the situation understandable, expected and normal.

Here are a few more examples of a disability limitation in your ability to master the skill. Again, when this might happen, follow the three-step process above

Let's say you are visually impaired or blind and you know that in a business meeting with several people in the room, the "best professional practice" or conventional advice is to look occasionally at all the people in the room when either you or they are speaking. You understand that even though you can't see them, they are accustomed to a speaker glancing at them when talking. This executive presence skill emphasizes to an audience that you're listening carefully to the speaker. If you are blind and this skill seems difficult or impossible, consider the value of attempting to master it for the impact it has on the person with whom you're speaking. Follow the three-step process above and practice ways of getting as close to the professional practice as possible. Perhaps you might practice your ability to direct your eyes towards the location of each person in the room as revealed by the sound of them speaking. Perhaps you might ask each person in your meeting to introduce themselves, so you can study where each one is

using the direction of their voice and then move your eyes to their locations when either they or you speak. And if these types of tactics don't work for you, just implement step #3 above and say to the group, "Because of my visual impairment I am not able to look at each one of you as I speak; however, be assured of my commitment to this conversation."

Let's say you have a disability which prevents you from mastering some of the recommended skills around being an effective communicator. Such skills include speaking clearly with good volume and vocal variation (changes in tone and style). People are usually more interested in both listening to and working with others who have these skills. However, there are some disabilities which may prevent an individual from being able to perform them either well or at all. For example, stuttering or fatigue-related disabilities may hold people back from being able to perform these professional verbal communication skills. In such situations, it might be best to just let the listener know about your disability-related limitation as you begin, so they can know the facts of the situation and adapt their expectations accordingly. It's amazing how understanding people can be if they know why certain skills are not being displayed. If they don't get the benefit of you mentioning the skill and your disability-related limitation in performing it, they may just assume that you're not as professional as you should be. So, it often serves you well when you simply ask them to be patient with you because, for example, you stutter.

You must not let yourself overly worry or give up when you hear about some of the workplace skills discussed in Part II. Follow the three-step strategy mentioned above in order to achieve the best performance outcomes possible for you. Again, the steps are:

1. Try and practice the skill you may not be good at in order to get either closer to or better with it.
2. Seek to identify and develop an accommodation or an alternative technique which might assist you.
3. Practice a statement which explains why you are not performing the skill, so people can fully understand the situation and know that you value the professional skills.

Sometimes, when a disability enters the picture, we may shy away from embracing the full spectrum of knowledge about the mainstream community's expectations or practices because we fear that these practices are beyond our capabilities. While it may be true that we encounter barriers, we must not shy away from attempting to acquire knowledge and some capacity or accommodation around each skill. When we approach this subject in this way, will we increase our chances of reaching our full professional potential? Approach the topics of those expectations and practices in this spirit of learning.

Before we begin our review of the workplace or professional skills, there is one more subject to consider.

Sometimes people, especially young people, rebel against the idea that they need to alter how they act or behave in certain situations because that's not who they feel they are. They may feel that the expected behaviors or ways of acting at work, for example, are forcing them to become a "phony" person or to become someone they are not. So, is this book asking you to become someone you are

not? Are we trying to get you to change who you really are and pretend to be someone else? Are these “professional” behaviors just society’s way of bringing you “under control” and making you change who you are?

Let’s be realistic, there are many environments where “who you are” (or want to be) can be unacceptable. If you are someone who is fiercely independent, impulsive, and doesn’t like to follow rules, do you have the right to act that way no matter where you find yourself? How about when you enter the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to apply for a driver’s license? Is a rule-defiant rebel a good candidate for a driver’s license (where key rules are speed limits and using turn signals)? Probably not.

If you insist on being “true” to who you are in this example, you probably won’t pass the driving test. So, when at the DMV, you need to control or modify your rebellious or independent behaviors in order to observe the driving rules necessary to successfully complete the driving test. You will want to alter who you really are because who want that driver’s license. You may be independent, impulsive and don’t like to follow rules, like stop signs – but in order to be successful in this situation you need to conform to the DMV’s rules or else you will fail their test.

Is the DMV making you become someone you are not? Or are you realizing that, in order to be successful in a particular situation, you may need to behave or act in a way which will help you to get what you want (to become a legal driver)? So, in order to get what you want, you must be prepared to adapt yourself to the expected behaviors of the DMV; and, in many ways, the same is true in the workplace.

Of course, if you don’t want to adapt to these environments, you always have the option of being true to yourself and not letting society or social situations change who you. You can be “true” to who you are by just giving up any thoughts you might have about getting a public driver’s license or working in an organization or company. So, you do have choices, but the trade-off is that you’ll have to give up certain opportunities and, perhaps, get less out of life.

For those of you who are struggling with this idea of acting like a professional, this doesn’t mean you have to entirely alter your being. Both before and after work, and on weekends and holidays, you can be a rebel and follow your bliss. Go cliff jumping off a mountain, hike in the deep wilderness or ride a motorcycle off-road. At the right times and in the right places, you can still be the rebel inside of you. But even in these examples, you’d be smart to still conform to society’s norms – like wearing a parachute when cliff jumping, wilderness gear in the deep woods or a helmet when off-roading.

So, if you want to be successful in a career (and life in general), it will be necessary for you to learn and practice the skills and behaviors discussed around being professional in the world of work.

Lesson 1 — Workplace Presence (soft skills — marketing yourself)

Getting a job or promotion depends on making a good impression on the person who will make the decision to hire or advance you. Ask yourself, “If I were the employer, what would I want to see in the person I’m thinking about hiring or promoting?”

Over my career, I've interviewed over 600 youth with disabilities from across the country, as well as another 100 adults with disabilities, for jobs with various organizations. As a result of these experiences, I've learned something very important about the value of marketing yourself to an employer.

The first thing I noticed during the start of each job interview, in the first 30 seconds or so of our meeting, was that I had already formed a general opinion about the person I was interviewing. It came from a pleasant or comfortable first impression about the "like-ability" of the person. I also noticed that my like-ability and comfort level about them was *set by them*. Did they come into the interview room with a smile? Did they give me a warm hello and introduction? Did they say something which showed me they were confident about themselves? These human signals set my emotions around either liking them or not feeling comfortable with them.

If I instantly liked the person entering the interview room, I also noticed that I was listening better to what they were saying. As a result of liking the person and listening better, I was scoring them higher in the interview. In fact, I found myself actually rooting for those I liked. I even noticed that I was helping them to complete their answers with prompts, so I could score them even higher!

Conversely, if I didn't like the person I was interviewing because they didn't connect with me, I was prone to be less attentive. I was even more stiff or distant (matching their energy) and, as a result, more critical of their answers and scored them lower.

Eventually, I noticed that some of the people I like versus those I didn't, were saying essentially the same things, yet I scored those I liked better. When I realize what I was doing I felt quite unprofessional and inadequate as a job interviewer.

Was I flawed? Was I being unfair?

No, I was being human.

Let's understand that any employment-related relationship, especially during a job interview, depends a great deal on your ability to demonstrate your "like-ability". Such a seemingly superficial reality is a fact of life. If you think about it, any potential relationship must have the "like-ability" factor working for it from the start. So, learning how to enhance and quickly demonstrate that you are "like-able" is important not only in the workplace, but in life as well. In the workplace, this means you must learn and practice a strategy designed to help people to like you. Another way of describing this skill is "workplace presence."

Workplace presence is your professional "like-ability." Do people find you interesting, talkative, attentive, funny, warm, nice, thoughtful, well-groomed, appropriately dressed, etc.? If they do, they'll begin to like you more than if you were not these things. When this begins to happen, you're on your way to convincing them that they want to work with you.

In the disability world, there are many groups, agencies and organizations supporting the employment of people with disabilities. They do great work and can really help you get ready for employment.

However, none of them can actually convince an employer to hire you. You must learn how to do that yourself, and the best way to develop this skill is to learn how to be likeable. Learn how to show a potential employer your workplace presence or like-ability as the first step in convincing them to hire you.

Remember, when the door closes on the interview room, it's just you with the job interviewer. The power of your workplace presence is an important first step either to make or kill the sale.

Studies have shown that among the most important considerations employers rely on is your "like-ability," which in more professional terms is called "workplace fit." ("Are you a good fit for our organization?") Studies also suggest that you have only the first 10 to 30 seconds of an interview to present a positive response to this basic human question.

So, the most important item a potential employer is considering as they meet you is very personal. It is: "do I like this person or not?" If you don't immediately connect with the interviewer in a likeable, interesting, and personal way, you may lose the interview and the job. Your interviewer can lose their enthusiasm and interest in you very early on in your meeting, no matter how well qualified you might be. If they don't get energized by your personality or like-ability from the start, it may be "game over" just as the game begins.

Think about it -- would you want to spend 40 hours a week with someone you didn't like that much? Well, they (the employer or interviewer) wouldn't either.

The following are some tips for making a great first impression. Here's how to help the employer or interviewer begin to like you, listen more closely to you and seriously consider you for their job.

Framing yourself

Does a picture look better with or without a frame? Does a new toy look better by itself or in its packaging? How about a book? Do you first judge a book by its cover? The answer to these questions is "yes." So, consider the importance of how you frame, cover or package yourself whenever you meet a potential employer.

Here's an experiment that tells a story about the importance of paying close attention to the art of properly framing or presenting yourself.

Imagine that you are one of the world's greatest classical violinists. You're so good that people willingly pay \$80 and more for a concert ticket to hear you play. Not only are you considered one of the greatest violin talents of our time, but you play your beautiful music on an antique violin that is revered as the best ever made (a Stradivarius violin). You've been called "the poet of the violin," recorded over 40 albums (CDs), won several Grammy awards, and have been listed among People Magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People."

Your name is Joshua Bell.

Now, you (Joshua Bell) go out into the streets of Washington, DC, in blue jeans and a sweatshirt, and set up in a subway station to play for small change donations. How much attention and money will your talent demand in this situation?

This experiment actually happened and was reported by the “Washington Post” newspaper a few years ago. The result of this experiment was that only a dozen or so people, out of tens of thousands of commuters, stopped for a moment to listen to the famous Joshua Bell playing his Stradivarius violin. Subtracting a \$20 bill one lady gave him because she recognized him, Mr. Bell earned a total of \$12.17 in coins for his eight-hour work day.

The purpose of the experiment was to see if people would stop to recognize beauty in a common or unexpected place. Well, evidently, they don’t.

But there’s another important lesson to learn here that relates to our subject of workplace presence. It’s the truth that no matter how talented you may be, if you don’t pay attention to how you look, as well as the way you present yourself, few people will take time away from their busy schedule to stop to notice you.

Evidently, only when Joshua Bell wears his tuxedo to perform on a well-lighted stage of a glorious concert hall with an expectant audience who paid \$80 or more to see him play his Stradivarius violin, will people marvel at his talent. When we strip away his usual framing, almost nobody pays attention to him.

So, in order to get noticed and taken seriously, what is the best way for us to show or frame our talents in the workplace?

Here are a few tips.

Dress and appearance

When it comes to successfully finding or advancing in a job, think about yourself as a product for sale.

Now, I know you’re not an object, but just bear with me for the sake of this example. In order to capture the buying public’s attention, products need to look good or be visually appealing. They need to “catch” the customer’s eye. If they look messy or are not properly placed in the store, no matter how great the products may be, they might not make that critically important first impression. Good packaging gets the sale process started. It’s just how people get interested in learning more about what’s inside the picture frame or box.

Also, studies show that when someone meets another person, for the first time, it takes about 5-10 seconds for the person to formulate their first impression about that new person. Obviously, there’s not much you can say about yourself in that short amount of time in order to make a good first impression, so how you look (dressing and grooming) will become the primary basis for their first and often lasting impression. So, let’s commit ourselves to looking good on the outside as we develop our inside talents, because one without the other is an incomplete package.

How do we dress and groom ourselves in a way which gets people's positive attention? How do we set the stage for success in the workplace?

The answers vary.

It depends on the dress and grooming patterns of the workplace we're aspiring to join. So, the first step in this process is to learn more about what is expected by the occupation or organization where you're interested in finding employment.

If it's the construction industry, then steel toe boots, a hard hat and clean coveralls may be correct. If it's a computer-related company, clean business-casual may be what is customary and usual. If it's a financial company, a clean suit and tie for men, and clean business dress or suit for women may be the way to go.

Did you notice the repeated use of the word "clean" in all these examples?

A great way to learn what the expected dress code might be for the workplace you want to join is to visit the location and see what people are wearing. If you can't get in you might sit outside of the building or worksite and observe how the employees who are coming and going dress. And sometimes, pictures or photographs on the organization's website will offer you clues about how to dress appropriately in their workplace.

Once you've determined what the expected dress code is for a specific company, try to match your clothes to the workplace you have in mind. If you begin to look like you belong there (dress like them), they'll be better able to imagine you reporting for work. If you don't, it will be much harder for them to have this vision of you. Remember, even Joshua Bell needs to dress to fit the stage in order for his talent to be seen. If you have to buy new clothes to match their culture, DO IT – consider it as one of the best investments you'll ever make for your economic future.

And when it comes to dressing for an actual job interview, it may be wise to take the baseline dress code for the job you're seeking and enhance it or raise it up a notch in order to look your very best. This may mean getting a bit more dressed-up than the workplace's every day dress code. If the everyday dress code is business casual, maybe add a nice sport coat or jacket over your new business-casual clothes. Also, pay attention to what others interviewing for the same kind of job are wearing. You can do this by watching others attending similar job interviews or job fairs.

When considering the subject of appropriate dress, also consider the subject of body tattoos and piercings. While it's fine to have them in your personal life, in many workplaces they might make a less-than-favorable impression on a potential employer, especially if other job applicants aren't showing their tattoos and piercings. When it appears to be in your best interest to do so, consider covering up the tattoos and not wearing the piercings at either the interview or the workplace.

Also, be well-groomed. Good grooming means always being fresh and clean (with showering, clothes, shoes, hair, teeth and breath). Consider this standard as a mandatory requirement for employment

success anywhere you want to work, even in the physical or sweaty occupations (like mechanic's work or construction). Always start the day clean and well-groomed, and always look at yourself in a mirror just before an interview to make sure you still look great. Oh, when you look in a mirror, smile to be sure there's no spinach from your lunch salad in your teeth.

Speaking of being clean, if you have a disability and use a disability related devices, appliances or a service animal, you'll want to be sure that they are also clean.

I once met an on-air television personality who happened to use a wheelchair. I first noticed how well dressed she looked and then I noticed something even more impressive. The front casters (small wheels) of her wheelchair were the same color as her blazer jacket. I asked her, "Was this color coordination intentional?" She smiled and said, "Yes, it was." She then proceeded to tell me that she has several different colored wheelchair casters to match her various clothing colors.

I know this is a dramatic example, but it makes a very important point. While few may expect you to go to this length, matching your disability device color with your dress color scheme makes the point that your disability-related devices are a part of your overall professional look. Don't think that people won't notice a dirty wheelchair or service animal? They will. When a person's wheelchair is sporting dust and cobwebs in its framing, or the wheels are mud encrusted, or their support animal is ill-kept, then their professional presences or look is diminished.

So, don't just consider the subject of good grooming, dressing, and framing as you only. Include your disability equipment as part of your total "look." Also, when you go for an interview, cover up the wheelchair bumper stickers or other sporty add-ons which may reduce your overall professional appearance.

Personality

After you learn how to frame yourself (dressing and grooming), the next step in creating your workplace presence is to learn how to best to present yourself. As said several times before, every good interaction starts with a simply yet sincere smile. Just ask yourself, "When I meet someone, and they smile at me, doesn't that make them more welcoming and interesting to me as a person?" Doesn't that person's face, if it's sporting a smile, tend to lift your feelings about having a positive encounter with them? So, a nice smile can get things off to a great start, even in professional meetings.

And smiles are contagious. When you smile, it helps others smile back at you. A smile opens the heart, which in turn fuels the mind to listen better to the person smiling. Therefore, a smile can help you to engage with the other person on a more personal level during those critical first few seconds when first impressions about you are being formed by them.

As a result, a smile is the best way to begin the process of bringing someone closer to you and, in turn, getting them to like you. And if you can get that feeling started right away, you're well on your way to a successful conversation (interview or meeting). Remember, if the interviewer starts to like you, they will hear you better (they will naturally pay better attention to you) and may even start to hope for you to

be successful in the interview. It's a natural inclination for humans to help people they like. Be likeable and gain that important advantage or edge.

Along with having a warm smile on your face, a good first impression gets even better if you can find something nice or humorous to say to the person you're first meeting. Being pleasant and using humor correctly can be a positive force. Work is serious business and humans need this kind of relief in their jobs. So, if you find the right opportunity to deliver a complement or make a humorous observation, go for it. Once you get the other person to laugh, return the humor or just smile at your comment, you'll have their full attention because they have already started liking you.

People often say that the biggest quality they're looking for in a friendship or relationship is someone who makes them laugh or someone with a sense of humor. We'll talk more about a sense of humor later, but for now just remember the power it holds for making a great first impression.

The core value of smiling, being pleasant and appropriately humorous, is that it emphasizes your humanity. It's being real. It's being warm. It's being likeable. You can further enhance your likeability factor by demonstrating your personality in these ways. Don't be a robot. Don't be stiff or rigid. Don't be distant or aloof. Be who you are, for sure, but get your personality off to a fast start with a smile, good cheer and humor.

Let's consider the meaning of the word personality. It's true that each person is different. Each person has a slightly different personality. When an employer first meets job applicant, they're anxious to learn what that applicant's personality is like. As a result, it's important to understand what yours might be.

To this end, try to better understand what your individual personality type is like. Here some questions to think about as you analyze your individual personality.

- What makes you happy?
- What do you avoid doing?
- What is your perspective on various subjects (life, work, relationships, success, failure, etc.)?
- How do you most like to interact with other people?
- How do you like to express yourself?
- How do you make decisions?

The answers to these and other questions add up to your personality type. Begin to better understand what yours is and how to express it.

With regards to the last three questions above, there are some general personality tendencies or types to consider as you try to answer these questions about yourself. These general personality tendencies were developed by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality test. These tendencies or differences will be discussed more fully in Lesson 4 below (Workplace Patterns).

In summary, there are four scales or general types of personalities to consider as you think about how you might be built or wired. See which types sound most like you. And REMEMBER, these are individual

differences, preferences or tendencies. There is no right way or wrong way to be. None are better or worse than another. They are ALL good and each has a value to teams or at work. Plus, mixing them either on teams or in the workplace makes everyone smarter and stronger.

The MBTI offers four areas or preferences to measure. These are:

1. Extrovert or Introvert (E or I)
2. Sensing or Intuition (S or N)
3. Thinking or Feeling (T or F)
4. Judging or Perceiving (J or P)

The “extrovert” or “introvert” range explores your differences in the way you tend to focus your attention. Extroverts focus their attention on the outer world of people and things. Introverts prefer to focus their attention on the inner world of ideas and impressions.

The “sensing” or “intuition” range explores your differences in the way you tend to take in information. Sensing people take in information by seeing, reading or hearing it. They tend to focus in the here and now. Intuitive people are the opposite, as they take in information from patterns and focus on the big picture and the future.

The “thinking” or “feeling” range explores your differences in the way you tend to make decisions. Thinking people prefer to make decisions primarily based on logic and on objective analysis. Feeling people tend to make decisions on what feels right based on values and people’s concerns.

The “judging” or “perceiving” range explores how you deal with the world outside of you. Judging people prefer to plan, organize and settle things. Perceiving people tend to want to be flexible and spontaneous and keep their options open as long as they can.

Which of these sounds like you?

Of course, the above listing is only a broad outline of an individual’s personality tendencies and is not intended to document which of these tendencies fully represent you. This can only be done by actually taking the MBTI personality test. Still, this listing may help you to begin to understand how you think and tend to make decisions. Again, more on this subject, including how to take the MBTI test, is reviewed in Lesson 4 below.

Remember, no matter what your individual personality type is, never, ever think it’s wrong to be that way. And never think of yourself as inadequate. Similarly, never think less of someone else who demonstrates a different or opposite personality tendency. All personality types are interesting and powerful, especially when they’re understood and utilized to a person's advantage. And people can

freely move from one personality type to the other both intentionally and naturally. These are just tendencies.

Understand that employers, especially during an interview, mostly want to know who you really are, not just what you can do (your resume) – and nothing says it better than your personality. Therefore, it will benefit you to better understand the various aspects of your personality. Plus, getting yourself in this mode of being confident about whom you are will enable you to present to the employer your best and authentic self. This will help to relax you, and by being more relaxed, you will increase your potential to be effective.

Of course, we're talking about your positive traits, not your bad behaviors. So, if there are negative things about your personality which people may not like, don't embrace them in this exercise. We'll help you focus on these negative items which might need improvement in Lesson 7 (Career Plan) below.

Study yourself. Ask others for feedback. Know who your best and authentic self is.

When you have prepared yourself in these ways you will, no doubt, shine.

Self-confidence

Self-confidence is the foundation of professional development. It's the key to success.

As mentioned in the "Introduction" section of this book, I was amazed to find out how many tremendously talented college students with disabilities had a severe lack of self-confidence about their employment potential.

As I thought about it, I realized that everyone, from time to time, lacks self-confidence about their ability to master a new skill. Even the greatest and most accomplished people among us sometimes wonder if they can learn a new skill or master a new challenge. The reality is that just about everybody is lacking some degree self-confidence – this fact alone ought to give you a degree of comfort about any lack of self-confidence you might have.

For the record, let's be sure that we share the same understanding about the meaning of "self-confidence."

Self-confidence is a belief or trust in your ability to learn new skills or take on new challenges. It's a positive attitude or a "can-do" spirit. It's a belief in yourself that you can perform as people expect you to perform. It's an observable value or characteristic about yourself which people tend to notice. It's a core belief in your potential to succeed.

Self-confidence is not a false claim about what you have accomplished or can do now. It's not an exaggeration, misrepresentation or lie about your abilities. It's not false bravado. It's a statement about your potential, what you are reasonably sure you can do. And, most importantly, it's wrapped in an attractive measure of humility ("I think I can do that" versus "Oh sure, I can do that!").

Since we all have experienced a lack of self-confidence at various times, it's comforting to know that it's normal and we must not allow it to stop us in our tracks. Having a lack of self-confidence should never be feared as a flaw in one's character or ability. In fact, if a negative feeling about one's self-confidence is used properly, it can become the fuel we need to get us going or started on meeting the new challenge that has created our self-doubts.

It's like being nervous. There is nothing wrong with being nervous, unless you let it over-power and stop you. Both of these feelings (being nervous and lacking some self-confidence) are natural and closely connected. Both, when managed correctly, can be fuel to get you "fired-up" to act. When you lack self-confidence or become anxious and nervous, your heart beats faster and your mind starts getting more active. So, when either self-doubt or nervousness is present in you, if you accept them and don't fear them, you can actually channel this energy towards a constructive response.

So, it's your choice – "fight or flight." Now that you better understand your options, it's time to fight and get busy meeting the challenges, not fleeing from them.

How do we do that? Well, one way to manage your nerves is to build up your self-confidence. We'll discuss other ways when we get to the "Over the Top" exercise later in this Lesson. One trick to follow to counteract a lack of self-confidence is to simply pretend you're self-confident.

"Faking it" (or pretending that you are self-confident when you're really not) can be a good temporary bridge response during times of serious doubts about being able to do something. Now, there are limits to this strategy. Don't pretend or fake it if you clearly are neither qualified nor ready to take on the challenge. Only pretend when you are able to say to yourself, "maybe I can do this with some study, practice and courage." Maybe all you need is to go for it and give it a try. So, bravely think or tell yourself I can do this. Is that faking it? Not really. It's just taking a calculated and reasonable risk to move yourself to action and keep getting better.

This strategy also can help others to gain confidence in you. When people first meet you, after looking at your visual presentation (dressing and grooming) and gaining an impression about your personality, they will next be wondering whether they should believe in your abilities or have confidence in you as a capable person. The clue that will guide them in getting a good first impression about your capabilities will be the degree of self-confidence you demonstrate to them. If you appear to be uncertain or silent about your abilities, if you seem afraid and withdrawn, or if you don't look and act in a strong and self-confident way, then others will have no reason to develop their own initial sense of confidence in you. In other words, we naturally gain a confidence in others we meet when they show us that they are self-confident about themselves. So, if you lack self-confidence, pretend or fake it until it arrives. If you don't fake it, you may quickly end any chance you may have had to get the job.

There's more.

Often, by being brave and pretending or faking self-confidence (within a reasonable range), you begin to realize just how over-blown and irrational that feeling of no confidence in yourself was in the first place.

This is true because in order to fake it, you'll have to naturally begin to both encourage and coach yourself into positive thoughts about doing or accomplishing the task or skill.

Do you ever remember a task you thought you could not do, but instead of being discouraged and quitting, you said to yourself with grit and determination, "I know I can do this if I try"? For example, the first time you asked someone to go out on a date with you? When you finally decided to ask the person out, something happened (hopefully the person said "yes"). Even if they didn't, you gained experience and a degree of self-confidence for the next time. Well, the power of your grit and determination propelled you to make it happen. Sure, it may have taken you practice and effort, and you may have failed a few times along the way. However, determination or "pretend self-confidence" will most often pull you through your fears or lack of self-confidence. Therefore, "faking it" is really just another way of saying "let's go for it."

You have to play to win!

For those of you who wonder if faking self-confidence might be dishonest, let me try and explain why it isn't. When we say, "Fake it," what we're really saying to ourselves is "Get started." Start doing whatever the challenge is with some beginner's self-confidence that you can eventually accomplish whatever it is you wish to accomplish. It's telling yourself not to let your lack of self-confidence keep you from even trying that which you don't yet feel capable of doing. It's like learning how to swim. You probably realized, at one point, that until you actually try to do it, you'll always have doubts about your ability to succeed. So, take the leap into the shallow end of the pool and splash around faking a swimming motion until you're actually swimming. Soon, swimming will become natural. You may not even notice the moment in time when the "faked" self-confidence about swimming becomes real self-confidence and you begin swimming around.

Here are some more thoughts on the art of building up your self-confidence when it's missing.

- Chant positive thoughts about yourself ("I want to do this", "I know I can do this").
- Think about the times you successfully achieved something you thought you couldn't do.
- Envision yourself doing it.
- Don't let the fear of failure cause you to fail.
- Seek and gain related experiences which will help build the skills need to succeed at what it is you fear you cannot do.
- Remember the old saying, "A job started is half done!"
- Keep making corrections and improvements along the way.
- Know that even if you might fail, failure is the fuel for success.
- And, try, try again...

Here are some specific tips on the art of developing your self-confidence in the workplace.

- Prepare before a meeting or professional encounter (Google everything you don't know or might need to know).
- Pay close attention to everything that's said and take notes for follow-up.
- Strategically and thoughtfully ask good questions about what's being discussed.
- Before you speak, say quietly to yourself what you're about to say out loud and analyze how it sounds.
- When you have a good idea, get it out clearly and quickly before others do.
- Identify the key points and try to discover the theme or pattern of it all.
- In your own words, be ready to summarize the major points or themes of what has been discussed.
- Be an important part of the team and always offer to help in team tasks such as keeping notes or follow-up actions.

Effective communications skills

Note: The ideas and recommendations in the remainder of this lesson on "Workplace Presence" come from the teachings of one of our guest instructors, Peggy Klaus. For more information on these topics, be sure to read her books, "The Hard Truth about Soft Skills" and "The Art of Bragging." These books can be found here: www.peggyklaus.com.

Research shows that only seven percent (7%) of what a speaker actually says to an audience is remembered by them. Ninety-three percent (93%) of what people remember from their encounter with a speaker are the general impressions of the presentation, not actually what was said. In other words, people "remember" mostly a speaker's workplace or executive presence. They mostly remember how the speaker acted toward them (friendly, likeable, positive, self-confident, authentic, humorous, and effective communication skills), as well as the speaker's visual presence (dress, grooming, gesturing, vocal variation, movements, and body language). Hence, a speaker's words are a small percentage (7%) of the professional communication experience.

This reality suggests that in order for us to become effective communicators, both in a job interview and workplace, we need to learn and practice these added effective communication skills.

So, don't just think that what you say is all that counts. What you say is only 7% of an effective communication strategy. The majority of your impact (93%) will come from the more subtle skills addressed in this Lesson.

Commit to becoming an effective communicator by learning and practicing these important and often underappreciated communication skills.

Eye contact – We talked about this already, but it cannot be overstated. People assumed that where your eyes are focused is where your attention is focused. So, whenever talking to someone or a group of people, always be sure to have eye contact.

Looking into a person's eyes is a sign of respect and attention in our culture (not always true in other cultures) so be sure to learn about different traditions when speaking to those from other cultures or countries). Now, you don't have to (nor should you) stare them down. That can become intimidating or even spooky, and as a result, would not help you with your communication style. A general rule is to make eye contact with the person or persons you are speaking to about 80% of the time. It's okay to look elsewhere the other 20% of the time.

It's especially effective to look into the other person's eyes when either you or they are saying something important. This technique will not only help you to appear more professional, but you may actually find that it helps improve a person's understanding and memory of what was said. This is true because when you fix your eyes on the person you're talking with, it tends to help the person's concentration by avoiding unrelated visual and mental distractions. Remember, if your disability prevents you from performing this or any other of the skills offered in this book, be sure to follow the strategies suggested at the beginning of Part II, above.

Gesturing – This is moving your hands, head, and feet in support of, or in unison with what you're saying. For example, if you're talking about something you're proud of, you can emphasize your pride by using your hands or leaning in closer to the person you're talking with to gesture excitement or passion. It's a very effective technique and it can distinguish you from other job candidates or workers because it adds power and effectiveness to your communication skills. Plus, they'll remember you better and more favorably (remember the 7% versus 93% rule above). Watch actors and public speakers. They are usually quite good at gesturing. That's why people are watching them with interest. Study them and try and integrate these skills into your verbal communication strategy.

Practice gesturing techniques often and it will soon become second nature to you. By learning how to gesture when you speak, you will add more drama and impact to your words and thoughts. Plus, this type of communication skill also helps the listener to keep their focus on you and, in turn, become more impressed with your workplace or executive presence.

Gesturing can help you to "own the room," which will build up your self-confidence and help you to become more successful in your professional communications. Plus, as we'll learn later, verbal communication skills are among THE most important skills an employer is looking for in a job applicant.

Posture and body position – Did you ever talk with someone who was slouching in their chair? What was your reaction? Maybe you thought they were lazy or that they weren't really that interested in talking with you.

Body posture is a signal promoting attention, interest and respect. So, body posture becomes another key indicator in communication skills. As a result, always be aware of your body posture when participating in an interview or engaging in professional conversation. Be sure to sit or stand up straight, shoulders back, with your head held high.

Also, before an important business event, consider the physical and emotional power of getting or posing your body in the posture or position that best matches the situation. For example, if you're about

to give a speech to an audience or have an interview to an employer, don't sit or lay down just before the event. Assume the correct body posture before the event begins. Get into your character physically, so your body and mind are readied for action. The practice of assuming a more appropriate and powerful body position before it's time to perform or speak can help you get into the right frame of mind to be at your best from the very start. Plus, such an exercise will help calm your nerves. Resting just gives those nerves an open stage to occupy and distract your mind.

Speaking style or method (telling stories) – Have you ever listened to a speaker and became bored? When this happens, your mind naturally begins to wonder. You begin to think about other things that seem more interesting to you at the time (like where to go for lunch or what to do over the weekend), and not on what the speaker is saying. Well, we all have the tendency for our minds to wander when we get bored or distracted during a conversation or presentation.

What keeps us paying attention to a speaker, teacher or someone we're supposed to be listening to is when they begin to deliver their message through story-telling. When they tell us a story, our listening skills improve because we like to hear stories. Stories are more interesting and memorable than facts. Maybe that's true because we like to watch TV shows, movies and read books. They're in a story format. Our minds tend to stay better focused when we're being told a story. Stories hold our attention far better than a dry series of facts and figures. You'll probably agree that your attention sharpens when the other person says, "oh, that reminds me of a story." When this happens, the speaker's points seem easier to "hear" rather than when they offer them in a cold and data-driven way.

As a result, what you have to say in an interview or in a professional setting will be more memorable if you're able to "spice it up" with a personal story, anecdote or example which conveys the points you're trying to make. This technique (story-telling) is more memorable because it's more entertaining. When you're preparing for a job interview, for example, try to deliver your key points or give your answers in ways which include stories about your workplace skills and experiences. You might talk about your leadership skills by telling a story which makes your point. For example, you might say, "one time, I was asked to cover for the boss while gone on a business trip and I..." or, "when I was in college, I led our social club's community homeless effort and I..."

Language – How you use language, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary tells the listener if you're smart, thoughtful, well-educated, interesting and (in the end) professional. This doesn't mean you have to talk like a scholar or grammarian. Rather, think about what you're saying in professional settings and try to be more careful about your grammar, syntax and vocabulary. This may mean that you need to review these subjects. Thank goodness for the internet, because now there isn't a question on any subject (including these) that cannot be answered in a matter of seconds. Take the time to get it right. Check it out before you say it or send it. Always use your spell- and grammar-check features. Such extra efforts are a great investment in building your future earning potential. And, please, be sure to ask a trusted person if you need to review these subjects before you go looking for work. It's better to hear it from a friend and get it corrected than to lose that job you want because you ignored this topic.

In addition, be sure to avoid current-day jargon or popular ways of speaking which make you sound trite and superficial. Here are some examples of non-professional expressions to be avoided.

- “ah, ah, ah, and ah”
- “like, like, like and like”
- “u know what I’m saying”, or “u know what I mean”

Can you think of any others? These popular expressions may be fine with friends and family, but they’re not so welcomed or impressive in the workplace. They tend to show immaturity and a limited ability to communicate effectively. And research shows us that your ability to communicate effectively is very likely to be more important in getting a job than your actual ability to do the job you’re seeking. Getting rid of the “likes” (counting them as you speak helps you to cut them out) and replacing them with a breath, pause or silence is critical. Plus, employing the technique of not saying anything instead of “ah” or “like” gives you that extra second you may need while you’re thinking about what to say next. Silence or a pause also gives the listener a chance to remember what you just said. Practice these skills and you’ll greatly improve your workplace presence around effective communication skills or language.

Voice or vocal variation – Have you ever listened to someone whose vocal tones are the same (monotone) no matter what they say? Doesn’t that put you to sleep? Don’t these boring speaking styles cause your attention to drift away from the speaker? That’s what happens when you don’t vary the tone and volume of your speech when you’re talking. For example, if you were to say, “the house is on fire” in a monotone voice, half the people in the building would tune you out. It’s boring. It doesn’t match the information you’re trying to convey. So, obviously, when it’s time (hopefully never) to say, “The house is on fire,” say it with the vocal variation it deserves: “The HOUSE is on FIRE!!!” That’s a dramatic example of voice or vocal variation. Conversations are far more interesting when the person you’re talking with doesn’t maintain the same vocal tone or volume through everything they say. Match the emotion, excitement or importance of a point or statement with more volume, energy and expression than what you might use for minor comments or lesser points.

Also, be careful to avoid communicating in a professional situation in vocal patterns or fads such as “valley speak.” “Valley speak” is a way of expressing or ending all your comments, phrases, or sentences on a higher note, for example, the word “whatever.” Check your speaking style for such tendencies and work on correcting them for the workplace.

Be conversational – In addition to “telling stories” and “vocal variation,” another good idea is to speak in a conversational manner (or to express yourself in a friendly and personal way). For example, even in a job interview, try to reduce the feeling of formality that is going to naturally invade the interview room by trying to make the interview more like a person-to-person conversation.

Speaking in conversational manner means your interview is more personal, friendly and less formal or stiff. This strategy not only helps you to become more relaxed and less nervous, it also encourages a sense of friendliness from the other person, which helps you to make a better impression. Also, speaking conversationally in an interview makes you appear more like the co-worker you want to

become. You want to sound like “one of them” even before you are (again, the power of positive thinking).

Humor – Before we discuss why humor can help you become a better communicator, let’s talk professionally about this seemingly non-professional subject. Humor in the workplace is a valuable commodity. It’s so important that some companies teach their supervisors how to be humorous in the workplace. Research has shown that where humor exists in the workplace, productivity or results are often higher. How can this be? Here’s how. Humor actually encourages employees to take risks, to try new ideas, to feel freer to speak up about what they see happening in the workplace.

Think about it.

Being humorous is taking a risk because you’re putting yourself out there, to get a smile, giggle or even a laugh. If humor is welcomed in the workplace, this act of bravery plays out in other ways. Speaking up and sharing appropriate jokes sets the stage for speaking up with new ideas for better productivity, or feeling freer to speak up about problems that employees may have noticed. So, humor can help an organization perform better by encouraging its workers to speak up with new ideas and feel freer to report problems.

Plus, humor energizes workers. It gives them a laugh, which relaxes them by releasing the natural tensions of work. It’s like taking a short break in the seriousness of work and helps workers to continue on productively.

Also, humor in the workplace makes for better teams. People who can feel safe and free to laugh together can work and perform better together. So, having a sense of humor is a good quality for a potential worker to demonstrate to a potential employer.

With regards to its value to improve communications, humor makes the listener perk up and become more interested and attentive to what you are saying. If you can find something funny to say, it’s likely to better make the point you’re trying to communicate. It’s like telling a story.

Now, a word of caution about the subject of humor: there are some jokes that are not welcomed in the workplace. There are some jokes that may be offensive and even illegal and may get you fired. Jokes that make fun of other people or groups of other people (i.e. minorities, ethnic groups, women or even co-workers or the boss) are likely to get you in trouble, fired or even sued. Jokes about sex or politics are also probably out of bounds. So always think about the appropriateness of the humorous comment you’re about to make. Know and understand humor’s limitations. When in doubt about a joke, don’t say it.

Content – be specific – Remember, we began this Lesson by noting that listeners or audiences pick up 93% of their information from a speaker through the nonverbal and verbal communication techniques discussed in this Lesson. That leaves us with the last 7% of an effective communications strategy to consider. This 7% is the content of the remarks or speech, or what’s actually been said. So, what’s the best advice about the content of your comments or remarks?

Well, it's simple. It's to **BE SPECIFIC!**

That sounds easy, but it's actually quite hard for most people to do. Mark Twain said it best when he wrote at the end of a very long letter to a friend, "This letter would have been shorter had I had the time to make it so." It takes everyone (even a great author) more time to develop shorter statements than longer ones. It's harder to speak in concise, specific terms than it is to ramble on with background information and semi-related points.

And for young people leaving school, it's a BIG challenge to learn how to "BE SPECIFIC." Much of your educational experience has been to tell the teacher the background or process you followed as you arrived at your answers, conclusions or even solved math problems. In school, teachers want you to be able to tell them the back story or the process you followed to arrive at your point, not just your point or answer. So, if you are a student, you may be used to this academic method of effective communications.

If you are, it's time to change to a more business-like method of communication.

Okay, I'll be more specific. You will be better served in your communications strategy if you tell the people you're speaking with the point of your story first, then tell them key back story or relevant facts.

Give them the headline first.

Don't bury your key point under a mountain of words. If you do, you'll quickly lose your audience's interest. The general rule of professional speaking is: tell them exactly what you want them to know (be specific), then tell them the back story, as necessary and as time permits.

Assume that the professional or business person you're talking with has 20-30 things on their mind at the very moment you're speaking with them. They have little time for you and your new information. So, you might have 10 seconds to get and hold their attention. Hence, you must learn to be specific with your communications. Once you get the headline out and you have the listener's attention, the story can follow as might be required.

Enough said.

Well, there is one last thing. There is something called an "elevator speech." This is an effective communication strategy that comes from the question, "If the boss and you were riding alone in an elevator for just a few floors, what would you say to him or her to make a good impression?" With this short time-frame (about 30 seconds) in mind, craft and practice a clear and concise elevator speech, should this chance meeting (in an elevator or elsewhere) happen. You need to learn to be specific because 30 seconds is not much time. Don't blow the opportunity by not being prepared and specific. Under this principle, professionals are advised to develop an elevator speech about something they want to tell the boss or a key contact that will get their attention and make you "shine." It can be about what you've done, know or think is important for that person to know. Use your time effectively.

Learn to listen

Listening well and thoughtfully is another key professional skill which can help you become effective and accomplished professionally. Everyone knows what listening is, right?

The skill seems simple enough. Someone says something to you and you listen and remember. Then why do so many people perform this skill poorly? They falter or fail because they never really commit themselves to listening as they should.

When you're in a conversation with someone, did you ever notice that most of your thinking isn't so much on what the other person is saying; rather, it's largely on what you are going to say in response to what is being said? In other words, you are not completely listening, are you? You're focused, much of the time, on what you might say when it's your turn to speak or respond. Or, if not that, you're simply losing your concentration on what's being said and beginning to think about something else entirely (that's called not paying attention). The fact of the matter is we all have this inner voice which never stops talking to us, even when we should be listening to someone else. This inner voice is constantly distracting us. Unless we learn how to exercise some discipline over it, it will never stop distracting us from what we're supposed to be doing – that is, listening effectively.

Listening – really listening, carefully and completely – is a skill that doesn't come easily. We must practice it constantly by telling our blabbering inner voice to “hush-up and listen.” Since we really can't stop our inner voice from talking, we need to train it to repeat what's being said to us instead of distracting us (for example, by preparing our responses or thinking about lunch or our summer vacation). The reason why this skill is so important is that we really need to gain the information being communicated to us in order to maintain and improve our job performance. We need to completely understand what the other person (especially our boss) is saying to us before we can professionally and competently respond to them.

The better a listener we become, the more we will know, and the more we know and understand, the better our job performance will be.

Study your listening skills and determine if either your concentration or inner voice is getting in the way of hearing completely all that is being said. Practice by repeating silently to yourself what the speaker is saying. This may mean you have less time to prepare your reply which can affect its quality. So consider some tricks to use in order to give yourself more time to prepare your reply while improving your listening skills:

- ask the speaker a question about what they just said;
- ask the speaker to repeat or “say more” about a particular point;
- repeat back to the speaker a short summary of what you heard them say; or,
- simply tell them that you need some time to think about your reply and you'll respond as soon as possible.

In addition, listening skills can help you better manage conflict. With regards to conflict, if a subject has made the speaker visibly angry at you or your company, begin these uncomfortable situations by

reminding yourself that it's part of your job to accept people's complaints. Things don't always go well or as planned. People and organizations make mistakes. Not having them happen is not an option, so how you handle them is the key to your success.

Let's first admit that conflict is stressful. It's hard to listen to people express disappointment with either your work or organization. What's the best way to listen to bad news or to handle conflict?

An important first step is to let the angry person "have their say." Just listen attentively. Don't interrupt. When someone is clearly upset, what they want most of all is for someone representing the company to actually be quiet and listen to what they have to say. Much of their anger is anchored in not being heard, understood or allowed to tell their story.

So, if you take a few moments to actually listen to them, you're well on your way to soothing their concerns; and that's a key step in solving the problem. A good rule to follow is to not respond or say anything for at least 5 to 10 minutes. Listen carefully and let them have their say. Don't respond yet. Give them a reasonable amount of time to tell you whatever it is they desperately need to say. What will most often happen is the complainer will notice that you're really listening to them and they will likely appreciate this fact and see it as a sign of respect or an acknowledgement about their concerns. During the beginning of a complaint, it's often best just to let them say anything and everything they feel compelled to get out. Let them even say things that you believe are not to be true. By listening to them carefully, you'll often hear a nuance or new detail which may illuminate the situation and help you to understand something that you didn't know about before. In other words, you might learn something. This is a hard skill to practice because when most people listen to a complaining person, they naturally want to rebut or disagree with them when they know they're wrong. They think that if they correct them, this might solve the problem. Well, that's not likely to help because conflicts or complaints are nearly impossible to solve until the angry person has had their say. When they feel like they've had their say and that you've listened respectfully, it will be much easier for them to listen to your reaction and rebuttal, as appropriate.

So, listen quietly to complaints. Let them have their say. When you sense that either they're repeating themselves or are beginning to calm down, you can begin to try to solve the problem rationally (there will be more on handling conflict in the next Lesson).

Listening is an important professional skill in so many ways.

The art of bragging

Isn't bragging wrong? Weren't we taught not to brag when we were younger? Well, "yes," we might have been, and this virtue often serves us well when building personal relationships. However, when it comes to the workplace and being professional, we need to re-define our understanding about "bragging."

First of all, let's start by defining bragging in a different way.

In a professional context, it's educating others about what you have done or can do. Bragging is an awkward word for communicating or advertising our accomplishments and abilities to those who matter to us in our professional or work situations.

As a job applicant, you must learn how to become your best advocate regarding your talents. And when doing this, you need to develop a sophisticated or professional style of letting people know what you've done or can do. In one sense this is bragging; however, in the world of work it is effective marketing or advertising about your knowledge, skills and abilities. And if it's true, it's not really bragging. This attribute or skill is a form of self-advocacy. It's a key part of better representing your work skills to others, as well as demonstrating an all-important self-confidence.

Most workers think that if they do a good job or accomplish an important task, their bosses will let others know about it. And isn't that the boss' job, anyway? Also, don't actions speak louder than words?

Well, in the world of work, neither of these points is always true.

In the workplace, people are very busy, plus they can be competitive. For these reasons, you can't count on others, including the boss, to tell your story for you or to brag about what you've accomplished. The sad truth is that most bosses have whole other jobs alongside their duties to supervise you. So, they're pressed for time and are likely to be too distracted to promote your accomplishments to others.

In addition, in the competitive workplace environment, workers tend to be more worried about bragging about their accomplishments than telling others what a great job you did. Plus, they may be competitors for bonuses, recognition and promotions. So, the responsibility to get the word out about what you've accomplished falls on you. If you don't tell people (in the right way) what you've accomplished or are capable of doing, you'll likely not to be recognized and your situation may suffer. Be alert and begin to understand that no one else is likely to "brag" about you. So, if you don't speak-up about your accomplishments and capabilities, they may go unnoticed.

Therefore, you may need to override those early childhood lessons about bragging. In this new reality, accept your responsibility to let people know about your skills and talents. Begin this strategy by thinking about what you've already done and can brag about. Take time to think about and write down or list your accomplishments. Then, practice ways of talking about them in a professional way. Do this factually and with a measure of humility, and not in a boastful way.

For example, if you're trying to get a job or assignment to be a meeting or event planner, you might tell key people, when the time is right: "When I worked at my internship last summer, I really enjoyed having the opportunity to organize and produce a special community event for our customers. With the help and support of my supervisor, I was able to ..." And, be sure to add the punch line details or specific accomplishments like, "we had over 200 people attend and I organized the registration, conference room arrangements and invited the key speakers to come and present." What your "bragging" is designed to do is to say, "Hey, I can do meeting planning for you. Consider me for this assignment!" This is advertising your accomplishments, ambitions and skills in a professional way.

One way to develop your skill to promote your career potential (professional bragging) is by answering some basic questions about your accomplishments. This listing will help you to build up a set of facts about your accomplishments giving you “brag-able” content. Once you’ve answered these basic questions, you should next practice conversational ways of saying short, concise and specific statements about these qualities or accomplishments.

Having them organized, prepared, and practiced will both steady and ready you to be able to weave these marketing messages about yourself into your conversations with people who may be able to help you with your career. These questions are offered below with permission from Peggy Klaus. She calls your answers to the questions below “brag-bites” which develops content for your “brag-a-logue” (or monologue or elevator speech about yourself). For more insight into her methods, be sure to read her book, “The Art of Bragging.” See: <http://www.peggyklaus.com/books/brag>

Here’s Peggy’s self-help guide designed to help you find your “brag bites,” with some sample or possible answers listed.

For a blank “BRAG!” questionnaire form, see Appendix A on page 232.

BRAG! A Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (Sample)

1. What would you and others (friends, teachers, parents, coaches, supervisors, etc.) say are the three best traits or habits you possess?

1. <i>Being on time</i>
2. <i>Listening to people</i>
3. <i>Being friendly</i>

2. What are the five most interesting things you have done or that have happened to you in life so far?

1. <i>Traveled to New York City</i>
2. <i>Volunteered to a summer camp for kids</i>
3. <i>Won a sports award</i>
4. <i>Spoke to a group about my disability experience</i>
5.

3. What do you think is your strongest ability and how did you end up being good at it?

My strongest ability is to help other people become better at what they are trying to do, like playing sports or planning their travel. I like to encourage people and help guide them on how to do these things. I like making plans and coaching people.

4. What do you like/love most about your life?

Helping people.

5. What are you most proud of having accomplished recently or in the past?

While playing sports, my team mates voted me as their team captain.

6. What new skills have you learned in the last year?

1. I learning how to design plays for our sport's team.

2. I created a listing of websites which help people plan their trips.

3. I feel comfortable making speeches

4.

7. What difficulties have you overcome to get where you are now?

1. I was shy and had to push myself to talk to people. With practice it's much easier

2. I failed a course because I didn't study. I re-took that course and got a good grade.

3. I have trouble keep a budget. I learned how to do it and now keep at it.

4.

8. What important lessons have you learned from making mistakes?

To learn what I did wrong and commit myself not to making the same mistake twice. Plus, I learned that I learn more from mistakes than from successes.

9. What training or educational experiences have you completed and what did you gain from those experiences (academic, athletic, artistic, etc.)?

- | |
|---|
| <i>1. I'm getting my High School diploma in a month.</i> |
| <i>2. My summer camp job taught me how to develop my leadership skills</i> |
| <i>3. I won a sports award and I learned that my team mates helped me to win it</i> |
| <i>4.</i> |

10. What groups are you involved with (school clubs, church groups, teams, etc.) and in what ways (member, officer, captain, etc.)?

- | |
|---------------------------------------|
| <i>1. Belong to the YMCA</i> |
| <i>2. Captain of our sports team</i> |
| <i>3. Volunteer at the dog rescue</i> |
| <i>4.</i> |

11. How do you spend your time outside of school (hobbies, interests, sports, friends, family, and volunteer activities)?

I spend two evenings a week practicing with my sports team

I spend one day a weekend volunteering with the dog rescue shelter

12. In what ways are you making a difference in people's lives?

I feel good about helping people and dogs live better lives. When they thank me either by telling me or just wagging their tails, I know I've done a good job. And, that encourages me to do even more good work.

From these answers, you can start building your personal “brag-a-logue” content which will give the brag “nuggets” you’ll need to tell people about your accomplishments. Be sure to create a short 30-second-or-less statement around these facts, which you can tell people while networking, going to career fairs, looking for jobs and even while telling people at work something important about you (what you’ve accomplished or what needs to be accomplished).

BE SPECIFIC!

Going “OVER THE TOP”

In the world of sports, what happens on the field or court just before athletes begin their game or competition? What do performers do before they go on stage? Both athletes and performers engage in exaggerated physical and mental preparations before they feel ready to begin the game or performance. The athletes jump up and down and pat each other on the back with loud words of encouragement. Performers get into their roles by focusing, concentrating, and exaggerating their emotions in order to

ready themselves – much like the athletes do on the field before the competition begins. All performers want to ensure that they are alert, energized and ready to be at their best as the event begins or the curtain rises.

Most people call this preparation “psyching themselves up” for what’s about to happen. Even when these professionals have done a type of sporting event or performance 100 or even 1,000 times, the smart ones – the successful ones – go through this pre-game or pre-event preparation each and every time. They do this for several reasons. One, it gets the body and mind active and alert for what’s about to happen. And two, it helps them to manage their nervousness around anticipating what’s about to happen. “Yes,” even major athletes and major stars have a feeling of nervousness before the main event. And as we’ve discussed earlier in this Lesson, nervousness can be your friend or enemy, depending on how you respond to it (fight or flight).

It may be still hard for you to believe this, but it’s good to be nervous. If you’re not nervous, you’re not in the moment and less likely to perform well. Being nervous is a healthy sign. Welcome it, don’t fear it. Embrace it and don’t run from it. It’s that shot of adrenaline in your body that gets you ready for action.

Beyond helping control their nerves, the other reason athletes and performers engage in the practice of “psyching” themselves up by exaggerating the volume of their speech (cheering loudly) or jumping up-and-down while shouting “we’re number 1,” is that it helps them to be at their best performance from the very start of the game or activity. If they didn’t prepare in this exaggerated way, it might take several minutes of the game time, or longer, before they start to reach their peak performance. During those early moments, they may have fumbled the ball several times and even lost the game from the start.

Peggy Klaus, our class’ expert coach on this subject, calls this practice going “Over the Top” or OTT.

Going “Over the Top” serves many useful purposes. As mentioned, it calms the nerves and gets the body and mind alert and ready for action, which helps to ensure that you hit your mark or start your professional performance as your best and authentic self.

As Peggy Klaus tells us, “By going over the top before you begin, you’ll start your performance (interview or presentation) at your peak performance.” This is important because your job interviewer is making judgments about you from the moment you enter the interview room. In fact, you have just a few seconds to get their attention and for them to view you as a viable and serious candidate for the job. Don’t fumble the ball in the first few seconds of your interview! Be sure to go “Over the Top” before you go in – just like a real professional.

Here’s how.

In the minutes before the interview, go to a quiet place, by yourself (you don’t want to scare anyone because you’re about to go wild) and look at yourself in a mirror and tell yourself positive thoughts or affirmations – like you are number 1, that you’re the right person for this job, and that you’ve done many great things that you’re proud of and when the employer hears about them, they’ll want to hire. Go “over the top” with praise about who you are and how well you’re going to do in the interview.

The wilder you are, the better you will perform.

And be sure that no one can hear you going over the top because you should exaggerate loudly and vigorously this “pre-game” “pre-performance” pep talk to yourself.

Also, during this exercise, go through your check-list of the major points that you’ve prepared to talk about (“bragging” preparation). Remind yourself about the things you need to do to be impressive, like making eye contact, gesturing, posture, speaking style, language usage, vocal variation, humor, and being specific.

During your private “Over the Top” warm-up exercise, say loudly and with exaggeration things like:

- ✓ “I’m really excited to be here today!”
- ✓ “I can’t wait to tell you about how great I am!”
- ✓ “I’ve been preparing for this job all my life!”
- ✓ “Let me tell you why!”
- ✓ “I am so qualified for this job!”
- ✓ “I’m going to own that interview room!”
- ✓ “I’m ready, let’s begin the interview – bring it on!”

This is the time to end every sentence with a big fat exclamation point!

Make that two big, fat exclamation points!!

Oh, shout it out and let’s “go over the top” and make it three enormous exclamation points!!!

BE PROUD AND LOUD!!!

When your “rah, rah” (Over the Top) speech to yourself has ended, you will be at your peak performance and ready for action. Your nerves will be under control and you will have told your body and mind that you’ve chosen to “fight” to win (not “flee” and lose).

You should make the “Over the Top” exercise a regular thing before every important work related event.

As we end this Lesson on “Workplace Presence” understand that the skills and techniques mentioned in this Lesson are vital to your effort to be successful in getting a job and in your career. While these qualities may seem superficial, please understand that they are proven techniques for success. They are essential and lacking them is one of the major reasons why people are unable to find or hold jobs. It’s the soft skills like these that can make all the difference. Employers tell us that a job applicant’s ability to demonstrate all of these soft skills is what makes them an interesting and attractive candidate for the job. Many people can do the job, but only a few can do it in the right way. Strengthen your competitive edge by practicing these skills. Build your workplace presence.

Lesson 2 — 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 and 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.

Be professional at ALL times

What does “being professional” mean?

As we mentioned earlier, by “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 doing it 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...

Acting in a professional manner is a skill you’ll want to demonstrate at all times. It’s a skill that needs to be demonstrated by you all work-day long.

You shouldn’t act unprofessional during work for even a minute, even when you are telling a joke or having some fun with co-workers. Acting professional should always be your visible demeanor or behavior when interacting with co-workers as well as customers and others. Your company or organization will be judged by the professionalism you demonstrate inside as well as outside your organization. If you should let your professional image, guard or demeanor down while at work, even for a minute, it can prove to be very damaging to both you and your company.

Also, you need to be professional both before and after work. Even when you're on your way to work, out to lunch or on a break, your level of professionalism is likely to be observed. If it's "not so good," it's likely to be evaluated and reported back to your organization or even your boss. Plus, a nonprofessional attitude away from the office can impact your company's public image – and, in turn, yours. So, keep your professional look in place all day long.

I can't tell you how many times, during lunch hour, workers say or do unprofessional things that get overheard by others and reported back to their bosses. If you want to tell a friend at lunch how stupid your boss is (we all may do this from time to time... except me, of course), just be sure to say it softly so no one else can hear you. If you're driving the company car irresponsibly (or unprofessionally), the general public you're speeding by or cutting in front of will develop a negative reaction to both you and your company. And it's likely to be reported back to the company and might even upset the public enough for them to take their business elsewhere. If your customers take their business elsewhere because of your unprofessional actions, you might eventually get fired or laid-off because revenues are down. So, always be professional. It's in your best interest. This doesn't mean you have to be superhuman, just a smart and professional worker at all times.

This may sound both impossible and stifling. If it's of any comfort to you, know that billions of people before you have been able to master this technique. It's not that hard to be professional at all times. It becomes natural once you've made a commitment and practice being professional. If you should feel that the idea of being professional at all times is stifling or suffocating, just remind yourself that you're being paid real money to be professional at all times.

A good general rule about being professional all the workday long is to practice your best professional behaviors from the moment you leave your home to go to work (out the front door) until the time you return and close that front door behind you. This may sound excessive, but it's really not that hard to do and the protection it gives you and your reputation is well worth it. It's an investment in being successful in your job and getting a future promotion.

Without a doubt, from time to time, work will generate negative feelings and emotions which, if displayed at the workplace, might cause your reputation or standing great harm. So, when these emotional reactions arise (and they will), wait until you close the door of your home before you vent or say what you're really feeling or thinking. Or, take a day off (call in sick). It's okay to re-group or complain to a close friend or family member – we all do that from time to time. Just be discrete and non-public about these emotional expressions or releases.

Now, there are legitimate times when you'll need to complain about something -- and that's okay, because there is a professional way to do so. Organizations know that you have both a right and duty to bring your concerns about the workplace to the attention of the proper authorities. For example, if your company just initiated a new policy or program which seems to be failing, you should offer feedback to the right person about this concern (in many ways, it's your professional duty to do so). It might be best (professionally) to direct it to the person who is responsible for the policy or program, or to offer your feedback to your supervisor. Make sure your communication is factually based, not emotionally charged

or angry. These company officials want to hear from their employees when something is wrong. There's a big difference between ranting with emotion about a bad situation and calmly and rationally explaining to the right person at your workplace the observed negative impact of an effort or policy. That's the difference between being unprofessional and being professional.

Be professional at all times.

Leadership

Every worker, not just leaders, needs to learn the importance and techniques of leadership. And they should know key leadership concepts even before they begin their first job.

What if you neither want to nor expect to become a leader? Is it still important to learn about leadership? "Yes," it is. It's important because it means more than just being a boss or supervisor. It also describes both a vital personal and professional skill and a quality that all successful workers must be ready to demonstrate. Leadership is demonstrating industry, creditability, competence and potential. Leadership is prioritizing, constant learning and problem solving. Leadership is finding a way for everyone to work together.

So, leadership is an important skill for everyone to cultivate and master.

There are hundreds of self-help books written about leadership which define, describe, and explore it far more completely than we will here. You can read them later and you should. However, for now, let's just establish the essential concepts around leadership so you can begin to understand its importance and you can begin to practice it in order to become a more complete professional.

The essence of leadership begins by understanding that it happens in four (4) different ways.

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 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.

Leadership, in this first form, is practiced and demonstrated by your capability to manage your time and what you do responsibly or professionally. It's purposeful self-development. It's self-management. Can you lead yourself to do what must be done? Can you lead yourself away from distractions and over to the desk to study? If you are weak in this area of leadership (and to some extent we all are), you need to start your leadership development here. Begin to think about this type of leadership and develop and practice it. Understand that you'll first need to be able to lead yourself before the next three types of leadership will be possible. Lead yourself first!

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? If you are a lawyer, do you know the latest legal interpretations or case law in your field? Do people come to you for your leadership around the knowledge you're supposed to

have? Are you viewed as a leader around knowledge? If not, embrace this type of leadership and keep learning.

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? Who manages the group's discussions, keeps the group on task and supports real progress? Who reports the results of the team's effort? It's the group's emerging informal or natural leader. That can be you, if you choose to develop this skill. The key time to act as a leader is when the group or team first meets and there's that silent moment when each team member is wondering: "who has the leadership skills necessary to get us started?" That person will likely be the one who speaks up first and says, "Where shall we begin?" And that most often ends up becoming the group's natural or informal leader. That can be you, if you want to develop your leadership further.

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. This type of leader is the traditional authority figure whose orders or direction are expected to be followed. Others in the group recognize this rightful authority and are prepared to follow the leader's direction. Unfortunately, not all leaders give good direction. Not all leaders know what to do next. What happens then?

That brings us to a definition of leadership. What makes a good leader?

My favorite definition or description of good leadership comes from a former general in the U.S. Army. His name was General H. Norman Schwarzkopf. General Schwarzkopf was the leader of the coalition forces that removed Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991. In 100 hours, in command of 750,000 troops from dozens of nations, he completely defeated the Iraqi forces, and with very low casualties. This was an enormously impressive accomplishment given the complexity and scope of the effort. I heard him speak once about his understanding of good leadership. It was short and sweet, just like a general would be. General Schwarzkopf said that there are many books, theories, and complex definitions about leadership; however, they all boil down to a simple definition which epitomizes the concept of good leadership. It's not only simple, it's easy to remember. In the words of the General, good leadership is defined by these words:

"Fill the void and do the right thing."

What the General meant by this definition is that when a situation arises where you recognize that something or some action is needed – that is the "void." The void is begging for action to be taken. A leader is alert for "voids" and, when seeing them, seeks to take action or "fill the void."

At this point, you are probably wondering, "when I see a void, what action or response should I take?" Well, it's "do the right thing."

In other words, do what the conditions or circumstances indicate need to be done. Act with loyalty and integrity. Search your mind and heart to determine what the right action should be. Then, go for it. Do it. Sure, as time allows, get the good counsel of others, but act when action is needed. Another military commander once said, “If you’re not making mistakes, you’re not moving fast enough.” So, leadership is a balancing act. Taking action, when needed, may not allow you time to get the opinion of others. So, mistakes are possible and inevitable. Good leaders who are filling the void and doing the right thing still make mistakes, but when they do, they correct them as soon as possible.

That’s the essence of good leadership.

“Fill the void and do the right thing.”

A potential leader sounds like one (is self-confident or courageous), looks like one (is dressed for success), and follows the basic concepts around leadership offered above. So, learn more and practice your leadership skills. It will give you a competitive edge.

It’s also interesting to note that there’s a perception or image associated with being a leader. If you act and look like a leader, you’ll begin to be viewed as one. So, taking on the role of a leader in the four areas or dimensions of leadership described above will help to move you up the leadership ladder. Knowing these elementary principles around leadership is a great start. They will help you both develop your leadership skills and better recognize good leaders with whom you’ll want to follow.

“Leadership” also includes the idea of coaching or helping other people become better by helping them to see more clearly how they might perform better. Taking the time to coach a person is sometimes a hard thing to do, especially if you can more easily do it yourself and save the time teaching or coaching someone. While this might seem easier, you will actually find it far more time-consuming because the next time you may find yourself doing their task again. Good leaders know they can’t do (and should not try to do) everything themselves, so time coaching is time well spent.

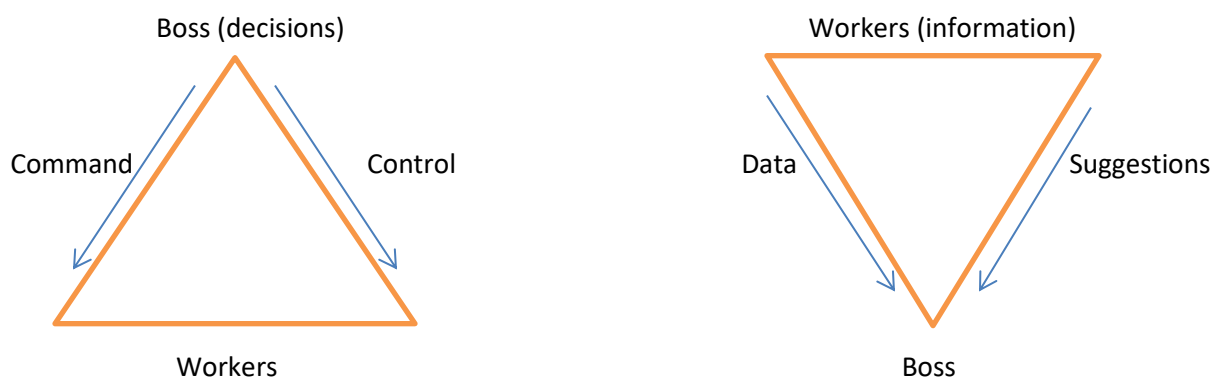
Now that we understand the core principle of leadership, how does it effectively operate in the world of work?

Good organizations and bosses most often practice their leadership responsibilities in the manner described in the two triangle charts below. Look for these traits when considering where you want to work. Organizations that follow these principles of leadership may be the better and more successful places to work.

In the first triangle or pyramid on the left below, the group leader sits the top. This is the classic or traditional way that leadership is practiced in organizations. The leader sits at the top of the organization and, from on-high, makes the decisions and gives the commands to the subordinates below, often through a chain of command and control. This is fine for getting things done, but to make the right decisions, it must be fueled or informed by the second, upside-down pyramid on the right below.

In this second up-side-down pyramid, the boss is at the bottom of the organization. The organization is turned upside down so the top boss can collect facts, data and suggestions on what problems need some attention. In organizations where this inverted triangle is practiced, bosses are smart enough to know that they don't know everything that is going on – but their workers do. So, in order to take advantage of this reality, smart leaders set up their organizations so that the flow or movement of vital information easily flows to them.

Most good leaders know that the quality of their decisions and commands is only as good as the information they are getting from their workers (and customers). An organization will quickly suffer and perform poorly (or worse) if it doesn't have a smooth and effective movement of information to the boss. This second, informational pyramid balances leadership. It tells the effective leader who is sitting on top of the decision pyramid, that he or she can't perform well or "do the right thing" without everyone's participation and support. In order to render the best or correct decisions from on-high, good leaders know that they need accurate data, information and facts to trickle down to them from those who know, first hand, what is going on. In order to be a good leader, successful leaders know that they must blend both the decision pyramid and the upside-down information pyramid below.



In addition to having a balance between the decision pyramid and the information pyramid, all good leaders (at all levels of leadership) strive to follow these guiding principles:

- ✓ Keep a focus on the important goals – don't get distracted by the small stuff.
- ✓ Collect everyone's opinions – listen carefully to all and know what's being said about the field, the company, and especially about your ideas.
- ✓ Create friendships as well as partnerships with people – if people like you, they'll want you to be successful.
- ✓ Not all people will agree with your decisions – so acknowledge creditable contrary opinions. Never dismiss them as wrong. Try to explain how your decisions respond to them.
- ✓ Don't try to win every argument, situation or battle. It's okay to lose a few points – just concentrate on winning the big ones.
- ✓ Understand that people may need time to appreciate and accept your ideas and leadership – let them evolve, don't overly fight them or force them to do it your way immediately. Good ideas get stronger with time, if you have time.

- ✓ Always let opponents talk (and listen attentively), as you may learn something new which will help your decisions to become better.
- ✓ The most important trait to demonstrate as a good leader is humility – if you are perceived as humble and not arrogant, you will be a more attractive leader. Being humble is to never brag that you’ve won the argument or debate or that you have the best idea. Demonstrate humility by showing that you are working for a common cause and not yourself.

Also, when you eventually get promoted from the lower ranks and are asked to become a team or group leader, understand the shift in your work skills that this new assignment entails. Most newly-minted leaders are chosen for promotions because they’ve demonstrated that they are the best performers in their job skill-set. For example, the best and most productive accountant or lawyer may be selected to be the leader of the accounting or law group. It’s classic or traditional for an organization to reward (with power and more money) their best workers or performers. Since high-level promotions are most often tied to leading the group, those workers who were great accountants or lawyers may become the leader.

The danger here is that the new leader, while a great accountant or lawyer, may not be knowledgeable or skillful at being a leader of accountants or lawyers. This is true because, as we’ve just discussed, leadership is its own skill set. In addition, since the new leader was promoted to this higher job because they were great at their job, they often want to keep on doing accounting or legal briefs because they’re good at it. It’s their comfort zone.

However, as the department’s new supervisor or leader, they must now shift or change their role and learn and practice new leadership skills. And this is a whole other set of job skills. The danger for our newly promoted leaders is that they might not fully embrace their responsibilities to lead and, as a result, may not be successful in their new role. So, just because you’re a great accountant, it doesn’t mean you’ll be a great manager or leader of the accounting department.

Start now, with a commitment to learn and practice leadership skills. Someday, if you do a good job, the next promotion may require these higher-end leadership skills. So, keep learning and practicing leadership skills and you will be prepared when this honor comes your way.

Conversely, some “worker bees” may rightfully say “no thank you” to an offer of a promotion to become the group’s leader because they love what they’re doing and understand that they may not be good leaders. Be aware of your desire and ability to perform as a leader or supervisor – and when the offer is made, be prepared with the answer that’s right for you.

Lastly, today’s good leaders know they are only as effective as those they lead. They’re not individual performers anymore. Their success or failure flows from the effectiveness or performance of those they lead. Smart leaders understand that they’re more of a coach, resource gatherer and consensus builder, than a worker or a tyrant. And we know from the sports world that good coaches nurture, encourage, teach and support those they lead. Good leaders are welcoming, attentive and open to team members’ comments. Good leaders are both passionate and optimistic about the work being performed. They

genuinely care about the well-being of their workers. Build up these traits within yourself and search for these traits wherever you look for work.

Chain of Command

We've already mentioned the term "chain of command" a few times. If that's an unfamiliar term, here's more on what that means in the world of work.

A definition is: "the order in which authority and power in an organization is used and delegated from top management to every employee at every level of the organization." Instructions flow downward along the chain of command and accountability flows upward.

The clearer the chain of command, the more effective the unit or organization becomes. Military forces are an example of a straight-line chain of command that extends in unbroken line from the top ranking officer to the lowest one. Everyone in the organization is listed and know exactly where they fit in (who's their immediate boss and who reports to them as their boss).

It's really important for you to know and follow your organization's chain of command.

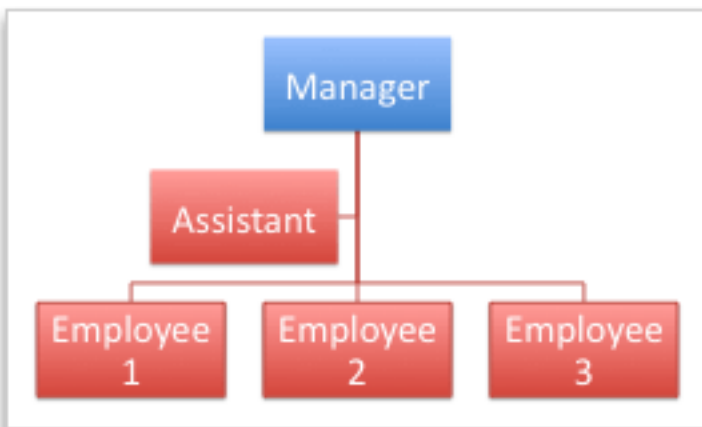
It starts with your immediate boss. Next up the line of command will be your boss' boss, all the way to the top. In the other direction, after (or reporting to) you will be the person or persons you supervise.

The organization chart is a diagram showing graphically or giving a picture of the chain of command for a specific organization. It shows the relationship and command of one official, unit or division to another. The organizational chart is valuable in that it enables one to visualize the flow of authority and responsibility both up and down the chain of command.

When an organization chart grows too large, it can be split into smaller charts for separate departments within the organization.

Here's a basic organization chart that is often used to show an organization's chain of command. It's also called an "org chart." When you arrive to your new place of employment or get transferred to a new unit, ask someone where your org chart might be found so you can learn it.

Sample "org. chart" below:



You should always take things up the chain of command in the correct order and not cut anyone out of it. Don't cut someone out of your chain of command unless there is a very good reason to do as they may take it out on you in the future.

Teamwork

What is teamwork?

It's the collective effort (or working together) of two or more people dedicated to a shared objective or goal. A sports team is a group that wants to beat the opponent and win the game. When you're a member of a team, you must accept the idea that an individual team member's success is less important than the team's success. If you score 40 points and the team loses, you lose too. The goal of the "game" is to win, not score 40 points. So, as the high scorer, you might have to pass the ball to the other team members in order to help the team win.

Why are teams considered so important?

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 just stands to reason that two (or more) heads are better than one.

So, teams are a proven way to develop better solutions to an employer's challenges and problems. Hence, when you go to work, you're likely to be involved on work teams – so it's a good idea to get ready for this experience now. Plus, when you seek employment, high on the list of skills that the employer interviewing you will want to see you have is both your appreciation for and potential to work in teams.

In order to be able to further demonstrate your understanding and knowledge about how to work effectively in teams, consider these tips about successful teams.

- All team members understand and are dedicated to the team's goal.
- All team members honor and respect each person's contributions to the team effort.
- All team members support open and honest communications.
- All team members play by agreed-upon rules of team behavior.
- All team members respect the richness of each member's background and unique perspective.
- All team members keep their minds open to everyone's ideas (even when they sound bad, at first).
- All team members support the full team's success and avoid creating internal divisions or factions.
- All team members share in leadership roles and other group duties.
- All team members support the team's final decisions.

Now, these are the general principles of teamwork, but, there's more to consider. Not all teams are successful – so remember, if you are a member of a team planning a company mutiny or if your team is clearly about to lose the game, your sense of team loyalty should be tempered by your higher duty to the organization or supervisor in charge of the team. It's usually advisable to first reveal your opinion about the team's poor performance or dangerous course to your team's members. Give your team a chance to either convince you that you are wrong about your observations (if you are) or an opportunity to use your caution to get them back on-track. However, if after this discussion, nothing significant changes, and you still feel a duty to report the team's problems to the supervisor, you must do so. So, team loyalty or integrity is not without a higher sense of loyalty and integrity to the team's organization or supervisor.

Loyalty and integrity

The words “loyalty” and “integrity” have been mentioned a number of times already. What exactly are these qualities and why are they so important to the world of work?

Well, they're important because 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 means you value, above all else, what's best for the organization and its leadership. Loyalty is keeping your boss well informed. Loyalty is supporting their will in an unselfish and consistent manner. And, to be more specific, loyalty to your boss (the person who hired you, pays you, approves your leave, rates your performance, gives you your assignments, may promote you and can fire you) is a smart professional practice. Be loyal to the person you're working for because they need you and you need them. You're on the same team.

That being said, 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's bosses).

In addition, a lack of loyalty will cause an organization to quickly fall apart. Think of your company or place of work as a ship at sea. If the crew doesn't remain loyal to the ship's captain, the whole structure starts to fall apart. And in the first storm, the ship can sink for lack of loyalty to the boss's (captain's) orders to perform certain tasks which can save a sinking ship. A lack of loyalty in any organization is an early sign of group or organization's ultimate failure. If you see a lack of loyalty in your organization, you might want to find another job because the end may be near.

There are some exceptions to loyalty, as it is not always absolute.

While it should always be a cherished value, if someone that you are loyal to (your boss) happens to violate their loyalty to either that person's boss or the organization, then your loyalty might better be re-directed to a higher authority. For example, if you notice that your boss is mismanaging money or practicing illegal accounting practices, you have an obligation (another form of loyalty) to go up the chain of command to the next-level supervisor or boss and re-focus your loyalty there by reporting the

transgression. In other words, once someone you should be loyal to does something illegal or clearly wrong, your loyalty should shift to another rightful leader or authority figure. You must report what you have found out to them. If you remain loyal to a boss who has illegally shifted company funds to their personal checking account in the Bahamas, failure to report this may cause you to share in the blame and even make you an accomplice to the crime. So, loyalty may have to be withdrawn.

Also, the concept of loyalty means you should trust your boss with both the good news and the bad news. And there's an art to delivering bad news to your boss.

First of all, bad news doesn't get any better with age. The longer you wait to tell it, the worse the bad news situation becomes, and the greater the chance that someone outside the organization or unit will report it to your boss before you do. If that should happen, you may look like someone who was hiding the bad news from your boss (that's neither a good look nor being loyal).

One other tip about handling bad news is that you should always try to think about possible solutions or actions to pursue in order to correct or improve the situation. As we now know, bosses really value employees who report what's wrong as soon as possible while, at the same time, offering them promising ideas or possible solutions. This approach around the art of delivering bad news both softens the blow and makes you "shine" as a valued employee. So, do your best to report bad news swiftly and serve it up with a "side order" of your proposed solution.

Lastly, loyalty should work both ways (up and down the chain of command). If you are finding that your boss is not loyal to you, or that the organization is not loyal to its employees, you might start looking for a new job. Not all organizations are loyal to their employees. When you find yourself in an organization that lacks either loyalty or concern about their workers, it's often an early sign of an organization's possible downturn or failure.

What about the second word in the title of this section – "integrity"? What exactly does that mean in the world of work?

It's 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 the truth being revealed to them. 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 an important work 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.

“Loyalty” and “integrity” are the two most important traits an employer is looking for and must have in an employee. It’s what they are looking for first when interviewing job candidates.

One additional way to better appreciate the value of showing both loyalty and integrity in your job is the idea that you can’t always be the best performing employee in the company. You can’t always have the best ideas, make the most sales, or fix the most problems. However, you can excel, all the time, by always demonstrating loyalty and integrity. If you do, you are on your way to an excellent performance in the two most valued traits for an employer. Following these principles will help you to become successful in your job and career.

Before we end this topic, let’s consider a word of caution about the important subjects of “loyalty” and “integrity.” Practicing both virtues doesn’t mean you act without regard to the impact the truth is likely to have on other workers, including your boss. For example, if you work with someone who has not been doing their job effectively and you go straight to the boss and tell on them, ask yourself the question: “what are the consequences of my report on the other person?” Since the other person’s reputation is at stake, such a report might create an office enemy. So, how do you balance the values of “loyalty and integrity” with office politics and good relationships?

Time permitting (that is to say, things won’t blow up if you wait a short time to report on the co-worker’s performance), think about the possibility of first approaching the co-worker and asking about your observation or concern. Ask them a question rather than accuse them. For example, ask them, “I noticed that our money or accounting reports have some problems with them, before I report this can you add any information about it?” Ask the person first to explain the situation. If the person has made an honest mistake, they will most likely correct it right away and be forever grateful to you for saving them a serious embarrassment. If this is true, you’ve made a grateful friend who owes you a favor for the one you just did for them. If they have been stealing the money, you’ll be able to tell by the embarrassing reaction they may give you. If they don’t give you a good and believable answer or if they start to lie and cover it up, now you know it’s time to report what you have learned to the appropriate authorities. Again, consider the first step of asking the employee you are thinking about reporting for their explanation only if time permits. And, if you have any doubts about their answers, go head and make your report.

Professional communications

The way we communicate in the workplace is an important part of our “workplace presences” or professional stature. Earlier, we discussed some of the basic principles of effective communications. We discussed the need to be specific, clear and impactful in all our workplace communications. But, there’s more. Let’s add on to these earlier style points a few additional professional practices which will make you a better professional communicator.

E-mailing & texting: Since e-mailing and texting are often the dominant method of communicating in the workplace today, let’s consider a few important points about professional electronic communications.

To begin with, please understand that how you currently write your personal e-mails and text messages should not be the way you write your 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. So, in addition to making your electronic communications specific, clear and be impactful, be sure to use your best writing skills (correct grammar, syntax and spelling). Write your messages carefully, edit them and re-read them with an objective and fresh, or first-time, point of view (as someone might first read them). Be sure to ask yourself this important question, “is this my best writing and does this make sense to the reader?” So, when you think you’ve finished writing your electronic business communications, before you hit the “send” button, be sure to stop, step back and re-read the message as the person receiving it might. Remember the old saying, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

A second mistake people often make when they’re writing their professional communications is they assume the reader knows what they know, and then fail to give the reader sufficient background, details or explanations necessary to fully understand the point of the message. It’s always a good idea to start your e-mail with a brief statement about the subject’s background. For example, you might start by saying, “The purpose of this message is to answer your questions about...” or, “In follow-up to our meeting on March 2nd, I want to...” Remember, all good messages, just like good stories, have a beginning, middle and an end.

Also, remember that e-mails are both irretrievable and last forever. Once you hit the send button, you can’t take them back or destroy them. Your e-mails or electronic messages will never disappear as long as there is electricity on this planet. They can be shared with others you never imagined would see them. They can be searched, found and used as evidence in a disciplinary matter or in a legal proceeding. So, be careful with what you write. Nothing on the internet is completely private.

In addition, electronic messages are read in a vacuum. How the message is received and understood depends solely on the words contained in the message, not on the sender’s tone of voice or with further explanations. Since the person sending the message is not going to be present to explain what they meant by a particular word or phrase, extra care should be taken with your written electronic messages. If you’re not careful with your words, the reader may take what you’ve written the wrong way. Have you ever read an e-mail which gave you one meaning, only to later learn from the sender that he or she meant another? In order to be clear and specific about what you intend to say, especially in your professional messages, take extra care writing and reviewing them before sending. And if you receive an unclear or aggravating e-mail, avoid the temptation to immediately fire back an angry reply. It might prove more productive to pick up the phone and speak directly to the person before you decide to send back an emotional response which might start an unnecessary dispute. My favorite example is the time a person in my office got very angry e-mail (or so he thought) from a person who had typed the message all in CAPITAL LETTERS! The receiver thought the sender was “hollering” or “shouting” angrily at him and read the message with that meaning. Based on this interpretation, the person receiving the “angry” message sent back an angry reply. Of course, an electronic fight soon followed. As the office supervisor, I had to calm everyone down and get to the bottom of it. During my interview with the

sender, I learned that he always sends his e-mails in all CAPITAL LETTERS because he can see them better. The argument turned out to be a total misunderstanding.

So, be sure to think about the fact that electronic messages are one-dimensional or incomplete communications and if you worry that a message you want to send might be misinterpreted, don't send it. Rather, call or visit the person to discuss the subject. When people are face-to-face, better communications and better results are more likely to happen. As a general rule, before you send any potential confrontational or communications, set them aside for 24 hours, then read them once more, after a good night's sleep, before sending.

Verbal comments: What you say, 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 be far more careful and considered about what you say at work than you are 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. Follow the practice of consciously self-evaluating your comments before you speak them. Here are some questions to ponder before you speak: Are my comments directly relevant to what is being discussed? Do they advance the conversation in a positive way? Are they sensitive to what others have said? Are my words the right ones to use to say what I mean? Are they clear and do they make sense?

The "think before you speak" rule is also a great workplace rule. And being silent is not a bad thing. You can often show strength in silence, especially if you're not sure what to say. It's easier to explain silence (you're being thoughtful and listening carefully – everybody admires these qualities) than it is to explain a bad or inappropriate remark. So, don't be afraid to hold back your comments until you feel confident in what you are about to say. Don't feel compelled to speak up just for the sake of saying something. If you feel you need more information or time – get it and take it with your silence. When you hold back or reserve your opinion because there may be more to learn about the subject, you seem more attentive, reflective and, of course, more professional. If you say meaningless things or incorrect things, you soon will be not listened to as well (even when you have something valuable to say). So, silence is a powerful ally, especially for a novice or new worker.

In addition, if you're the type of person who tends to talk out loud about how you feel about things, that may be something you'll want to carefully manage in the workplace. In general, how you feel is not something you want to broadcast to others at work. Feelings are emotions which, while valid in human beings, are often considered weaknesses in the workplace. So, it's a good general rule to manage your emotions carefully at work. Thoughtful comments (reasoned and logical as opposed to emotional) are valued more. Plus, work is a more matter-of-fact situation. Good business decisions are more thoughtful, considered and planned than feelings or emotions would seem to allow. Plus, your release of emotions in the workplace may give other workers clues about how they can manipulate or undermine you (for example, by getting you mad and looking out of control).

We can learn much about this subject by watching successful poker card players. Have you ever seen someone gambling or betting on their playing card hands? No matter how good or bad their poker hand or cards are, they always show the same expressionless face. The reason for this is they don't want to give their positions away to their opponents by showing joy over a good hand, or despair over a bad one. If the poker player shows any emotion, their opponents gain an insight on what the other person's hand is and will have an advantage. That could cost the emotion-showing poker player their money. Even when good poker players win, they are often expressionless. That's a good professional look for us all to keep in mind. Emotions tend to give away information that you may not want to be known.

Also, an expression of emotions in the workplace often tends to commit you to a particular point of view or position. By holding in or hiding your true emotions as the conversation or meeting goes on, you have more flexibility in hearing more information or data – and, in turn, are in a better position to change your mind without looking like you're flip-flopping your opinion or decision (which is not a good professional look).

So, as a general rule, be extra careful about showing your emotions at work. You can display them when you go home. It's safer there.

Red flag words: In a highly-charged atmosphere like the workplace (with all its deadlines and pressures), the words we choose to use in our communications will either help or hurt our working relationships. It's important to understand that conflict can be either started or avoided depending on the words we use when expressing ourselves.

One secret to successful workplace communications is to understand the concept and power of "red flag words." Red flag words are those common (and seemingly innocent) words which take on a different connotation when a disagreement is possible. When this starts to happen, these innocent words tend to promote conflict rather than foster cooperation and understanding. Knowing about the power of red flag words in confrontational situation is an important professional skill which can promote positive professional communications and relationships.

This is also an important subject for your personal relationships.

Did you ever get in a fight with a family member or close friend and found yourself saying "well, you said...", only to get an angry or confrontational reply back? Did things start to get worse when you said, "you said"? It's likely that it did. And, the reason for this reaction was that you put the other person on the defensive by saying "you said." With that big red flag word (you) in the air, the other person likely goes on the defensive because they believe you were using their own words to challenge their position. And thus, the argument has begun. Therefore, it's important to understand the impact of red flag words during tense conversations, be they professional or personal. With this knowledge and skill to manage your use of "red flag" words, you will greatly improve your ability to be positive even when tempers might flare. This will make you both more effective and professional.

What are the red flag words?

Again, by themselves they are quite innocent until they're introduced into tense, emotionally charged conversations. These innocent words quickly lose their innocence when the situation becomes an argument. In fact, these red flag words can start an argument where one might have not happened. Red flag words can act like a red cap in front of a bull (as in bull fight) urging the other party to "charge".

And, the biggest red flag word of all is the word "you."

Here are the more common red flag words to be on the lookout for and avoid when you can:

1. You
2. Need
3. Must
4. Can't
5. Easy
6. Just
7. Only
8. Fast
9. Listen
10. Look

Let's say these red flag words in a sentence in order to better understand their potential impact on creating or escalating conflict. Also, notice the **alternative statements (in bold italics)** which offer a more positive and less confrontational way of saying the same thing. Being aware and alert around red flag words can work to your advantage.

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 get this done?***
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?***

Did you notice how less confrontational asking a question can be instead of making a statement? And, did you notice how putting the both words "I" and "you" into the sentence made it seem more like a joint or shared problem rather than the other person's fault or responsibility?

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.

How to set priorities and manage time

Work is often busy, pressure packed and sometimes overwhelming. Your list of “things to do” can often expand well beyond the time available to get them done. Moreover, it may be hard to know which things to do first, second or third. Your ability to prioritize and set deadlines may get blurred as everything seems due immediately. Moreover, you’re likely to get more direction on setting priorities and establishing deadlines from your teachers in school, rather than from your boss at work. The reason for this lack of clarity in the workplace is the fact that your boss has his or her own work to do and may not have the time necessary to give you the direction you need to set priorities or properly manage your work. At the workplace, you simply get assignments or tasks with the only direction being “hey, get this done right away.”

So, how do you organize yourself and manage chaos at the workplace? There are a few simple tips or rules to follow which can help you. The first is to have a basic framework for setting priorities.

In school, your sense of priorities (what should be done first, second or third) is very often different from what it needs to be at work. For example, in school, your sense of priorities is probably defined for you by teachers who have carefully planned the semester’s work and already set deadlines and time frames for each part of the instructional program (syllabus) – which include reasonable dates for papers, quizzes and tests. In other words, there’s already a well-considered schedule to guide you as you plan your time and effort.

As we’ve discussed, what your teachers do in school will probably not be what your boss will do in the workplace. Your boss will give you work and will not define for you any well-planned timeframes or schedules to follow. As we enter the workplace, we will need a new strategy for setting priorities and managing our time.

Plus, at work, you will be getting assignments from many sources. For example, you will have work goals or things you want to accomplish. The company will have things it needs you to do. Your customers or clients will be asking you to get other things done for them. And your boss will be giving you assignments. If all four give you an assignment at the same time, how would you prioritize them? Which source of work holds the highest priority for you to consider as you plan your work on your own?

Given the four possible sources of work described above, a good general rule for you to follow in the setting of your priorities is:

- ✓ Priority #1 = do what the boss needs you to do
- ✓ Priority #2 = do what your company or organization needs you to do
- ✓ Priority #3 = do what your customers/clients need
- ✓ Priority #4 = do what you want to accomplish in your job

Your boss’ needs should almost always be your first priority. Remember, your boss hired you and pays you to help him or her get the job done. Be sure to watch and listen to the boss for what their priorities are and attempt to address and respond to them first. For example, your boss might tell you that they’re working on a report that’s due next week and they need some data or information from you. Make that

need or assignment your highest priority. Serve the boss well and they will both appreciate and reward you. Nothing warms the boss's heart more than an employee who pays close attention and gives the highest priority to what they need to get done.

After you serve the boss as your first priority, next address the other priorities on the list above. If you keep this general sense or rank order of priorities ever-present in your mind, you'll be well on your way to properly managing your work and becoming a valued employee.

What if you follow this general rule of setting priorities and there still is too much work to get done in the time available? What should you do now? First, sort out all your work assignments or tasks into the four categories based on the model above (#1 = boss; #2 = company; #3 = customer/client; and #4 = your goals). Then, create priorities within each of these four categories. With this sorting or arranging of your work, go to your boss and present the work list to them and ask, "What do you want me to do 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.?" Have your boss help you confirm (or not) how you should prioritize your work. This gesture acknowledges your understanding that the boss is the top priority in setting your work priorities. If the boss changes your priorities, then you're still doing what the boss wants you to do first.

While we're on the subject of how to set priorities in the workplace, let's discuss two dangerous workplace trends that can derail your performance at work. The first is the ever-so-fashionable technique called "multi-tasking." Multi-tasking gives us a rush. It makes us feel important, busy and productive. It seems like the only way to respond to being over-worked and not having enough time to do your work. And, we feel good about ourselves when we simultaneously talk on the phone, while reading and responding to an e-mail. Everybody seems to be doing it and even bragging about it. It's a workplace craze. But, that doesn't mean it's productive or effective. In fact, studies have shown it's not. Studies show that you do not perform at your best while multi-tasking. In fact, multi-tasking almost always negatively impacts the quality of the work you perform.

The merits and positive beliefs about multi-tasking is a fallacy of our modern high-tech culture. While most people think it's good for them, research shows that it actually decreases productivity. Some studies have shown that while multitasking, your IQ or ability to perform at your best is reduced by 5 points for women and (women, you'll love this) 15 points for men. So, in either case, you're losing an amount of your brain power to the fashionable lure of multi-tasking. Now, that may not sound like much of a loss, but think about it this way: it's enough of a loss that most States are banning talking on your cell phone while driving. Why? Driving requires 100% of your attention in order to minimize your risks of having a crash. Some studies have equated talking on your cell phone while driving to be as dangerous as driving drunk. Wow, that's a big drop in performance! And always remember: just because something is fashionable, it doesn't mean it's good for you. Not too long ago, it was considered fashionable and sophisticated to smoke cigars, pipes and cigarettes at work. Well, that didn't turn out so well, did it?

The second dangerous technique born of the technology revolution is "internet surfing" or the time-drain associated with the constant checking of your emails, browsing social network sites, online shopping, checking the news, or just roaming the infinite virtual universe. Talk about a bunch of "black

holes” where even light can’t escape! Don’t fall into that temptation, because before you know it, your productive time will seem to mysteriously disappear.

It’s worth noting that science tells us that the brain gets a boost from “internet surfing.” It gets stimulated by the distraction of constantly having new things to see. The brain is enticed and pulled by a craving for new and constantly stimulating information. There is an excitement and anticipation that results from web surfing. If you study the definition of “addiction,” web surfing can become an addiction for your brain and that’s not good for you. So, beware and be careful.

If the practices of multi-tasking and web surfing aren’t the best way to get your work done, what should you do?

With regards to multi-tasking, start practicing single tasking and following the prioritizing strategy mentioned above. In addition, there is always the old fashion idea of starting your work earlier and/or working longer to get it all done. Sure, that’s not as exciting as multi-tasking, but it will prove to be more exciting when you get that bonus or promotion.

With regards to internet surfing at work or when you should be doing work, watch yourself for warning signs that you’re wasting time aimlessly web surfing. If you find yourself sliding into this black hole, pull yourself out of it by employing your internal leadership skills to get back to what you should be doing.

Along these lines, one of the biggest workplace pitfalls facing workers today is the idea that while they are getting paid for 8 hours a day, they’re often given work which cannot be performed in that amount of time. How you respond to this challenge may spell the difference between your success and failure. If this happens to you, here are some important strategies or ways to work through this challenge.

First, be sure that you are setting your priorities correctly. Maybe the less important work is holding you back from finishing the more important work. Sometimes the less important work is more fun to do than the more important work. Remember, work isn’t always fun, and it’s the more important work that the boss will notice is not getting done (or is getting done well). Examine your priorities carefully – and if you need guidance prioritizing work, it’s usually okay to ask your supervisor what’s most important or has the tightest timeframe.

Second, understand that there are probably few workers in the world who go home every night and say to themselves, “I got everything done today.” Some nights that might be true, but for the vast majority of time, workers go home feeling that they didn’t get everything done. Try to accept that feeling and not let it disturb you too much (especially once you are off the clock and need to relax or take care of errands). Recognize that it’s both natural and normal to feel that way. When you think about it, that’s why you’re needed at work the next day (to do what didn’t get done). Still, if this feeling is overly worrying or distracting to the point where you’re frustrated or worse, go back to the strategy of re-setting your priorities, consulting with your boss on how to get it all done on-time if needed. Sometimes, these discussions will lead the boss to either share your work with others or even hire another person to help you and your team.

Next, look at your time allotment for getting your work done. Are you taking too many breaks? Are you overly distracted by other things? Are you operating as efficiently as you could be? The truth is, workers spend much of the day doing things that may not be productive – like socializing with others, surfing the web, taking long breaks and long lunches, or day-dreaming about the weekend. So, study your workplace practices as well as your level of concentration. Nobody works 8 straight hours without a break. Everyone takes a few minutes to stop working and take a much-needed rest. Some amount of break time is necessary to keep your performance high all day long. That’s why sports teams have timeouts, periods and half-time breaks. Many offices even have policies allowing or requiring a short break every several hours, which can help employees stay healthy and focused. So, don’t give-up those refreshing stoppages to your work routine. You’ll need them in order to keep going strong.

If time is still too short for you to get your work done and you’re new at the job, remember that your efficiency will improve as you become more familiar with the work. So, find a way to feel at-ease with the situation and see if your frustration melts away as your experience grows.

You may also consider if more training might help. Training can be either formal (a special class) or on-the-job (a more seasoned worker who coaches or teaches you more about a task or set of tasks). Employers understand and tend to support employee training when needed to help with performance. It just makes sense as an “investment” in employee quality. Keep the need for training in mind and request it when it seems necessary. Your boss may find an on-the-job mentor or even pay for training outside of the office, which will help your performance in the short term and the long run.

Another skill to practice around time management is to make sure you’re always following this very important rule about work, work assignments and meetings. The rule is:

“Show up – on-time – and prepared.”

Make this your motto. Consider this rule essential and vital for workplace success.

Let’s break down the “show up – on-time – and prepared” rule into its basic parts.

First, “show up.” So much workplace success comes from just being where you’re supposed to be. Your physical presence at work, at an appointment or meeting sets the stage for your success. Conversely, if you’re not there, failure becomes a real possibility. Too many workers cut corners around this essential rule. They call in “sick” more than they should. They miss meetings or events that are important for them to attend. Let’s be frank: they might be lazy or even afraid of an event and, as a result, let themselves miss it. Don’t let yourself fall into this trap. Commit yourself to the practice of always “showing up.” Only violate this rule when you have a very real excuse, like you are too sick to work (nobody wants you to show up when you have a fever and are sneezing or coughing), or are in a real emergency, like if someone close to you needs your help.

If you need to be absent from your job for any kind of appointment, schedule in advance and also ask for permission from your supervisor before you make the appointment. For example, there may be an important meeting that would conflict with the appointment, there may be a major deadline that will

need your attention that day, or it just might be impossible to find somebody to “fill your shift” – so your boss may need you to find another time to meet with your doctor or dentist. It will cause problems if they don’t know in advance and you don’t “show up” by simply calling out the same day.

If you are thinking about not showing up where you are supposed to be because you might be afraid of a meeting or event, remember fear gives you two choices. The first is “flight” (running away and not showing-up as required). The second is “fight” (being courageous and doing the right thing). The sad truth about running away or not showing up is that when you eventually show up, you will likely have far more to fear than the work or meeting you missed.

The reason why showing up is so critical is that not showing up makes an employee look seriously undependable and not dedicated to the job and, perhaps, afraid of taking on necessary or difficult tasks. Also, you miss so much important information when you’re not present, so you may fall behind those who showed up. With that in mind, commit yourself to always showing up where you’re supposed to be.

After showing up where you’re supposed to be, the second rule is to be “on time.” This is just as important – and may even be more important, depending on the situation. When you are late to a meeting, other attendees may think negatively of your performance. Plus, being late can be rude and is often viewed as disrespectful to those who showed up on time. In its own way, being late to work or a meeting is like stealing money from the company (because time is money – for your salary, the paychecks of other attendees, and any logistics or supplies for the meeting itself).

Now, sometimes we’re all late to meetings. In such a situation, it is important to express your regret for being late and offer a short explanation for why. For example, you might say (if true) “I’m very sorry to be late, there was an accident and heavy traffic on my way here.” Whatever the reason, make sure that it is true and genuine – and also commit to being on time in the future.

Even if you always have a good excuse for being late, being late too much can easily become dangerous to your reputation. Understand, that in a competitive working environment co-workers love to gossip about other co-workers. And, being late gives your coworkers an opportunity to gossip about you.

Also, both “showing-up” and being “on-time” are powerful practices which create opportunities to gain both knowledge as well as respect. If you don’t practice these skills, you’ll reduce your chances of being seen in a favorable light. The boss is far more likely to give good assignments and extra consideration to those employees who are dependable in these ways. Missing meetings and being late can quickly take you out of consideration for career enhancing opportunities. On the other hand, being reliable and on-time – and contributing well to meetings and work products – can put you in front of the line for developing your career, being promoted, and even getting a raise.

The third part of this rule is “to be prepared”.

Since you’re making the effort to show up and be on time, you might as well go all the way and “be prepared” for the meeting or event. Being prepared means anticipating what will happen or be discussed and having something to contribute to the proceedings. All it takes is study, reflection,

consideration, and – if needed – producing materials for yourself or your team. Sometimes this means just taking the time needed to read the meeting’s agenda (when there is one), going through any extra links or documents, and noting what you can add to the discussions. If you are asked to bring anything “to the table” – such as a presentation or handout – make sure to prepare it in advance and practice your speech or talking points. After all, why invest all that energy into attending the meeting or event without being prepared and making the most of it?

Now that you know and understand the significance of “showing up” – “on-time” – and “being prepared,” start practicing those work skills as soon as possible (even while you’re still in school). It’s amazing how easy habits (both good and bad ones) are to follow once you practice them for a while. Make these workplace rules a regular set of habits now, and before you know it, it will be easier to follow them than to break them.

Lastly, let’s admit that sometimes a boss or organization will give their workers too much work to perform – and even when we follow all these techniques around setting priorities and managing time effectively, there still might be a problem. In today’s competitive workplace, the practice of doing more with less (doing more work with fewer resources or workers) has made this a harsh reality. If you’ve tried all these techniques and it’s still impossible to get it all the work done, simply go to your boss and tell them that you’ve set your priorities effectively, managed your time, taken work home (as needed), and dependably showed up on-time and prepared. A good boss will be sympathetic to the conversation because you’ve done all you should have done, and they may adjust your workload or give you more supports to finish tasks. In such cases, the act of reporting your inability to get the job done is not a sign of failure. It’s an act of duty. It’s also important to take this step before you’ve missed key deadlines. You will be more creditable by having this conversation with your boss before any negative outcomes or poor performance has happened. By raising this subject with the boss, after taking the actions suggested above, you will have been proactive and responsible (both admirable qualities).

Remember, the boss has a responsibility to manage you. That means helping you to perform successfully. If you ask the boss for help, before poor performance happens, they’ll want to act (do their job) to help you improve your performance. Understand that your boss also has a boss and they don’t want to have to report to their boss the fact they knew you were running late with a key project or miss a deadline and they did nothing to help you.

As mentioned, your boss may respond with additional training, moving some of your duties to others, assigning others to help, extend deadlines, give you strategies or ideas on how to most efficiently go forward to meet the deadline or even take you with them to meet their boss for further counsel and advice on how best to proceed.

So, if you ever find yourself in this situation, and you’ve done all the other things recommended above, feel confident about asking for help. Do not delay or avoid implementing this strategy. If you delay, you may hear those dreaded and chilling words from your boss: “Why didn’t you tell me earlier!”

If you are consistently overwhelmed and your boss will not make the effort to adjust your workload or provide accommodations, you may want to consult with other managers or human resources (HR) staff. This is especially true if your boss expects you to work extra hours without pay or somehow references your disability as a reason you “cannot perform” the job at-hand. However, if your job involves projects and timely deliverables – like many office jobs do – you may occasionally run into a hard deadline that is difficult to meet in a regular 8-hour day or 40-hour week. Unfortunately, this happens to people with and without disabilities in the modern economy. It shouldn’t happen all the time, so just keep track of your “deliverables” and communicate with your boss to make sure you aren’t over-worked.

Let’s say, though, that you run into an urgent deadline and just can’t get the task done in a regular workday or work-week. You may need to stay in the office after-hours or bring unfinished work home and take extra time to finish a project. If you are a “salaried” employee, like many people in offices are, it’s within the law to work more than 8 hours if it gets your tasks done. If you are an hourly employee, you may be able to ask your boss if you can log some overtime in the office, at a café or on your home computer. Some people will also work after-hours to make up for a doctor’s appointment instead of logging sick time, if it helps them get tasks done on-time. Always make sure to get written approval from your boss if you need to work extra, mark down the hours you work, and check any rules around “overtime pay” (such as getting paid time-and-a-half for anything over 8 hours in a day). And again, if you are consistently given more work than you can get done in a regular day or week, consult with your boss to adjust your workload or accommodations so you don’t get overwhelmed.

There are some things you can do outside of the office that will improve your performance, but might not necessarily count as time “worked.” For example, reading a book that’s related to your job (like an advertising guide if you are in a marketing department) will make you a more knowledgeable and effective employee – and is a better use of time at home than playing cell-phone games or watching TV. It can help you gain information to perform better in the office, and if you mention the book in a conversation with your boss, it can also show them you are investing time in your work and organization. That will reflect well on you as an employee, and may even lead to a raise or promotion in the long term. Since this book is about being a professional competitive worker who happens to have a disability, one final thought.

Through this book, we’ve discussed the reality that disability often means that some things take “extra time, resources and expenses” to do. As a result, consider the potential impact that a disability may have on your ability to meet workplace deadlines. This means considering or re-considering your workplace accommodations. Be smart about this subject, especially if performance is lagging and your need to have new disability-related accommodations or adjustments to your current ones. As work changes or your disability evolves, you may need a new assessment. Contact someone who can help. You can always call the Job Accommodation Network (1-800-JAN-7234) for a free and confidential consultation on how to increase performance through possible changes or additions to your disability accommodations. If you identify new or additional accommodation needs that will help you improve your work performance, be sure to discuss this with your boss.

Also, if you are a new worker and just out of school, remember that your former education-based accommodations may not be effective – or possible – in your job. For example, in school, you may have received extra time for assignments or a reduced course load (i.e. taking 3 courses per semester instead of the usual 4). In the workplace, employers usually do not consider adjusting workload or timelines as a first resort. If you feel like you need extra time due to a disability, take efforts on your own or with management to identify other types of disability-related accommodations which are designed to increase your productivity. These could include, for example, voice-dictation computer software for someone who has difficulty typing, or a new ergonomic chair for someone with back pain who would otherwise need to take frequent breaks. For help, remember JAN and your area’s vocational rehabilitation agency (see Lesson 6 below for more on these resources).

Always, keep learning

If you’re in school now, you probably can’t wait until it’s over and you get that degree or diploma. When you reach that milestone, you’re probably dreaming about finally putting the books, learning and studying behind you. Well, let go of that dream because successful professionals know that studying and learning never end.

If you want to be successful in your career, learning new ideas and information is going to be an on-going and continuous process. A big reason for lifelong learning is that the “state-of-the-art” in your field – no matter what it is – will continue to expand and grow, with new facts, figures, knowledge, practices and technologies. When employees decide to stop studying and learning about the latest advances relative to their job and profession, their fellow co-workers or competition for that next promotion are likely to pass them by. As industries advance, so do the expectations and requirements for jobs – so not keeping up may leave an employee unable to do their core, evolving responsibilities. The results can easily be the same as they are in school when a student fails to open their books and learn. It can mean getting the “F” grade – and at work, an “F” can stand for “fired.”

On the other hand, if you take the effort to constantly learn by keeping up with your industry’s changes, including the latest skills and technologies, you will get the “A” grade. At work, that “A” can stand for “advancing” – in your organization, your career, your salary, and more.

One important way to keep up-to-date with your profession’s evolution is to stay connected with a related professional society or trade association. For example, if you’re in communications or public relations, you might want to join the Public Relations Society of America and keep up with the latest developments in the field through their newsletters, meetings and journals. Just about every job category has a related professional society or trade group to follow. A simple online search, chatting with managers or coworkers, or networking at events can help you find the best groups to follow.

As we mentioned earlier, reading books related to your profession is a great way of keeping in-the-know and supporting your career. E-books for your computer, tablet or E-reader (like an Amazon Kindle) are also a convenient way to get new information, especially if you have a hard time holding a regular paper book. Audiobooks can be another great option and tend to work well for people with certain physical or learning disabilities: a close acquaintance of mine even listens to audiobooks and podcasts related to his

field while rolling around town in his wheelchair. If you find that money for books is an issue, consider going to your local library – and many libraries also offer subscriptions to e-book and audiobook services once you get a library card!

In addition to keeping up with your profession's news, you should also keep up with the general news. For example, knowing how the economy is doing in your locality, state, nation and the world can help to inform and guide you in your daily workplace and even career decisions. Keeping current on the latest news will also help to keep you up-to-date with new developments, opportunities and risks that can help you do a better job. Being well informed about current events and being able to contribute to workplace conversations, even if they are un-related to your specific field, makes you a more impressive professional. We live in a global economy and it has become increasingly important for every thoughtful and successful worker to know what's going on all over the world. So, read or listen to the news daily.

One tremendous learning tool at your finger-tips is, of course, the internet. Not only will surfing it routinely afford you instant access to the latest and greatest news sources, but it's also a tremendous asset in learning things that can make you a better-performing professional. For example, if in a business meeting, someone uses a word that you don't know or mentions a fact unfamiliar to you, be sure to look up the word or fact after the meeting and learn what it means. Just don't search on your phone during the meeting and miss what's going on in the moment!

Here's a word of caution about the subject of "always keep learning." Sometimes (more than you might imagine), moderately successful people get a "big head" or think they're too smart to keep learning. They think they know it all and arrogantly let the world of facts and information pass them by. All of a sudden, it's like learning is beneath them. When this happens, "know-it-alls" very quickly find themselves becoming obsolete. It's the continuous learners who pass them by. So, when you become successful (hopefully by seeking out new information) avoid this ego trap and keep learning.

It's not just learning new things that make for a great professional: it's also about "reflection." After you find new information, reflect on what you've read and heard. Take time either after or before work to just sit down and think about it all. You will find that your best ideas and thoughts come during quiet reflection, so set aside time for thinking back upon what you've read and learned. Consider how it might tie into the rest of your knowledge, work and career. This will help to make you a strong and always improving professional.

Even after school ends, always keep learning and reflecting. The truth of the matter is that school is the practice field for your life-long, continuing professional education. The skills you develop in school around learning, reflecting and getting tasks done are the same ones you'll need to use in your working career. So, if you are in school, take advantage of the full experience now and that will make you a stronger working professional. If you are out of school, think back to your studies and consider how the skills you learned will help you today and in the future.

Learning never ends.

Think and act strategically (the big picture)

Whenever companies or other work organizations have two or more employees (as most places do), the employees split or divide their duties between or among them. This division of labor allows for each employee to specialize in a particular set of subjects or tasks. As companies get larger and larger, their workers tend to become even more specialized in their duties. In the process of becoming more focused, though, individual employees may become further removed from the organization's overall sense of direction. It's a difficult dynamic that leaders, managers, and other employees need to navigate to both get work done and meet organizational goals.

Imagine that you get an entry-level job with a company of about 100 to 200 people (this workforce is generally considered a small- to medium-sized business). It's likely that your duties will be specialized and you will be far down the chain of command. For example, you might get a researching job which requires you to routinely review relevant journals, reports and data for individual projects. This may sound like a straightforward job: just read and report what you learn to your boss. However, in order to do your best, it is important for you to learn as much as you can about the company's current issues, challenges and goals. If you have a good working knowledge of these overarching facts (the "big picture" stuff), you can do your job more effectively by being more alert for information which best serves the "big picture" concerns of your company.

Having a sense and strategy about the big picture will always make you a smarter employee in whatever role or task you have. That's true because it's the sum of the parts that make the whole: the quality of each employee's individual work adds up to the company's success.

So, let's say that you are an entry-level employee with specialized tasks – but you want to include the big picture in your work. By performing your work in a strategic way, you will be most effective.

Suppose you have an assignment that is a seemingly minor one. You've been asked to prepare nametags for guests at a company meeting or event. That sounds simple enough: just greet each guest when they arrive at your registration desk and ask for their name so you can create a nametag for them. At least, that's how most employees might approach this assignment. They might not take the time to think about the strategy of the event within the context of the company's goals. If they did, they might decide to adapt or expand their effort to include other key elements which better serve the company's overall strategy.

Let's say, for example, the purpose of this meeting is to secure new customers (the attendees). You might take the initiative and modify your assignment by deciding that, in order to help the company with its goal of getting new customers, you are going to make sure that each attendee feels especially welcomed. You realize that you are likely to be the first person from your company they meet – and you know how important first impressions are. So, on your own, you enhance the assignment. For starters, you make an extra effort to warmly and enthusiastically welcome the conference's attendees. After you greet each person, you ask them how their trip was and thank them for coming. Instead of just asking for a name and writing it on a name tag, you help to build a connection between the attendees and the

company itself. Hopefully that connection will continue long-term and grow to a strong business relationship.

In addition, you may expand the basic assignment – so instead of creating name tags when attendees show up, you’ve decided to create them before they arrive. This way, you can both speed up the process and make them feel more important to the company. Also, you recognize that on the meeting’s attendee list, there is a mix of different customer types (prior, existing and potential new customers). In order to help your co-workers tell the difference, you go ahead and prepare their nametags in different colors which show these differences.

Of course, be sure to check-in with your boss on these ideas to be sure they are welcomed. If your boss likes the idea, they will almost certainly be grateful – and keep your quality work in mind for the future.

The point is that no matter how routine your work tasks seems to be, it’s very likely that you can make your work more meaningful to your organization when you think and act strategically. By doing so, you will get both greater results and well-earned recognition. When you contribute to your organization’s success, the organization becomes more stable, which also means that your job is that much more secure.

Knowing how you’re doing

The full picture of how you are doing in the workplace is often difficult to see. It’s hard for workers to assess themselves and their work objectively, including identifying areas for improvement. It’s hard to because self-assessments, no matter how positive, often brings up a few shortcomings that can hurt our feelings – and nobody wants to feel badly about themselves. So, the tendency for most workers is to ignore self-assessment and just look away.

While looking away is a natural and understandable reaction, 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. For better or worse, others are going to see your work and make judgments about you. By doing this for yourself, you can stay ahead of others’ negativity by recognizing any weaknesses early on and correcting them even before others notice them.

It’s always to your advantage to be aware of your weaknesses and, in turn, to 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 corrections imposed upon you. Plus, it’s better and even easier to make minor self-corrections to your performance as soon as possible before missteps become bad habits or affect the quality of your work for a long time. 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-improvement techniques a part of your professional practice.

Here’s how to self-assess your work performance.

One key strategy to practice is to ask yourself the question, “How often have I successfully completed an assignment, on-time, that my boss has asked me to do?” If your answer is “not always” or “sometimes,” you may be in trouble. Remember, your top priority should be to get done what your boss wants you to do. If you find yourself lacking on this count, don’t panic: just honestly think about why this may be happening.

Start by making a list of the times when your boss asked you to do something and you didn’t get it done within the expected timeframe or to their satisfaction (or to your own satisfaction). Review the list and see if you can understand why this might be so. If you can’t make sense of it, take the list to someone you can trust and ask them for some help with your understanding of what might be going wrong. See if you or a friend can identify or determine the reasons why you have come up short.

Then, develop a plan of action to improve your performance. If you need help beyond either yourself or a friend, consider asking your boss for help. Your boss will likely be pleased that you’re trying hard to improve your performance and will usually take steps to assist you. In all likelihood, your boss has already noticed any shortcomings and is thinking about when to bring up the subject. Make it easier on the both of you by bringing it up first – in a thoughtful and professional way.

Another way to determine how well you’re doing at work is revealed in the answer to the question, “How often is my boss asking me to take on new and increasingly more responsible assignments?” If this is happening, it probably means that your performance is good. Awarding of better and more work assignments is a sign of building trust in your abilities. It is often an early indication of possible advancement or promotion.

That’s how the promotion process often begins. You rarely get the promotion first, then are given greater responsibilities and more advanced work. An employer will usually want to first try you out at this next level of performance, to see if you can handle it, before the formal promotion is considered. The employer wants to be sure you can perform at this next higher level before you’re deemed qualified for it. Thank your boss for trusting you with those responsibilities and consult with them as needed to ensure you are completing the tasks up to their expectations. They will appreciate that you want to give them high-quality work (especially because they likely have a boss too, so they want to provide quality products up the chain-of-command).

If you are simply given the same level tasks and are not getting these types of growth opportunities, you might begin to consider the possibility that you have room for improvement. Maybe you are providing decent work, but not high enough quality that your boss would trust you with increasing responsibilities (and opportunities for career growth, including a promotion and raise). If that’s happening, take a close and objective look at what is going on and be alert to work on your any performance issues that you might identify. Again, don’t be shy about asking your boss for some feedback on how you can provide better quality work. That act alone can save the situation by showing your boss that, while your performance might need improving, you have a desire and commitment to improving it. Always strive to be proactive. Take self-directed positive steps before your boss takes any negative ones.

Another way to get good feedback on your performance is to ask your boss about it often and routinely. Believe it or not, bosses may withhold their negative impressions about their workers longer than they should. Since their goal is to get the most out of their workers, they often steer clear of telling an employee every time they might fumble the ball (fail to do the job correctly or successfully) because they worry that the employee might get demoralized and perform even worse. As a result, bosses want to encourage employees to do better with regular praise, while holding back negative comments – which could be turned into constructive feedback and teaching moments. Unfortunately, by avoiding constructive feedback, a supervisor may allow an employee’s negative performance to truly affect their work and develop into a long-term habit. When that happens, things become even worse.

To avoid this natural tendency of withholding negative comments or feedback until it’s too late, make it easier on the both you and your boss by asking, “How am I doing?” Even let them know that you are interested in finding “areas for improvement” where you can build better habits. By practicing this skill, you’re more likely to get earlier and gentler alerts that improve things before they become a major issue. In addition to making your boss’ job easier by initiating this conversation, you will show your desire to perform better and keep improving. These “bonus points” for dedication can often counteract any negative performance issues that would cause concern. Once you correct any negative habits, those bonus points turn into a double-win!

The performance evaluation

Once or twice per year, an employee usually gets a formal “performance evaluation.” These are official and written documents that go on your record. Performance evaluation time is tough for everyone involved. Regarding the dreaded “performance evaluation” process, it’s important that you understand how they generally work.

Typically, your overall performance is evaluated in two categories. The two classic performance evaluation considerations are:

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

Most new workers believe a performance evaluation just includes the first category, and they avoiding the second category, which can get them into trouble. The truth is that they work together and the “how” is a vital component. Let’s look at both pieces. “What” means the actual work performed, including its quality, quantity, and impact. “How” means the way in which you did it, including the timeframe, technique and teamwork. Most workplaces estimate that about half of your performance grade or score will be based on what you accomplished and half of your grade or rating will be based on how you did it.

To say it another way, if an employee is a great worker in the sense that they get things done and achieve great results, but they are unfriendly or uncooperative with coworkers and make people angry (at either themselves or the company), the employee is not likely to score well on a performance

evaluation because of “how” they go about their 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 good bragger (or “self-promoter”) as described in Lesson 1 above.

Paving the way to a good performance evaluation should start when the period begins, not when it ends. Give your boss the best possible statement on your performance by starting right after the last performance review 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 for your boss to read when they write your evaluation.

Here’s a typical performance evaluation outline which lists both the “what” and “how” qualities to be rated.

“What” outcomes did you achieved around your major assigned duties or tasks?

This section of a performance evaluation is directly related to your job description duties and what your boss instructed you to do. Sometimes, the “work goals” are part of your job description, sometimes they are tasks given to you along the way, and sometimes they are specific goals laid out at the end of the last performance review. Each goal will come with a “measure of success” that serves as a measuring stick for weather the goal was met to an ideal degree – or even done beyond expectations. Then, the review will allow the employee and supervisor to put in undervaluation about whether the goal was met and any other comments about its quality. Here are three sample work goals being evaluated, though it’s likely that you’ll have more than three in a performance review.

- ✓ Work goal 1: Develop a brochure about the organization’s new product.
Measure of success: Brochure is written in 3 months and published in 6 months.
Comment or evaluation statement: Brochure was developed ahead of schedule and was both accurate and attractive.
- ✓ Work goal 2: Make five (5) presentations about our new product to key organizations.
Measure of success: These five (5) presentations are to reach over 500 potential customers
Comment or evaluation statement: Employee made seven (7) presentations which reached over 1,000 potential customers.
- ✓ Work goal 3: Survey customers’ feedback on the impact of the brochure.
Measure of success: Collect and report the results of 100 customer competed surveys.
Comment or Evaluation Statement: Collected over 300 customer surveys, with the average rating for the brochure’s impact as 90% effective.

“How” did you do these tasks?

Your employer will further rate you on how well you perform around the following professional skills.

- ✓ Good interpersonal skills – respect for supervisor, co-workers & customers
- ✓ Follows workplace rules
- ✓ Problem solving and decision-making skills
- ✓ Effective communication skills
- ✓ Leadership – leads by example
- ✓ Teamwork – shares credit with others and helps others perform better
- ✓ General knowledge about his or her field

After your boss writes his or hers comments about how well you performed in both areas of performance, they will give you an overall rating. Here’s a typical performance rating sheet for a sample completed performance evaluation (the scale ranks 1 as best and 5 as worst, although some scales will go the other way).

Scoring: The scoring will be based on a five-point scale.

1) Outstanding: Performance exceeds standard performance by an exceptional degree and clearly is superior to above standard performance. This high level of performance is consistent throughout the appraisal period and contributes heavily to the achievement of company goals and objectives. (Eligible for 5% Raise)

2) Exceeds Expectations: Performance consistently exceeds expectations for the position. Performance contributes to the achievement of company goals and objectives. (Eligible for 3% Raise)

3) Meets Expectations: Performance meets expectations for the position and occasionally exceeds them. Efforts are consistent with what is routinely expected for satisfactory performance.

4) Needs Improvement: Performance falls below established standards (i.e. what is routinely expected of the employee in the position) but is not totally unacceptable. Improvement is needed.

5) Unacceptable: Performance fails to meet the work requirements of the position. Performance fails to significantly contribute to departmental work goals or objectives. Substantial improvement and immediate corrective action are needed.

If this performance rating scale looks familiar to you, you might be right. It does look like the grading system in school. At work, you’re likely to have these five sample levels of performance. In school, you have five grading levels. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the performance Level #1 in our sample grading scale above is like an “A” grade in school and so forth (just to complete the comparison, level #5 is an “F”). Some things never change.

Now, when your performance evaluation overall score is in either the “meets expectations” or “satisfactory” scoring range, you may think that this means you’re doing a great job. What it really

means is you are performing at a basic level of performance: you're doing your job at the required level of performance necessary to stay out of trouble. This may be fine for the first evaluation or two; however, as your employment continues, if you don't see your scores moving higher, you may want to study your performance more closely and make extra effort to improve. This is because continuing to be scored at the "meets expectations" level may mean promotions will pass you by, and in the worst case may put your job in danger if your employer makes staffing changes.

With that in mind, strive to score higher than "satisfactory" whenever you can. And always be sure to ask openly and honestly of yourself, a trusted friend or even your boss: "What can I do to become a better performer?"

Another subject related to "knowing how you're doing" is being sure to take a good and honest look at your "methods of working" or "biases about working" (your true and deep feelings about working). In short, what are your attitudes about both working in general and your current job specifically? If you have negative feelings about either of these, it may dramatically affect the quality of your work efforts and, in turn, your performance. Successful workers know the importance of monitoring these deeper factors or feelings within themselves, because they understand the importance of being in the right frame-of-mind about work.

Your "methods of working" – or your attitude about working – is the foundation upon which performance either goes up or down. It's like school. Whenever you were unhappy or had negative feelings about school, the quality of your work probably went down (if you still kept those grades up, then well done). So, look even deeper than the "what" and "how" you're performing at work to your deeper feelings about it all. If you are feeling negatively about work, you must deal with it before bad things happen. Consult with a friend or coworker, have a talk with your boss, or maybe even find a professional job coach – but take actions to improve your attitude so that you can more easily make a high-quality work product.

Some questions to ask yourself about your "methods of working" are:

- ✓ Do I always show up, on time and prepared for the day?
- ✓ Do I take too much leave because I'm not happy with my job?
- ✓ Am I rested and energized for work?
- ✓ Am I clean and properly dressed for work each day?
- ✓ Do I greet people when I arrive at work?
- ✓ Do people like to talk with me?
- ✓ Do I show a good attitude?
- ✓ Do I keep my effort high all day?
- ✓ Do I communicate well?
- ✓ Am I positive, even when things aren't going well?
- ✓ Do I take reasonable (not too many or too long) breaks, including lunch time?
- ✓ Do I complain about work to others (at work, at home, or both)?
- ✓ If I say I'm going to do something, do I make sure I do it, or do I pretend I did it?

- ✓ Do I always treat others with respect?
- ✓ Do I obey the golden rule, “Do unto others as you wish they would do unto you”?

Your answers to these questions will help you understand your mental readiness or attitude about either (or both) working in general or your job specifically.

So, it's time to ask yourself: are you engaged, interested, and committed to your job – or are you feeling lazy, bored, or not that excited about the idea of getting up each morning to go to work? Don't be afraid of your answers. If you're not that interested, engaged or committed to the idea of working, deal with it now before it becomes a negative experience or a bad mark on your record.

One way to deal with negative feelings about work is to identify why these feelings may be so. Maybe you dislike working because of a general fear about failure, or because you feel not accepted or even rejected in the workplace, or because you feel you're not doing a good job, or because accommodating your disability doesn't seem adequate or right. If your feelings seem more general than these reasons – like work is a drag or working is tiring – dig deeper. Usually, if the workplace is a positive experience, then these types of more general negative feelings won't be there. In other words, try and get to the bottom of any negative feeling you might be having. You can deal with your concerns by reflecting on your own or discussing them with someone you trust.

Every worker, at one time or another, has had these negative feelings and thoughts. So, don't despair or give up. There are solutions and answers to all of these bad feelings and, perhaps, many answers to these questions or concerns can be found in this book.

The key or important point here is to get these questions out of your subconscious so they can be explored and answered thoughtfully. There are always answers to be found which can change the whole situation. If not, it may be time to find a new job.

Let's be further honest with ourselves and recognize that work is called “work” for a reason: it's work. It takes time, focus, energy, effort – and can become tiring after a while. Even the most exciting and meaningful jobs can leave people drained at the end of the day, but given the right opportunity, the good outweighs the bad.

However, the answer to negative fears or feeling around work is to find work that you like or love to do. It's really true to say, “work can be fun if you love what you're doing.” For example, if you love being around young people and helping them grow, maybe being a teacher is the way to go. If you love animals, maybe working at an animal shelter or becoming a veterinarian would be rewarding and fulfilling careers. To avoid negative feelings about your line of work, try to match your interest and abilities to jobs and careers which give you what you like or love to do. It might be hard to imagine having a job you love to do, but it can happen if you try. And, should you find such work, it will both make work easier and enrich your life.

If you already have a job and find yourself unhappy where you work, you have two options. First, you can change your career and find new employment. This takes time and energy, just like any job hunt,

and you will need to balance working with sending out resumes and doing interviews. You could choose to quit and then apply for jobs while unemployed, but this can be risky for your finances since you won't have income for an unknown amount of time; and because generally, unemployed job applicants are less appealing to potential employers, who often wonder why a person is currently unemployed.

The second choice is to discover a way to find happiness at your current job. You could talk with friends, coworkers, family or a counselor to identify the good in your job and focus on that through your day. In some cases, you may be able to talk with your boss and see if you can tweak your job to do more of what you actually enjoy at work. If things remain tough, it's also possible to view your work as a long-term investment. A stressful job can still be a "stepping stone" to a more fulfilling career – for example, a position filing paperwork in an office can be a starting point toward working on projects, then managing those projects, then becoming part of upper-management, and so on. If you think that the sacrifice of a demanding position is worth doing what you love long-term, you may want to look to the future to stay motivated during tough days. If work is really a drag and you don't see things getting better, though, sometimes the first option of changing things up is the way to go.

Now, let's say that you are looking for a job (either right out of school or after leaving another job) and really want to make sure you choose the right one. The first step is to understand your own skills and what you want out of work. As you self-evaluate or assess yourself around the subject of working, there's a technique which might be useful. It's called the SWOT method.

SWOT stands for "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats." This management technique was developed by Dr. Robert Humphrey of Stanford University in the 1960s to help organizations better analyze their risks and then develop a plan to respond. And although it was developed for organizations, it can be helpful to individuals when managing their barriers to performance and reaching their goals.

The SWOT analysis works this way. When analyzing their situations, individuals ask, "What are my own strengths and weaknesses – and what are the opportunities and threats in front of me?" The person using SWOT then uses compares those 4 factors and builds a strategy for achieving their goals.

As we mentioned above, this tool can be applied to either organizations or individuals. For our purposes here, let's use the SWOT as an individual self-assessment tool. First off, look inside: what are your strengths (pluses) and weaknesses (minuses) as you seek to better understand your current employment performance, feelings about working or even finding or holding job? In any case or situation, look at the world around you: what are the opportunities (pluses) and threats (minuses) for the job market in general, as well as any specific jobs that you may be looking at?

In this example, we're looking to find a job.

The following SWOT example documents a person's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats in the job market around them. (For a blank personal SWOT analysis form to use for the job market in general, specific positions, or other parts of your life, see Appendix B on page 237.)

The chart below lists two areas for you to consider regarding your strengths and weaknesses. These are: your personal situation and outside or external forces.

“My SWOT analysis for getting a job”

	<u>Strengths (Pluses)</u>	<u>Weaknesses (Minuses)</u>
Your Personal Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I want a job• I have worked before• I have my “brag bites,” elevator speech, and resume ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I’m not sure what work I want• I don’t know where to look• I’m not good at job interviews
	<u>Opportunities (Pluses)</u>	<u>Threats (Minuses)</u>
Outside or External Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are plenty of job openings• My parents and friends want to help• I have good references	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible transportation is limited• There are no employment agencies that can help me

Having done this review, you’re now in a better place to define what actions or plans you need to follow in order to find solutions. In fact, just by doing this assessment, you’re beginning to take action. Keep moving forward. If helpful, take what you wrote in your SWOT analysis to a trusted friend and talk further with them about it. With your SWOT analysis, you have some facts to begin a good conversation.

And, use this SWOT formula to help you see the various factors that need to be understood in order to best approach a situation.

It’s important for you to understand and continually think about self-assessing your work place performance. If you take the initiative to self-assess regularly you’re far more likely to have a successful and rewarding career.

Be in control of your future.

Making mistakes

Make no mistake: in the world of work, you'll make plenty of mistakes. We're all human – and mistakes are a routine part of being human. So don't feel like you're a failure if you make them. If you feel down after a slip-up, just remind yourself: everybody makes mistakes.

The trick about making mistakes is to strive to learn from them and to be sure not to make the same mistake twice. As a general rule, the first time you make a mistake, it can be called a "learning experience" and people (including your boss) will usually understand and be forgiving. It's often said that you learn more from your mistakes than from your successes. The key word here is "learn," so take an effort to reflect on your mistake and understand how to avoid it in the future. A good boss who saw what happened may appreciate it if you explain what you learned and how you plan to improve. Many will also provide advice on exactly what to do moving forward.

However, if you make the same mistake a second time, it might be viewed in a worse light (this is why it's important to learn and improve the first time). Your boss may believe that that you failed to learn from your first mistake, and the "failure to learn" impacted or hurt your job performance. Because your boss is responsible for supervising you and your work, *their* boss may also hold them responsible for your mistakes. Your boss may become concerned that it will happen again, which can affect your working relationship. If you should make the same mistake a third time (or more), they likely aren't going to be at all happy. They will begin to think that you're just not thinking, learning, being careful, or taking the effort to improve your job performance. If this happens, you may be demoted (moved to a lower-paying position) or even fired. This is, again, why it's so important to reflect on your work and take the necessary steps to improve.

Another rule around making mistakes is to learn NOT to let it undermine your confidence. Self-confidence is vital to you and your performance. Don't be overly upset or shaken by a mistake. Rather, be professional – which means being calm, taking responsibility and fixing any problems that your action caused as soon as possible. Try to stay positive: in fact, sometimes the fix to a mistake can be better than the original idea, if you learned from it. That's how we improve.

So, don't be afraid or feel devastated when you make mistakes. Don't obsess about what might happen if the same thing happens in the future. Just correct any consequences and change your own habits that led to the mistake itself. And don't repeat them.

Finally, think about what causes mistakes. Sometimes it's because we don't know the correct way to do things, sometimes it's because we aren't paying attention closely enough, and sometimes it's because we simply slipped up. But sometimes it's because we are working so hard and putting in so much effort, that too much is happening at once and we miss a detail. In this last case, some leaders believe that if you're not making mistakes, you're not moving fast enough.

Just be sure you move even faster to fix them.

Being innovative and excelling

Okay, it's "extra credit" time.

If you follow the advice above, you'll become a valued employee. You'll get a "C" or "B" and maybe some "A"s in your job. Now, you're beginning to learn what it takes to ensure that you'll perform well in a job and career. You know how to continuously evaluate yourself in order to be sure you're doing your job in a manner that keeps both you and your boss happy regarding your performance.

However, you have the ambition and drive to do more. You want to excel. You want to get all "A"s, even "A+"s. Being good is fine, but being great is best. You want to be more than a good employee. You want to be a great employee who is heading for the top of your department or organization. Using our example earlier, you want to move from filing papers to working on projects to managing those projects to being upper-level management. You want to lead (and get paid more as you do).

What's the edge needed to excel to the top? What else do you need to know in order to be more than just a fine employee? What does it take to be "great"?

In a word, it takes being an innovator. Becoming that trusted employee who not only gets their job done effectively but is always looking at everything from 30,000 feet high up in the air, where you can see the "big picture" more clearly. Up in the sky, you can see more. You will be looking at where the company has been, where it is now and where it needs to go next. With this perspective, you can become an innovator and an outstanding employee heading for the top ranks.

Practice these additional skills if you want to become a top performer. Here are even more secrets to maximum success in your career. And don't forget: all that has been said in this book and which lies ahead must be included in your performance for you to reach the top.

This is the extra credit stuff – and here are those extra lessons.

1. Stay Positive

Don't complain about things that aren't right. See these things as golden opportunities for you to excel by finding solutions. It's easy to find faults and problems. It's harder to create solutions. See the silver lining in the dark clouds. Always be positive. Positive people attract other positive people and that's where innovation occurs.

2. Observe, notice and ask the deeper questions.

Strive to understand why things are the way they are. Dig deeper and develop an insight into what's going on and why. Look for patterns or deep underlying causes. Learn more than others just notice. Be curious. Most people focus on the getting the job at hand done correctly, while not paying close attention to the deeper meanings or insights regarding what's happening. Ask questions, think beyond the surface reality. Don't just do your job well; understand your job in the context of the whole operation – of your organization and even the industry it operates in. In addition, always try to find the things that are a little bit off or not quite right. And listen to everyone, especially those who may

disagree with you or see things differently. They may provide insight into what's really going on – or show you the viewpoints that are holding things back.

3. Think, ponder and dream

Most people think that daydreaming or reflecting isn't working. "Let's stop day dreaming and get to work," someone might say. Well, research has shown us that daydreaming or stepping back from the "pressing business" and wondering about things is a great way to remain innovative and productive. Daydreaming, in this example, is recalling information without distractions – so simply taking a break to reflect on a meeting or task you completed (or are working on). Many top organizations give their employees free time to engage in experiments or just to think about what's going on in the workplace around them. Great performers need this "quiet time" or "time out" to more completely reflect and analyze the true meanings of their daily routine, ways to improve their performance, the direction of their organization, and more. Reflection can also happen off the job. Think, ponder and dream about work even when you're not there – not all the time, but for some of the time (and try to keep it positive and constructive). While you're doing housework, just before you go to sleep, or while you're at home getting ready for work, let your mind reflect or ponder it all. It's amazing how much more insightful your mind will be when you reflect away from the hustle and bustle of work.

4. Pay attention to everything

Don't dismiss minor details or points by explaining them away so you can stay in your comfort zone. Be alert and look to identify inconsistencies, anomalies, and unexplained outcomes. Try to capture and pay attention to all the minor details or "dots" of the company's operation. Be innovative by connecting those random dots in new and not-previously-understood ways. Obviously, without all the dots identified, you won't get the correct picture when you connect them all. So, don't dismiss anything you notice. It might be the key to developing a deeper understanding of what's actually happening – which can help you be more innovative for making things better.

5. Look closely at contradictions

Deep and important insights most often occur when we notice things that don't make sense to us. Here's where you dig deeper. If your instincts tell you that something doesn't make sense, dig until it does. These are the situations where innovation most often occurs. Humans (especially average workers) have a tendency to shrug our shoulders when we identify contradictions or inconsistencies. We want to move on, not stop and ponder why these may exist. It takes time and energy to ask questions, and our instincts often tell us it's not worth the effort to investigate farther. Sure, sometimes there is not meaning in these "not quite right" facts; however, many times that's where the gold is to be mined by the outstanding innovative employee on their way to the top.

6. Do something

If you're going to take the time and invest the energy to follow the steps above, it is without value unless you take the step of "doing something." Taking action is where your leadership skills kick in. This

means getting needed data or evidence, defining the challenge, developing a plan of action or response, as well as speaking out on about what you've observed and recommend. This is the payoff point and the crowning achievement of your innovative spirit. So, don't present to your boss or team just a "hunch" around a "problem" – instead, offer a complete proposal.

Lastly, there are often great opportunities for innovative workers when there is great crisis.

Too many times, when a company or organization is in crisis, most of its workers run and hide under their desks. This is not the time to lay low. This is the time for you, as an innovative and high performing leader, to seize and rise to the challenge. Great leaders are born when defeat is near. Some examples are Lee Iacocca at Chrysler, Steve Jobs at Apple, Winston Churchill during World War II, and the list goes on. The reason for this rise to the top during a time of crisis is that unusual opportunities become available which would not be possible if everything was under control. Safe or stable times are times of routine performance, steady expectations and slow promotions. However, during a company crisis, innovation is needed. It's time to "fill the void and do the right thing". Here's your opening. Here's your chance to run to the fire (crisis), not from it. During a crisis, with your new skills around leadership and innovation, you can accelerate yourself forward with recognition, admiration and promotions.

Workplace relationships (office politics)

Appropriate or proper workplace relationships are often described as "office politics." Office politics are the "dos" 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 you learn the strategies of office politics and practice them to your advantage.

If you're new to the world of work, understand that workplace rules or office politics are quite different from either those in school or in the community. One of the key differences is the fact that money and power are the very powerful forces behind them. And, it's interesting to see how people change when they are competing for either or both (money and power).

Another important thing to know is that no two workplaces are the same, and neither are their politics. Some organizations have a strong sense of teamwork and equality, some have more strict power structures, and some are hyper-competitive. Individual employees also vary: certain people are friendly and others are more cut-throat in their search for money, power and promotions. Politics are different among industries and within them, too. The way things work in a factory are different than they do in a restaurant, while a start-up business is different than a large corporation which is different than a charitable non-profit. At the same time, one startup may be up-beat and supportive, but another could be strict with a set of managers that is very critical of employees. Whenever you get a new job (or are choosing between jobs), understand exactly how the politics operate and work to succeed within them.

In order not to get tripped up by office politics, be alert for and follow these basic rules or 11 commandments.

1. **Learn how things actually work** – Each workplace has its own peculiarities on how things get done or who really wields 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 (or “management structure”) shows. For example, when I reported to my first job, someone hinted that the real position of power in the office was not the top manager, but his administrative officer. If I wanted to get something done or accomplished, my coworker told me that smart workers went to her because she was the center-point around which things got done. So, guess who the first friend was I tried to make? (Hint: it wasn’t the manager). And in the end, befriending the administrative officer was the smartest move I made during my early career. So observe, ask, study, learn, and adapt to the political landscape where you work.
2. **Guard against being manipulated or controlled** – Unfortunately, some employees are unprofessional and manipulative in the world of office politics: they try to pit other people against each other in their own search for money and power. So 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 (especially if the “secret” is something negative). 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 appears wrong, as it likely is wrong. The temptation for a new worker is that they’re anxious to make new friends whom they can trust. Remember, the people you can trust often don’t tell you something that seems negative or even destructive. It’s not professional behavior. In such cases, just file the information away and seek to learn more about this group’s office politics before you act. As you learn more, you’re likely to learn that this new “friend” is involved in a feud or fight with the person they were talking trash about.
3. **Talk to people** – You can safeguard your reputation and practice great office political skills if you make it a practice to leave your work-station (desk or otherwise) and go to talk to the other people you work with in person. Key reasons for this suggested practice is that it helps to build better relationships with your co-workers (it shows a respect for them by showing up at their work-station). It also helps you to get to know what they’re doing and thinking, and vice versa. You’ll learn more and more quickly by interacting with coworkers than simply by doing the tasks you are given. Of course, always get your job done well and don’t spend too much time socializing, otherwise your boss may think you are not putting in enough effort.
4. **Don’t be a complainer** – Nobody enjoys being around someone who’s complaining. Watch yourself and when things are going badly or unfairly: don’t give into temptation and complain about it in the workplace. People do not want to hear others venting at work (they have their own things to deal with). More than that, complainers are viewed as both trouble-makers and drags on progress; people viewed negatively in these ways are not likely to move ahead in an organization. Obviously, things will go wrong for you at your job at some point – and people, even your boss, may do you an injustice or two. If that happens, go home and vent, but don’t do it at work. When you are on the job, be proactive instead. Think of ways to positively respond to the injustice. If someone else got the task or job you wanted and you feel like it should have

been given to you, talk to your boss about what you can do to improve your chances next time. Then, take the actions they recommend and make sure they see you doing so. This positive response is more likely to lead to you getting the job you want next time. Complaining, on the other hand, will likely move you down the list rather than up. And no matter what, don't retaliate against the person who got the job over you. In fact, go out of your way to help them. This will impress everyone involved.

5. **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 gossipers, 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." And don't pass the gossip on. Gossip is manipulation. It's designed to get you to join one office faction or another.
6. **Be a peace-keeper** – When tempers flare or arguments rage, try to 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. Think of fights in the workplace as fights on a sinking ship. You're all in it together, so the better action is not to wage war among yourselves, but to find an agreeable solution in order to maintain the peace and stay afloat (alive).
7. **Thou shalt not be an "apple-polisher"** – This is someone who tries to win favor by extra compliments, being overly solicitous of a boss or key member of the office, or by being a "yes" person with the idea that if you agree to everything a boss says, he or she will favor you. Well, this is often so transparent that it will always backfire on you. A good boss is smart enough to know when an employee is trying to manipulate them by always agreeing with them and overly complementing them. And, the only conclusion they'll likely to draw is that the "apple-polisher" lacks self-confidence in your ability to win respect the old fashion way: through good performance. Simply avoid being overly-enthusiastic and instead interact with supervisors in a professional and balanced way.
8. **Take your enemies to lunch** – Invariably, someone will oppose you in the workplace at some point in your career. 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 a person is against you. Is it because they dislike your ideas, think you did something to hurt them, feel competitive when you are both going for the same promotion, or maybe just are having a bad day and need someone to lash out at? Depending on the situation, you can try to understand what happened on your own or you can ask them to explain why they are frustrated. Once you begin to understand why they are against you, develop your response. Next, try to 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. Be humble and remember that you're not always right. Maybe you did do something to anger them. Try to make it right, if you can. If you understand that you made a mistake, let them know that you are sorry and will do your best to correct it. That may end the situation. If you hear

their frustration and realize they misunderstood your actions, explain yourself calmly and carefully. Not everything is 100% right or 100% wrong, so you might find middle ground if you talk through 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. Whenever possible, meet with them and get their advice on neutral matters. Even take them to lunch. There’s an old politics saying that advises, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” This saying ultimately suggests that you try to find a way forward and strive to end the feud peacefully, rather than battle it out. No one wins a feud through conflict without harming themselves. Even if the feud doesn’t go away, the closer your enemies are, the less likely they’ll be to launch a surprise attack. Remember, “take your enemies to lunch” – understand their frustrations, apologize or explain your position, work to end conflict, and in the worst cases just keep your enemies close. In these ways, you will be holding the higher ground, which is the next item below.

9. **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 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. That’s why the general advice about leadership mentioned earlier (“Fill the void and do the right thing”) is so powerful. If you can explain to people that what you’re proposing to do or recommending is the truth or the right thing to do, you’re on your way to honor, victory and professional success.
10. **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 in times of conflict or when there is an argument, 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 there is no possible “victory,” or even when the war is over and the peace treaty has been signed. Know when it’s time to let go.
11. **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. If you get in a romantic relationship with a coworker and are obviously affectionate in the workplace, it is unprofessional and others will likely notice. If you get into a personal argument at home, it can also spill over to your relationship at work – and should things end, 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. If it’s perfect and turns out

well, there can still be problems as many places won't let you work in the same office as your partner. With regard to friendships, these are less dangerous. However, your co-worker – now your new close friend – will be seeing the “unprofessional” version of you, and that can lead to harming your workplace reputation, especially if you have some not so good habits (housekeeping, unusual collections, drinking, eating habits, etc.) that they'll get to observe up-close. One safeguard might be to keep a certain level of professionalism in such a friendship – so occasional coffee outside the office is fine, but “hitting the town” regularly can be a problem. As a general rule, it's better if you find a partner and close friends elsewhere.

Being polite

Let's finish this Lesson by observing that being professional is also being polite.

It's the polite or right thing to do when sharing credit for an accomplishment at work by saying “thank you” to others. It demonstrates your sense of loyalty, integrity, teamwork and humility. It attracts people to you as they come to admire your unselfish spirit. It's contagious and contributes to a healthy workplace environment.

The fact of the matter is no one exists alone on an island. You could not have been successful or achieved a major accomplishment in your workplace without the support of others. For example, if you are an attorney and you win a big case, the office law librarian probably helped you by finding the research materials you needed to win. The office IT staff's support was helpful to you in winning the case. Certainly, your boss helped by letting you take the case on in the first place. Even an intern may have also helped you in a small but important way. So acknowledge them all, share the credit and thank them for helping to make your success possible.

It's curious that this subject of being polite can benefit from reminding ourselves of what we were taught as young children by our parents and kindergarten teachers.

There's a wonderful book called, *“All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten”* by Robert Fulghum. Read it. In this book are great fundamental truths about good “Workplace Practices.” While they sound elementary and for children, they're really good tips for professional working adults, as well. Consider these basic rules and remember to always:

- Say “please” and “thank you.”
- Share.
- Play fair.
- Don't hit people (literally or figuratively).
- Put things back where you found them.
- Clean up your mess.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.
- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

In short, always be polite.

Lesson 3 — Workplace Job Skills (hard skills or job specific skills)

In the prior Lessons, we’ve discussed how to look or appear professional (“Workplace Presences” or soft skills) and how to act as a professional (“Workplace Practices” or medium skills). Now, we need to discover, define and learn how to effectively communicate our job-specific technical skills – or “hard skills” – to get the job you want.

Pitching our hard skills is like developing and selling any new product in “the marketplace.” Product developers know that what they’re selling has to first be appealing (catch the customer’s eye) second, act or show itself as a desirable object (grab the customer’s interest) and third, have the qualities that the customer needs or wants (close the sale).

In this Lesson, we’re going to review the third aspect of pitching yourself to an employer. And that’s convincing a potential employer (customer) that you have the specific technical job requirements or duties they need.

While you’re not a product, you are “selling” your labor in the competitive market place. Employers pay you to perform certain tasks – so they are purchasing your time, energy and skills when you’re working. And you’re competing with other similar products (other job seekers and their labor) to get the sale (hired for the job). As a result, you must prepare yourself to be able to explain why your labor is something the employer should buy (hire) over other job candidates’.

This Lesson will help you learn how to identify, understand and communicate effectively what exactly you can do for an employer.

Identify and describe your job-specific skills

As mentioned, job-specific skills are the hard skills you must be able to perform to complete the technical duties of the job in question. They are the skills we think about first when applying for a job. We see a job posting – whether for a not a mechanic or a legal assistant – and ask, “Am I qualified to be in that position? Do I have the skills they asked for and can I perform the tasks well?”

Can I do the work?

There are several ways to approach the subject of documenting your skills for a specific occupational area and, in turn, for the exact job within that occupation that you are competing to get. (For example, the occupational area could be “community law” and the occupation would be “legal assistant”). The method suggested here is using the knowledge, skills and abilities method – or KSAs.

KSAs are:

- Knowledge is being informed about how to perform a function, act or task – or “I know how to do it”
- Skill is being able to perform a specific act or task – or “I can get it done”
- Ability is having significant experience or a proven ability to routinely do a task – or “I’ve done it before and I’m good at it”

Here are some examples of each level of competency for particular type of job.

Knowledge:

- ✓ I know HR policies and procedures
- ✓ I know computer programming techniques
- ✓ I know legal principles and practices
- ✓ I know graphic design techniques
- ✓ I know how machinery works
- ✓ I know principles of book-keeping or accounting

Skills:

- ✓ I can write and edit documents well
- ✓ I can do thorough research
- ✓ I can deliver strong presentations and public speeches
- ✓ I can produce communication materials such as advertisements
- ✓ I can work with conventional media and social media (public relations)

Abilities:

- ✓ I have managed one dozen projects and many beat expectations
- ✓ I have managed budgets and kept costs in-check
- ✓ I have worked in several teams and always shared tasks well
- ✓ I have developed software programs and none have bugs
- ✓ I have done book-keeping for an entire company, with no errors

The KSA categories above give you a framework to build your listing of employment-related proficiencies or “hard skills.” This approach gives you a broader range of ways to describe your workplace skills, which helps when you might not have a long history of prior work experiences.

It’s important to remember that you should first create a general or broad listing of your KSAs around your occupation’s typically required job skills. By doing so, when you apply for a specific job, you will be ready to refine and edit this general list to match the actual job duties of the job under consideration. Various jobs and their employers will prioritize the skills they want job applicants to have differently, so you’ll need to always refine your general KSA qualifications for each specific job you’re seeking.

You will know what the specific job requirements are only when you read the job’s vacancy announcement and/or the job’s written job description. When you read these job-specific documents, try to match each of that specific job’s major duties with your KSAs which best match them. That’s when you can both determine if you might be qualified for the job, as well as begin to generate the content you need in order to create a competitive application.

The turnaround from when a job opportunity is posted and when employers want job applications can be very fast. Know that when the time comes to submit a specific job application, you will probably have just a few days or weeks to do so. Hence, it’s important for you to prepare with the general KSA list in advance.

Furthermore, the process of preparing your KSAs will help you with both your resume and job interviewing preparation, which we will be discussing in Lesson 5. In all three areas (KSAs, resumes, and interview talking points) you must be sure to refine your content in each document to match the specific vacancy announcement or job description you might want. Again, having general statements prepared in advance for these three key items will assist you greatly.

The deeper skills

The truth is that employers aren’t *only* looking for those hard skills (or KSAs) when they finally get to interviewing job candidates. KSAs are absolutely vital in job applications (paper or online), listing skills and writing resumes. However, research has shown that while the job specific “hard” skills are the obvious skills being questioned and evaluated during a job interview, employers are subtly measuring the applicant’s “soft” and “medium” skills even more.

While employers do want to hire people who can do the job, they are even more interested in people who have the right “soft” and “medium” skills for the job. Employers value these additional skills even more highly because they can’t teach them easily on the job. As far as many employers are concerned, you either have them or you don’t. (As we’ve learned in this book, though, you *can* learn soft and medium skills – just put in the effort!)

Here’s what research tells us about the relative value of these deeper “soft” and “medium” skills. The National Business Education Association surveyed 500 employers interviewing college students for jobs and found that among the top 10 things these interviewers were scoring job applicant on during an interview, the “can you do the job” question was way back in 7th place!

Here are the top 10 things they were scoring job applicants on during the application and interviewing process. And keep in mind that you get more points for the number one item listed below than for the number two, and so forth. That means the number seven item (“can you do the job”) gets less points than all of the higher ranked skills (1-6).

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization
3. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
4. Ability to obtain and process information
5. Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. **Technical knowledge related to the job (“can you do the job”)**
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell or influence others

Let’s put both together

In order to be able to mount a successful employment campaign, you simply must take the time to reflect and prepare your listing of what you have to offer an employer (KSAs). This is often thought of as a job resume. However, it’s really a diary about what you’ve learned, done and experienced through your education and employment. This diary should be kept current as you continue on throughout your work life.

You can follow any format for your KSA diary, just as long as you include the key elements which are listed in the headings of the **columns** and **rows** in the table below. Sample entries are also included in the table as examples which might further help you understand how this can help you create an effective marketing campaign around your job search.

A blank KSA Top Ten form see Appendix C on page 239. In the chart below, listed the top ten things scored in a typical interview with each item allowing space for you to identify your KSA’s for each.

SAMPLE

	Knowledge: I know about/how to...	Skills: I can do it...	Abilities: I'm good/ experienced at it...
1) Team Work	<i>Studied team work strategies in management class</i>	<i>I can work in competition teams, such as my science team in school</i> <i>I can work on specific positions within larger teams, like when I played wheelchair basketball</i>	<i>I worked with a group of volunteers to organize and produce a fundraising event and raised over \$10,000 for charity</i>
2) Verbal Communications	<i>Learned public speaking skills in a "Speech" class</i>	<i>I can give speeches with PowerPoint slides or just on my own</i>	<i>I am a regular speaker for our area's UCP organization</i>
3) Make Decisions & Solve Problems	<i>Studied various customer survey techniques</i> <i>Understand business-decision strategies from a management course in college</i>	<i>I can go through materials and note areas for improvement</i>	<i>During my internship I was given assignment to fix accounting problems and gave 5 recommendations that were used by management</i> <i>In school science club, organized membership, wrote by-laws and got group moving again</i>
4) Get and Use Information	<i>Learned about various research methods</i>	<i>Developed research models for two project</i>	<i>Worked for research group and led effort to collected financial data</i>
5) Plan, Organize and Prioritize	<i>Studied strategic planning concepts</i>	<i>Can use many types of software to organize tasks, budgets, and projects</i>	<i>Worked on an action plan for a company which helped to establish their work priorities for the next quarter</i>

6) Analyze Data	<i>Studied statistics</i>	<i>Can use Microsoft Excel for high-level data analysis</i>	<i>Did an accounting projects for a prior employer guiding them on productivity and results, with 10% improvements in efficiency</i>
7) Specific Job Skills (to a specific job you're applying for) ID Specific JOB: Social Worker	<i>Majored in Social Work at UC Berkeley with a 3.0 GPA</i> <i>Concentrated on family and children services</i>	<i>Can collect family information and match against useful government programs</i> <i>Can work calmly and professionally with stressful clients</i>	<i>Had a social work internship with family services, worked with a 50-family case load</i> <i>Had a second internship with Child Protective Services with abused and neglected youth</i>
8) Proficiency with Computers	<i>Learned new software programs in an online course, with certificates [list software type]</i>	<i>Can use the full Microsoft Office and Google Suites</i> <i>Proficient with my assistive technology and very productive</i>	<i>Integrated 7 new software programs into a system for a company doing an IT upgrade</i>
9) Create/Edit Written Reports	<i>Studied technical report writing in school</i> <i>Took a writing course with proper formatting, grammar, punctuation etc.</i>	<i>Can use Word and Google Docs for writing documents</i> <i>Can produce properly-formatted PDF documents</i>	<i>Wrote a 75-page annual report for previous company covering projects, budgets, fundraising and more</i>
10) Convince or Influence Others	<i>Practiced debate technique on school debate team</i>	<i>Can identify areas for improvement and present alternatives</i>	<i>Convinced my company's leadership to adopt new social media strategies</i>

Your KSA listing should be like a diary and be added to and updated as you have new experiences. For example, under “teamwork,” new examples might happen with sports teams, study groups, project teams, etc. And regarding sports, you don’t have to actually play on a team to get this qualification: you could be a sports team manager, cheerleader or announcer. As another example, under “verbal

communications,” list any and all presentations you may have made (even in school), important conversations, etc., and what you learned through these experiences on how to be an effective communicator. It may seem like a long diary, but when it comes time to apply for a job, it’s a good thing to be able to pick-and-choose from a large list than come up with ideas at the last minute (especially if your best examples are hard to remember). In each section, list examples and, as always, be specific.

Your KSA diary will help you to better understand the value of these various experiences and give you some direction about seeking other opportunities in these areas. Plus, as the list begins to grow, you will become increasingly ready to mount a successful job search effort.

And please remember: if you are a student and have never worked before, all is not lost. Think about your educational- or community-related experiences and seek to identify those school or community projects activities and assignments that developed your KSAs in these top ten employment skills. Just check out the example table above: there are plenty of classes, clubs and internships that can be put on a KSA list. If you’re in school and deciding which classes to take or what to do in your free time, try to choose ones that can best build your knowledge, skills and abilities (so maybe the debate team instead of the fantasy football league).

Also, know that getting a job is a precise or surgical process. Using the same statement about your KSAs for every job you apply for is a mistake. Each job is different the strongest applications address a job’s specific tasks and requirements. Many hiring managers can also spot an application that was copied-and-pasted from a mile away and will simply set it in the “no” pile. Thus, each KSA statement should be fine-tuned for each specific job.

How to improve your skills

If you feel you don’t have many KSAs to document, what should you do? What if your KSAs are less than what might be needed for the job you want?

If after analyzing your situation you feel that’s true, do something about it.

Identify which KSAs you need to become more proficient with or experienced in for the job(s) you are seeking. Develop a plan to improve. Use the KSA table and process above to clearly outline what’s missing or needed and, in turn, make a plan to increase your skills in these areas. For example, if you need more KSA examples or “brag bites” regarding teamwork, get busy looking for volunteer situations, internships or activities that can give you the opportunity to grow your teamwork experiences.

If you have a job opportunity but feel you are missing a “knowledge” piece, it can be surprisingly easy to learn useful information on a short timeframe. Developing your knowledge list is a constant process, so you can teach yourself throughout your job hunt – not just in school or at work. Buying an instructional book, taking an online course, and just researching over the Internet are great ways to build your “hard skills” in time for a job application or interview.

Lesson 4 — Workplace Patterns (understanding differences in the workplace)

As we know, people are called individuals because each person is different.

Each person has unique tendencies, traits or styles that make them who they are. This is true in school, in your community and, of course, in the workplace. The more you understand about these differences, the better equipped and prepared you'll be to effectively communicate and work with each individual you meet.

The purpose of this Lesson is to discuss these differences.

Just because people are different from each other and from you, it doesn't mean that they are less capable or "worse" in some way. It just means they see things from a different experience, culture, or perception. And when you learn how to understand some of these differences, you'll begin to recognize that many of these differences make for a richer work team and a broader set of perspectives, which most often leads to better results for an organization when all its individuals work together effectively.

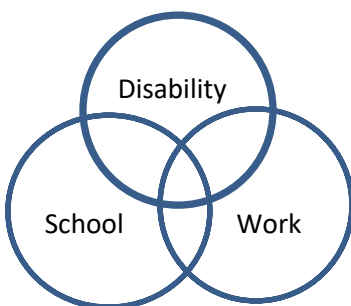
And if you take the effort to understand these differences and navigate them in your career, your professional power will increase.

The differences between worlds (education, disability and work)

As mentioned in this book's "Introduction," if you're entering the workforce for the first time, it's important that you understand and appreciate the differences between the three worlds "education," "disability" and "school."

Here might be your experience with each of these three worlds – disability, education, and work.

- ✓ World of Disability -- Most of your life in this world has been spent learning about and managing your disability skills, rights and needs (self-determination skills, independent living skills, civil rights, educational rights, disability access and accommodation needs, etc.). This world spins around laws like Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), State protections and disability-related programs.
- ✓ World of Education -- Most of your life has been spent in the educational system as a student working within the rules and expectations of teachers and school systems. These include reading, sitting in classes or lectures, turning in assignments, and taking exams. The goals are to earn good grades, get into better programs and earn degrees from high school or college. Being late to class or turning in an assignment late ends in discipline or a lower grade.
- ✓ World of Work -- A new and different world. People are competing for jobs, careers and promotions. The major concerns are around finding a job you like, earning money, getting, and keeping a job. Depending on your job, you may be performing regular tasks, serving customers (for example, at a store or restaurant), participating in large projects, or managing other employees.



If you're on the verge of a major life transition – for example, from school to work – it's time to shift gears and prepare yourself for the new reality ahead.

In order to begin to understand this transition better, let's examine some of the major differences between and among these three worlds.

Areas of major differences between the worlds of disability and work are:

- Relationships: Most disability-related relationships are most often candid and open about disability issues and concerns. Problems can be shared and discussed in confidence. Concerns and conversations often focus on disability rights, at individual or society-wide levels, and how to fight for them. Being disability sensitive is a given. In the workplace, on the other hand, relationships are professional not as “familiar.” Personal problems and feelings are not usually openly discussed. The subject of disability rights can be a loaded one, as there are disability-related laws and lawsuits or complaints are possible. Disability subjects should become less of your focus and identity in the workplace than elsewhere. Social relationships with bosses, co-workers and customers are most often not a good idea.
- Schedules: Disability schedules are more in tune with disability needs. It's better understood and appreciated that a disability means you might have to take more time to do your tasks including getting out of the front door of your home. In the workplace, people generally don't want to hear about your scheduling problems. For example, in most office jobs, work starts at 9:00 a.m. and lasts for 8 hours (some offices start at 8:00 a.m. and service jobs like grocery clerks or servers might have different hours). No matter the job, you are expected to be on-time and continue working full-speed the entire shift. If your disability means that getting ready in the morning takes a while, you will just need to get up earlier than your coworkers – it might be frustrating, but that's the world of professional work.
- Dress behaviors: The disability related dress code in public is more relaxed, including your personal devices. Your presentation may be dictated by your disability and attendant supports – no real worries, please understand. In the workplace, the office dress code is for everyone, so stock up on professional-looking attire and make sure it's clean. If you need to push an attendant to iron your shirt and tie your tie just right, don't feel guilty. And good appearance includes your personal devices, so try to keep them in good working order (even if a wheelchair needs repair and you put a little duct tape to hold something in place, make sure the tape is placed well and isn't tearing apart). Looking professional is a pre-requisite to being professional

in the office and with people outside of it. Bosses want it. Co-workers need it. And customers won't be attracted to doing business with you unless you have it.

- Success measures: Disability success might be measured by your ability to maintain independence and demand access and equal treatment under the law. If you can't get into a public accommodation, you are expected to speak up forcefully and don't take "no" for an answer. Workplace success, on the other hand, is doing the duties of your job and achieving the successes your boss requires. True success means going *beyond* what is required. In your worker role, more diplomatic skills are expected than aggressive disability advocacy type skills. Success is determined by doing what it takes to be hired, promoted and earn a salary.

Areas of major differences between the worlds of school and work are:

- Relationships: School relationships between and among teachers, family & friends are mostly social and familiar. Often, you can feel free to ask basic and even obvious questions and they will be answered patiently. In some situations, you can show your feelings and talk about personal subjects (especially if they are related to a school lesson). In the workplace, relationships are professional and not "familiar." Personal problems and feelings are not usually openly discussed. You are most often better off privately and quietly researching (on your own) answers to your basic questions before letting others know what you don't know. Again, the Internet can be your friend when you have questions!
- Schedules: School schedules tend to be more forgiving around taking time off when sick. And when you return, all is forgiven and forgotten with a note from your parent. The work you missed should be reviewed, but you might get pass on missed homework assignments. After all, you were sick. Being late can be excused with no real consequences. In the workplace, you earn sick leave after working for weeks or months and can only take that time off when you are really sick (in many jobs, a doctor's note is needed to prove it). If you don't have the sick leave time to cover you absence, you will usually lose your pay even for a doctor-approved sickness, although some jobs let you go into "debt" on sick time. And the work you failed to do may still need to be done, even if you need to really go into over-drive for a few days (if you are salaried, you may also finish it in the evenings or over a weekend). Being late is sometimes even more serious of an issue. After all, you weren't sick, and unless there is an exceptional circumstance (for example, if the bridge you need to travel over is shut down unexpectedly), you can get your pay docked (held back) for the time missed or even suffer in your performance review. This is actually a good reason to follow local news and social media, so if there is an announcement ahead-of-time that the bridge will be shut down, you can know about it, leave earlier and get to work on-time using a different route. If you will miss work or be late for any reason – whether it's being sick or a broken bridge – make sure to call or email your boss as soon as possible to let them know.
- Dress behaviors: school dress codes tend to be more relaxed, including your personal devices. Fitting into fashion trends may be allowed, whether it's torn jeans or leather jackets with metal spikes. After all, even schools understand adolescent behaviors. Dress may be dictated by your disability and attendant supports – no real worries, just tell the teacher if he asks. In the

workplace, the office dress code is for everyone. And, good appearance includes your personal devices. Be careful about wearing new fashion trends to work (even if it's "casual Friday"). Dress is usually more conservative than these trends might allow. Remember, looking professional is a pre-requisite to being professional. Bosses want it. Co-workers need it. And customers won't be attracted to dining business with you unless you have it.

- Success measures: School success might be measured by grades. And often, students can negotiate them by asking for extra credit or appealing a grade they don't like. If your grades aren't good, the next test or assignment can pull your grade back up; you might even be able to re-take a course for a better grade if you really want to. Plus, you haven't lost any money. Workplace success is doing the duties of your job and achieving the successes your boss requires. You usually can't re-do a task, and a really bad work product can jeopardize your job. Poor performance might go on a performance review, which can affect your pay and promotions – although following up a bad deliverable with consistently strong performance can even things out.

So, there are significant differences between the worlds of education and disability and the world of work.

But there are also similarities.

Your educational experiences, such as asking good questions, raising your hand to speak, asking permission to leave, being respectful of the person in charge, having done your work (and studied) in advance, and more will readily fit into the world of work. Bring them with you.

And your disability experiences, such as effectively teaching people about your disability and accommodation needs, helping your organization better understand the market importance or potential of the disability community, helping your boss, co-workers and customers better understand the new disability perspective and more will also readily fit into the world of work. Sometimes, your disability knowledge and experiences can be extra assets in the world of work. Bring these with you also.

Mold yourself in these ways so you better fit into the various world-of-work patterns.

Be in the right space of the world-of-work circle.

Individual differences

It's an obvious point that people are not all alike, as we initially reviewed in the subject of personality in Lesson 1 above (Workplace Presence). Each person we meet is likely to have some thing or things about them which make them different from us. This is a major part of their personality. Sometimes, these differences are minor, and we can easily accept them. Other times, these individual differences are more dramatic, even to the point of confusing or even scaring us. When that might happen, we are likely to step back from interacting with another person. We may even ignore them or worse.

In these cases, we may see another person's "differences" as an undesirable fault or weakness. We may think of them as "odd" and someone we should avoid. We may make the mistake of thinking we're

better than they are because they don't think, act or look like us. If you're a person with a disability, you've probably realized that being "different from the norm" (as we are too-often told we are) doesn't mean you have less worth. In fact, if you have a disability, you may have been on the bad end of this experience, where others treated you as inferior or worse-off. If so, you probably have the maturity and wisdom necessary to see beyond these differences or you may have even learned to value them (which is the point of this section).

So, differences in people can be either a positive or a negative thing, depending on your ability to understand what you see and, in turn, learn how to understand and value these differences.

For example, let's say you're the silent or the quiet type. It's difficult for you to go up to a person you don't know (maybe even one you do know) and start a conversation with them. In fact, when that situation arises, your palms may start to sweat; your heart races; and your favored response is to avoid the difficulty of the situation and simply not say hello. People may have made fun of you for being acting that way. "Oh, they're an introvert," you may have heard others say about you. And you worry that they're telling people you're antisocial, shy, or even a snob or stuck-up because you don't say much. These reactions may have had an impact on your self-esteem. You may feel inadequate (or worse) for this tendency. It's unfortunate, but others' opinions about us can seriously impact how we feel about ourselves.

Well, at the other end of this spectrum of this personality type is the extrovert. That's the person who dominates the conversation. They love to talk. They'll approach anyone and start up a conversation about anything. And some extroverts will say whatever they happen to be thinking, without carefully considering what they are saying. They may also be criticized for being a "loud mouth," never letting others speak, and even for saying "stupid" or inappropriate things.

These two examples give us an insight into idea of individual differences. Neither example is the right way or the wrong way to be. It's just the way some people are wired or built. If you are one or the other, the key is to accept how you're wired and begin to learn that it's normal. So, get liberated and learn how to embrace and use your natural style in a positive manner. If you really want to change how you communicate, you can make that effort, but don't feel negative at all about how you are right now.

As we've mentioned before, there's an interesting test that helps people better understand how they and others are wired with various personal tendencies or types. It's called the "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator" (MBTI) assessment tool or test. This tool or exercise asks you several questions which help you to understand what your individual personality details are and, in turn, gives you a chance to learn about the value of being wired the way you are. The fact is that no matter how you're wired, those tendencies or preferences give you power and value to perform at work and elsewhere (socially, politically or otherwise). When you better understand these tendencies and related values about both yourself and others, you can begin to understand their values especially when working with others and in teams. You can develop strategies for better partnerships, working relationships and more.

There are four scales or general types of personalities to consider. See which ones might best describe your preferences. The way to understand your MBTI is to choose one letter from each scale and create a 4-letter combination that best describes your personality. So, someone who is an Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, and Perceiving would have a personality type “ISTP,” and so on. You may tell yourself “I’m somewhere between one and the other” – so sometimes a bit introverted and sometimes extroverted – but just choose the “type” or letter that seems closest to your personality. And, REMEMBER, these are different types. None are bad or wrong. All are good and have value. Embrace who you are and respect others who might be different from you.

Here are the four scales.

Introvert or Extrovert

Introvert (I) -- Quiet people tend to be introverts and it’s hard for them to be talkative with the new people they meet. They can chat with those new people, but it takes extra effort. They often enjoy being alone with their thoughts and they are usually use fewer words to say what they are thinking.

Extrovert (E) – People who love to talk tend to be extroverts. It’s easy for them to meet new people and they like to say what comes to mind. They are outgoing and like to connect with others in business and social scenes.

Sensing or Intuitive

Sensing (S) -- People who prefer using their sensing skills tend to pay a great deal of attention to reality, particularly to what they can learn from their own senses. They value what they hear or see. They tend to focus on facts and details and enjoy getting hands-on experience.

Intuitive (N) – People who prefer using their intuition skills pay more attention to things like patterns and impressions. They enjoy thinking about possibilities, imagining the future and abstract theories. They tend to follow their instincts.

Thinking or Feeling

Thinking (T) -- People who prefer thinking over feeling place a greater emphasis on facts and data. They tend to be consistent, logical and impersonal when weighing a decision. They’ll tend to do what the facts demand regardless of what others may want or think.

Feeling (F) -- Those who prefer feeling over thinking are more likely to consider people and emotions when arriving at a conclusion. Even if the data says to do one thing, they may prefer to do the other thing or change their decision somewhat to respond to what others may want.

Judging or Perceiving

Judging (J) - Those who lean toward judging prefer structure and firm decisions. They tend to be determined and unyielding once they make a decision and start moving toward a goal. When they work,

they tend to be well-organized, planning and task-oriented. Judging should not be confused with “judgmental,” so these individuals do not necessarily criticize people and things around them.

Perceiving (P) -- People who lean toward perceiving are more open, flexible and adaptable. They might be more willing to change as things move along. They may be less structured in how they do work, approach tasks as a mix of work and play, and be more stimulated to rush when a deadline is near.

In summary, there are four scales or general types of personalities. Because of how these characteristics can be combined and mixed together, there are a total of 16 “personality types” (for example, ISTJ, ENFP, INTP, etc.). See which characteristics might be like you to find your personality type. And, REMEMBER, these are different types. None are bad or wrong. They are ALL good and have their individual worth in the workplace. Embrace who you are and use your personality to your advantage.

Of course, the above listing is only a broad outline of an individual’s personality tendencies and is not intended to document which of these tendencies you have. This can only be done by actually taking the MBTI, so find a way to take it if you can (more information is at www.MyersBriggs.org). Still, it helps you to begin to understand how you and others think and tend to make decisions.

No matter what your personality type is, never, ever think it’s wrong to be that way or think of yourself as inadequate. Similarly, never think less of someone else who demonstrates a different or opposite personality tendency. All personality types are interesting and powerful, especially when they’re well understood and utilized to their advantage. And people can often move from one type to the other both intentionally and naturally. For example, somebody who is introverted could take a networking course and learn to become more outgoing, and an extrovert may have a life experience that leads them to spend more time alone.

When I first took the MBTI, along with other classmates, I scored at the high end of the “introvert” scale.

After the class received their individual MBTI result, the instructor formed work teams based on each person’s results. All the extroverts were assembled on the same team and all the introverts on another team. When my team of introverts first gathered, we all laughed smugly at those “loud mouth” extroverts who launched right into the exercise before they even got organized. We laughed because they were all talking at once and weren’t listening to each other. In order for them to be heard, they began shouting louder and louder. It was mayhem! No one in their group was listening. Then our more civilized and feeling superior group started the exercise. As we did, each one of us thoughtfully and carefully took our turn and said what we thought about the problem we were given to solve. Each spoke only a few minutes, saying only a few well-chosen words, but what we said was clear and to the point. It took us about 15 minutes out of the 45 we had for this exercise to finish our work. When we were done, we all went painfully silent. No one said another word because we had our “say” and thought we had finished our task. After a few minutes, one of our introvert group members was listening to the various comments flying around the other team’s and said to us with a newfound wisdom, we need some of “these people” on our team – to energize and explore our comments.

When it came time to “report out” our respective group’s experience, the extroverts (naturally) reported first. They said that they wished they had some introverts on their team because they could have helped them to consolidate and summarize all their ideas into specific recommendations.

Differences are just that. There is no right or wrong way to be, just strive to be good at the way you are.

Always be proud of your differences, never ashamed of them. Respect the differences in both you and others and the capabilities they represent. Use them to an advantage. The magic about individual differences is to understand their respective strengths and, in turn, to learn the importance of mixing and matching different types to make the best work teams possible.

One last point to keep in mind is that while I scored on the very high end of being an introvert, I can be an extrovert when I need or want to be. You can always perform the opposite tendencies. It just takes extra effort and energy to demonstrate those skills. Plenty of introverts can get up in front of a crowd and give a great presentation when they need to; meanwhile, other “perceiving” people have learned to be more structured in their work when doing large projects. Just because you lean toward one way, it doesn’t mean you can’t be the other in some settings. You most certainly can when you need or want to.

Multi-generational workforce (differences between generations)

Just as individuals exhibit different preferences or tendencies, various generations of workers have their preferences and tendencies. People are living and choosing to work longer than in the past, so it’s likely that when you report for work, you will meet bosses and co-workers from these various generations. If you understand that each group or generation of workers has had a different life experience, which set their work expectations differently from other generations, you can be more successful as you navigate a multi-generational workplace.

There are five generations of workers currently in the work force. Each one views the workplace slightly differently. They are:

1. Traditional Workers (born before 1945) – 2% of the workforce
2. Baby Boomers (1946-1964) – 31% of the workforce
3. Generation X or Gen X (1965-1980) – 32% of the workforce
4. Millennials or Gen Y (1981-1994) – 34% of the workforce
5. Post-Millennials or Gen Z (1995-present) – 1% of the workforce

As noted, each of these five generations grew up under different conditions and, as a result, set their preferences and expectations around work differently than the other generations. Here are the general life experiences of each of these five groups and their resulting general preferences and tendencies in the workplace:

- 1) “Traditional Workers” remember the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, office machines, slide rules, and assembly lines in industry. These experiences forged their view about the workplace and often expresses itself in an orderly office structure, a tight chain of

command, strict office hours, the belief that “you’re lucky to have a job – hang on to it,” strong loyalty to where one works, a belief that respect is earned over time, the sense that you learn by experience, and an understanding that life is not always fair (so “deal with it”).

- 2) “Baby Boomers” grew up under the Cold War (including the Korean and Vietnam Wars), the space race to the moon, Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations, the civil rights movement, the “hippie” movement, Watergate, color television, calculators, and multiple landline phones (home, office and pay). These experiences forged their view about the workplace and often expresses itself in their participatory or consensus leadership, collegial and friendly workplace relationships, desire to work face-to-face with people, expecting rewards for hard work, wanting to change the world, seeking challenges to solve, and a dislike of poor work ethic in others. Baby Boomers often have strong feelings that work should happen in the workplace, not at cafés or at home (“remote work”).
- 3) “Gen X” workers grew up under a time when the divorce rate tripled from the prior generation, the Challenger and Chernobyl incidents, the AIDS epidemic, and the arrival of regular use of PCs, video games, the internet and cell phones. These experiences forged their view on the workplace and often expresses itself in independent thinking, using fewer “strict” rules, regular use of technology, a belief that it doesn’t matter when or where they work as long as they get the job done, a desire for a better work and life balance, wanting the latest technology, a desire to have fun in the workplace, and liking bonuses.
- 4) “Gen Y” workers grew up under Columbine, Oklahoma City, 9/11, and other terrorists’ threats, HD-TV, I-Pods, texting, and social media. These experiences helped to forge their view on the workplace, which often expresses itself in wanting to work in teams, wanting more information and data before deciding, comfort with multi-tasking, a feeling that work isn’t everything, wanting mentors to help them, wanting respect immediately, wanting the newest technology, and wanting interesting and challenging work.
- 5) “Gen Z” workers grew up with cell phone apps, social media, the “War on Terror,” globalization, online shopping, and an expansion in start-ups and freelance work. Because of these experiences, Gen Z workers are often motivated by social rewards, mentorship and constant feedback. They also want to be doing meaningful tasks and given responsibilities they can achieve. Like the “Gen Y” and “X” workers, they prefer flexible schedules. They prefer face to face communications and work environments but are plenty comfortable interacting over email, texting or social media.

With these subtle differences in mind, realize that if you work for someone from another generation, they might not agree with your workplace expectations or values. That doesn’t mean conflict is likely. If you know that different generations are likely to (but not always) have different workplace expectations, be sure to discuss these subjects with your boss or co-workers. By being clear about what they expect, you’ll avoid misunderstandings which may impact your job performance.

For example, if you're a Gen Y person working for a Baby Boomer, know that the Baby Boomer feels more secure when they see you at your desk when work is scheduled to start. If they don't see you at your work-station at that time, they are likely to assume you're late, missing and not working as you should be. So, if you have a flexible attitude about working (using flex-time and flex-place), request permission from your boss before you decide to work from home or another remote location.

What will bridge the natural generational divide about workplace values is your appreciation for the other generation's perspective, along with your direct communication about any adjustments that you can do to bridge the divide – or what your colleague can do in return. In many cases, you may want to get an agreement or permission to take actions first (especially if they are different than “normal protocol”). This way, you're more likely to bridge the natural generational divide successfully.

So, be alert for generational differences and careful to navigate them in a professional manner

Diversity patterns

We live in a world economy.

The whole world is becoming more and more interconnected both in our commerce (business) as well as our communication (especially electronically through the internet).

The days have long since passed when we used to work in cultural isolation, far away from our world neighbors. As a result, you should expect that your current or future workplace will have regular interactions with a very diverse range of racial, ethnic and cultural co-workers and customers from all around the world. As countries and economies become more global, cultural diversity will be greater. Plus, even in your locality, more cultural and racial diversity may be the rule rather than the exception. As a result, wherever you go to work, your company or organization will need its employees to know how to get the most out of this diversity.

If you're a person with a disability, you may have an advantage of understanding differences in people and are used to looking for their humanity rather than seeing their different dress, language, customs and appearance. People with disabilities certainly know the experience of being made to feel unwelcomed; having this experience may help you to have a mindset and sensibility to learn how to best welcome, understand and respond to the full range of diversity in the workplace.

To get you further along in this process and, in turn, become more professional, here are some general tips about working with different ethnicities and cultures. Again, these are just tips. The key is to see the person beyond the label and to find a way to communicate effectively with them so that positive outcomes or results can happen for all involved.

1. **Learn about your culture** – This may seem odd at first. But before you are truly able to open your mind and heart to other cultures, you need to first take stock of your own. By doing so, you'll begin to understand differences in a new light. Let's start by remembering that your culture is just that. It's yours. It's not other people's. And yours is not the best one which everyone in the world should want to copy or join. Your culture is on an equal footing with

all other cultures and ethnicities. After all, a culture is just the sum of different experiences, beliefs and practices that are particular to your location, history and opportunities. Change any of these factors and you would probably have a different culture – and life experience along with it. From this perspective, you're in a better position to see and accept cultural differences. And remember: unless you are a Native American (and in many cases, even if you are), your ancestors were from a different culture not that long ago. It was the diversity of all these immigrant groups which came together and fueled the culture that you call yours.

2. **Examine your biases** – The truth is that, based on our limited knowledge and exposure, we have certain preconceived notions about other ethnicities or cultures. Often, these notions are both wrong in a way that makes us think our own experience is better (even when we try to think otherwise). It's an interesting human trait that we lean toward feeling that our identity makes us just a little bit better than everyone else. Of course, it's also a dangerous tendency. Be honest with yourself and think about your biases, then challenge yourself by taking the next steps (starting with step 3 below).
3. **Meet people from other cultures** – Take every opportunity to meet people from cultures you may not know much about or feel uncomfortable with. One easy way to get started is to visit restaurants, fairs, or events associated with these cultures. In addition to getting a great meal or having some fun, you'll be exposing yourself to a new experience which will likely give you the chance to meet people from that culture. Meeting these people will help you to learn more about their customs and traditions. You will get to see them as people, just like you – only different from others in the world, just like you.
4. **Notice the differences** – As you begin to meet people from other groups, notice their communication styles, values and customs. As you learn more about how they greet people (for example, some bow or nod instead of shake hands) and how they communicate (out of respect, some may not look you in the eye, while others make an extra effort to hold eye-contact), your comfort level will grow and your ability to interact effectively will increase. Both feeling comfortable around others and interacting smoothly are great professional skills to have.
5. **Effectively manage diversity** – The final step in developing your diversity-related professional skill is to understand how to utilize your new knowledge in getting better results for yourself and your company. There are gains to be made. Internally, you will be more skillful working with your fellow workers from different ethnicities and cultures. It's always better to have allies and comrades at work than to have strangers or enemies. And you can use your new skills to help the company be more successful by effectively working with diverse groups. Learning how other groups go through life and business will help you make better decisions by having a broader perspective on how to solve problems and improve performance. The more diversity you seek to embrace (individual styles, genders cultures and ethnicities), the more perspectives and experiences will be available to you. So in the end, your openness may help you more than it helps the others, because you will become a more powerful working professional.

Gender perspectives

Often – though not always – men and women have different communication and problem-solving styles. These are related to the “gender norms” that have developed and transformed over thousands of years, but which are also being challenged in many areas. Still, it is important to understand some of these widespread communication styles and how they relate to the workplace.

When these differences are better understood, we can better communicate with each other as well as learn the advantages of combining styles on a gender-diverse team. Remember, using one or the other style doesn’t make someone better or worse, it just gives us another way to evaluate a situation. When these slight differences in gender perspectives combine themselves, both genders can perform more effectively.

One of the possible gender differences between women from men can be a heightened sense about what a person really means beyond the actual spoken words. Women often seem to observe “non-verbal cues” – such as tone-of-voice, facial expressions, posture and gestures – as part of the communication. In this way, they might sense a deeper or unspoken message behind just the content of a comment: not just what was said, but also what was unsaid. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be literal and take words spoken as the full meaning of the communication – then leave it at that.

For example, a man may hear someone tell him, “I’m going to have to cancel our appointment, something has come up, I’m so sorry.” Well, those words seem clear enough. However, the woman hearing the comment may observe, “Did you hear how he said that?” or “Did you notice his body language when he told you that?” Well, the man did see those things but the man may have been singularly focused on the words. Who’s right? The answer is both. What we know is, in this example, both gender perspectives can result in more effective communications.

Another example of conventional differences between genders, which, when combined will make everyone better performers, is around solving problems. Men tend to define problems more quickly by isolating the issues, then dive into fixing the problems. Women, on the other hand, will often define the problem in broader terms and want to discuss or talk about a wider range of possible solutions before taking action. (Again, this is not always the case – but the differences appear more often than not). Together, these slightly different approaches seem to make for a more complementary and complete effort.

Equity between genders in the workplace is important for many reasons, especially for moral and ethical reasons. The value of diverse perspectives and communication styles is yet another example of why we need genders working together.

“Stronger together” might be the shortest way to summarize the value of gender equity and inclusion in the workplace.

Boss, coworker, and customer relationships

In the work place, there are three key groups of people which must work well together. They are your boss (and their bosses), your coworkers and the outside people your office serves – such as customers, clients, or the general public.

Here are some basic tips on how you can develop a positive working relationship with your boss.

- ✓ Demonstrate loyalty and integrity. Through your actions and deeds, always show your boss that they can count on you to tell them the truth and that they can trust you to support them.
- ✓ Show respect. Even when your boss makes a mistake, be gentle and understanding and never undermine or speak badly about the boss with others.
- ✓ Learn what your boss wants and needs. Your boss might be as many things on their plate and will hand you tasks that need to get done. Communicate with your boss, fully understand what they need you to do, and strive to give it to them on-time.
- ✓ Ask for advice. Your boss's job is to help you do your job, so help them help you by asking questions, then seeking advice or feedback on how to get your job done right.
- ✓ Don't waste their time. Respect your boss's time and be sure to research and properly prepare for your discussions with them.
- ✓ Make your boss look good. Give your boss due credit for what you've accomplished (especially when talking with their boss and other management). After all, they hired you and provided guidance through your work, so that's a good reason to give them credit and a great way to thank them.

If it helps, think about the relationship between you and your boss as one in which the boss is giving you money to perform your job every day. You're also getting paid to nurture this relationship in a positive way – and if you do that successfully, you can get paid even more in the future.

Relationships with coworkers also demand positive working relationships. Your coworkers are the people you must depend on to get your work done right and on-time. They also want to be successful and get ahead in your organization. As a result, you'll want to be both admired and careful about how you relate to them.

Certainly, when it comes to the work at-hand, you will be admired when you practice the values of teamwork and mutual support. Some valuable strategies are:

- ✓ Show an interest in them by asking them regularly how they're doing. If they have a problem, listen to them and ask them how you might be able to help. Then, if you can, help them – even if it's just to check back with them to see if they've made any progress. Of course, you might finish your own work first and check in with your boss before giving a coworker help with theirs.
- ✓ Whenever you can, compliment coworkers about something good that they may have done. Giving compliments encourages people to like you and want to return the favor.

- ✓ Whenever you talk about your coworkers to others, be very careful not to say negative or critical things about them. This shows your professionalism and often sets the stage for others to do likewise about you.
- ✓ Share credit with your co-workers when getting credit. For example, in response to a compliment, you might say, “I could not have done it without the support of our human resource team members.”

However, as we discussed in the Lesson about “office politics,” be careful with your casual or personal communications and relationships with coworkers.

Since your coworkers are, in certain situations, also your competitors, it’s never a good idea to let your guard down and develop a personal relationship with your coworkers because it may expose your non-professional self to office politics or gossip.

Keep your co-worker relationship professional even though you would appear to be equals. Such a strategy can help to prevent negative criticisms which could put a stain on your reputation and block your advancement.

The third key group or workplace public that you must develop some ground rules around is with your company or organization’s customers, clients or the general public.

Most, if not all, organizations have customers. These are the people who benefit from your organization’s products or services. In short, they pay your company for what it does, which your company uses to pay you.

So, in that way, your customers are the ultimate boss. Keeping your customers happy keeps your company or organization afloat, which helps you keep your job.

Here, too, you’ll want to pursue a professional approach or strategy to serving your company’s customers in a proper manner.

Here are some basic tips for interacting with customers.

- ✓ Identify who your customers are, both in a general sense and individually whenever possible. By understanding their background, you can better understand what they want and the best way to “pitch” a sale. If you can connect on an individual level, they may feel more comfortable with you and thus paying for your company’s product or service.
- ✓ Talk with customers and listen to what they are saying about both your work and your company’s work. Analyze these comments as clues for improvements in your own work and as recommendations to your boss for improving the company.
- ✓ Make your customers feel important. Respect them and say “you’re right” and “thank you” whenever you can. Make them feel important to you – because they are.
- ✓ When you can, try to give your customers extra attention, and treat every customer as if they are special. Great service is the secret to better customer relations.

Some organizations teach the motto, “The customer is always right.” Well, while they might not always be right, at least try to make them feel that way.

Employment opportunities

The last part of this Lesson on “Workplace Patterns” or complexities is about the variations in the job market around opportunities and careers.

Job or career opportunities vary dramatically depending on time and place (current regional economic trends and realities). Not all localities have the same level of employment potential or variety of job opportunities, so where (in a specific location or larger geographic area) you choose to look for work matters.

Job opportunities show themselves in patterns, variations or differences as well.

As you plan your career and seek your first job, you’ll need to understand what’s realistic and possible where you live. Sometimes, the job or career you want for yourself may not be possible in your town or location. In such cases, you may need to identify other localities to move to in order to find the right kind of job opportunities. Of course, you may choose to stay where you are and that’s okay. You may be able to find a job that is “close enough” to your desired career, or which can serve as a “stepping stone” for future career growth. It just may be necessary for you think outside the “box” (or your current living location) to truly expand your employment options and opportunities.

In general, the wider you cast your net for the job or career you want, the greater your potential to find and land that “dream job.”

If you want to be an accountant in a specialty field (such as sports management), your geographic area may have few jobs like that in your community. In that case, be ready to explore other regions or areas where the job and career you want are more generally available. Also, regional economic conditions may dramatically affect your ability to find employment. If you are looking for a high-tech job and you live in an area with a limited number of these types of jobs, it makes your job search that much harder. For example, at the time of this book, there are thousands of high-tech job vacancies open right now in places like Silicon Valley (San Francisco/San Jose area) as well as other tech centers like Boston and Washington, DC, areas, to name a few. So, in this occupational example, you may want to search for job postings in Silicon Valley, Boston and DC, then apply to the ones that fit your skills and goals – and prepare for the possibility that you may move if you land one of those great jobs. The area or part of the country you choose to focus your job search on is a very important factor for you consider.

The wider you cast your net, the more fish you might catch.

In addition, after a few years in your first or entry level job, you’ll probably want a promotion. You’ll want to move up on the career ladder. It’s a natural and important part of your career development. However, be alert. There are ever-changing patterns when considering how to best navigate the promotion and career-ladder landscapes.

Often, it can be harder to get the promotion that you have earned and are ready for at your current job. There are many reasons why this might be the case. One is that management knows you and, in the case that they handed you more responsibility to test your abilities, they may ask to themselves: “why spend more money on you now, when you’ve done higher skilled work at the same pay level?” Or, they may be too busy with the day-to-day work to pay attention to the seemingly extra task of giving you a promotion and raise (which involves rearranging the organization’s structure, doing paperwork, negotiating a new salary, etc.). Or they may worry that giving you a promotion will start others wanting one also, which will cost money and complicate workplace politics. In short, they may just avoid going down this complicated path when it seems like everything is fine (at least, for them).

What should you do?

One way to break the log-jam might be to look for that promotion elsewhere. Yes, apply for other jobs. The fact is that there may not be an actual position for you to be promoted to at your current job – but when you find a job vacancy announcement somewhere else at a higher level, the process is already in motion to find a new worker at that level of responsibility (and pay). So, some of the inertia problems that exist in your current place of employment aren’t present in these other places.

If you are selected for this new job at the higher level you feel you deserve, think about telling your current employer about this possible move away from them to the new position. The fact that you’re looking elsewhere, or that you have a new job offer, is likely to break that “log-jam” and push them to action to try and keep you. If they value your work and skills, they may take steps to keep you on-board – meaning they’ll give you a better offer than the other job will provide.

Of course, you should be careful about this strategy. You should be prepared to move on if your current employer doesn’t give you either a similar or better offer to stay. If that doesn’t happen, at least you’ll know that a promotion where you currently are is not likely and you probably should move on if you want to keep moving up.

Lesson 5 — Workplace Job Searching Strategies (finding and winning the job)

Now that you know more about the world of work and being professional, it’s time to get out there to find and win the job you want.

In order to mount a successful job-searching effort, you first need to understand that finding a job is a job in itself.

That is to say, finding a job requires hard work, special skills, and time. Don’t approach this task in a half-hearted manner. If you do, you will move too slowly and the competition will swiftly pass you by. So start your job search by making a commitment to pursuing it with all the energy, hard work and time needed to be successful.

Next, remember that each job is filled in a competitive way. When an employer is looking for a new employee, they want the best person they can find. In order to have a good sampling to choose from, they’ll invite as many applicants to apply as they can. This means you’ll be in a competition with many

others for that job – and winning any competition means you must outperform the other competitors or applicants.

Since you may not always be the most experienced applicant or have the best-looking resume, you can still win the race if you work the hardest to impress the potential boss with your passion for the position. When the job interviewer or potential new employer sees your passion and desire for the job (including the company or organization and its mission), it can propel you to the head of the pack. So dedicate yourself to working harder and more enthusiastically to get the job you want than your competitors. After all, hard work and a passion for the job is often what the employer wants most of all. If you show yourself as that type of a job applicant, you will likely gain an edge over your competition, thereby improving your chances to win the job.

Also, be alert for those negative feelings inside of you that say, “It’s a tough job market,” “It’s a bad economy right now,” or “I need more education before I start looking.” While these types of thoughts may have some truth to them, they are more likely a smoke-screen hiding your general fears about your potential for success (the fear of failure).

With regards to the job market, economy or education level, no matter how bad you might be telling yourself these things are, employers are hiring somewhere. If you take yourself out of the job search process with these types of excuses, you’ve made these things true for yourself. Many people talk themselves out of the job hunt – so let the other job seekers be demoralized by such fears and doubts, not you. If you avoid these fears and traps, you’re a step ahead of your competition.

With regards to the unavoidable “fear of failure,” know and accept the fact that you are likely to have such a fear. When looking for work, the core of this fear is the fear of rejection. It’s the fear of being told “no, I’m not selecting or hiring you.” This fear of rejection is normal. So, let’s be realistic. You’re very likely going to get some “no” answers when applying for jobs. It’s a given. It’s a fact of life. And the “no” response hurts us deeply. It’s discouraging. Everybody feels this way.

With this reality in mind, think about the “no” response as a routine part of the process. Most job seekers, especially first-time job seekers, discover the following truth about looking for a job.

Expect this pattern of replies:

Job application #1 = No

Job application #4 = No

Job application #2 = No

Job application #5 = No

Job application #3 = No

Job application #6 = YES!

The number of “no” answers will vary, but they will always be there.

And, the “YES” is inevitable when you keep trying.

It’s also important for you to understand that a “no” is not a rejection of you. In fact, a “no” may really mean “yes” in the sense that this job is not for you; and as a result, you wouldn’t be either successful or

happy in it. You may feel overwhelmed in the position, then have to start the job hunt all over again. So, in that case, you're better off getting a "no." Always accept the "no" answer as a sign that the job wasn't right for you.

In addition, every "no" gets you one step closer to the "YES" that's out there waiting for you.

Plus, with each "no" you might hear along the way, you're gaining valuable job seeking experience which will make you better prepared for the next job search. One way to get the most out of not getting the job is to ask the employer, after they've made their decision to hire someone else, if they would give you some "constructive feedback" on your application or interview. This way, you can improve in your next job application. When you make this request, do so without any feelings of regret or anger about the outcome. Congratulate the employer on getting the right person, and thank them for considering you. By asking them for feedback about what they noticed during this process, the employer may even recommend you for another job at either their organization or elsewhere because you will have impressed them with your zeal to improve.

This is networking at a high level.

Networking

What is networking? Networking is the art of communicating to people what you want. In a professional development context (the purpose of this book) it's telling people something about yourself which includes information about your ambition for a particular job.

It's amazing how well this works. There seems to be a fundamental truth that people want to help other people get what they want – at least, when they like somebody and if they can. We're social animals. We want to be of assistance to those we like. It makes us feel good about ourselves when we are able to help someone else who seems deserving of our help. If helping that other person also helps us in our personal or professional lives, we are that much more willing to lend and

This is the underlying principle of the art of networking. This is why networking is so important and why it works. When you tell people (always in a nice and appealing way) that you're hoping to begin a career in a particular field, the listener is going to naturally want to share with you any information or ideas they may have which might help you. This information can come from almost anyone, including family, neighbors, teachers, friends, employers and even strangers.

It's amazing where job "leads" or great tips about job vacancies will come from – so tell everyone (even your classmates and teachers) what you want to do for a career. Every time we taught our "Professional Development and Disability" class, we began by introducing ourselves to each other. As a part of these introductions, students told the class about their career ambitions. Invariably, about 20% of the time, upon hearing a student mention a particular profession or career ambition, another student would speak up and say something like, "Oh, I have an uncle who works in that field, give me a call and I'll introduce you." Of course, it wasn't always an uncle – sometimes there was another family member, a friend, or even a friend's family member – but there was always a connection.

So, tell everyone about your career ambition with the idea that the more people you tell, the greater the chance that someone will reveal an important contact. Now, you're networking!

In addition to being outspoken about your career goals, be sure to observe the other two key elements of making this strategy work for you. First, be likeable. Try to establish some sort of connection with the person you're networking with. It could be as simple as a smile, a compliment, or even just saying what a lovely day it is (if that's true). Even an observation about bad weather will help to establish your likeability. Be sure to use the "executive presence" skills discussed in Lesson 1 above.

Also, if you are currently a student in school, understand that you have a built-in likeability factor. People want to help students. The mere fact that you are a student is likeable and appealing because everyone you'll be networking with was a student once and they appreciate the transition-to-employment phase you're about to enter. That in mind, they'll probably want to help you in some way. So if you are a student, let that be known in order to gain this natural support.

Since the subject of being a student has come up, understand the even bigger value of currently being a student has to your employment search. Too many (most) students rationalize that they should wait until they finish or graduate from school before they begin to look for work (including using networking as a job-hunting tool). Or they think that school was hard and they should take a long and well-deserved rest before starting to look for a job. That's absolutely the worst thing you can do to yourself. If you play it that way, you're disadvantaging yourself. Understand that for each month you're out of school and not yet working, your attractiveness as a job candidate will likely get lower and lower, making it harder and harder for you to get a job. It will be harder because employers often view people who don't yet have jobs as job applicants that others have passed over and didn't want (whether from a bad application or bad interview). So, if other people didn't view the unemployed applicant as worthwhile, why would they? The more time that passes before you start your job search and networking activities, the increasingly less desirable you might become to a potential employer. Conversely, as a student soon to be leaving school, you are a "hotter prospect" because you haven't been tagged as someone who has not been working a significant period of time. With that in mind, start networking early and apply to jobs during your final semester in school instead of waiting; because the hiring process takes time, just look for jobs that will begin after you graduate or tell the employer that you will be ready once you finish school.

Your virtual look

Social media is a great way to connect with family and friends; also, it's fun. We use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and other social media platforms to express ourselves every day.

People spend more time on social networks than on any other category of sites—roughly 20-30 percent of their total time online. Most people aged 25–34 use social networking at work (whether they are allowed to or not).

Social media is a good place to connect with others as well as present ourselves to the world. However, this "golden" opportunity has both its good and bad sides. We must be alert about each.

The good news about social media and your professional development (networking, look for a job and advancing your professional reputation) is these networks can market your capabilities and impress prospective employers. This is especially true about “LinkedIn” and other job-oriented sites. Those are the first places you should begin your employment campaign to market yourself for employment. The establishing of a professional looking and sounding profile will impress prospective employers and customers alike.

Conversely, a not-so-professional looking social media presence will work against your ability to market yourself successfully for employment.

Imagine that you have just met a prospective employer and you’re off to a good start by making a good first impression. You give the interested employer your resume (and it looks terrific) and they tell you, “Let me look at your resume and I’ll give you a call.” How promising, how exciting, you’re on your way!

Well, that call never comes. You never hear from that employer again. What happened? What probably or may have happened is that employer did what most employers are doing these days. They digitally checked you out. They went to your social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and both read what you had to say and looked at the pictures you posted. Unfortunately, for you, you trusted those “privacy settings” and never imagined that any potential employer would ever see your social media sites. So, you gleefully posted the photographs of you chugging a beer at the fraternity party. And of course, you didn’t look so professional in the picture. Plus, the irresponsible comments you added to the picture about the wild party probably didn’t help your cause either.

This social media background checking by employers is often called “digital stalking.” Employers want to know as much as they can about prospective hires because hiring staff is the most important decision they’ll ever make. If they hire well, a manager will get their work done and look great to *their* boss. If they hire a “party animal” with an apparent drinking problem, and then it affects the company’s image or the new hire simply isn’t effective, the manager will look bad to their boss and might even lose their job.

Given what’s at stake, and the ability they (or the investigators they contract) have to bypass your “privacy settings,” you must begin to realize your possible digital weaknesses.

According to an Ohio State study, 91% of employers admit to reviewing their job applicant’s social media sites as a part of their screening process. Another study on this subject by “Career Builder” reported that 60% of employers review applicants’ social media sites to confirm what their resume says, 56% say their trying to see if job candidates “look professional,” and 61% say that they stopped considering job candidates as a result of their social media searches (because of an unfavorable impression). The top reasons which lead to unfavorable impressions were: 46% had inappropriate photos; 34% wrote negative things about prior employers, professors or their schools; and 29% make discriminatory comments related to race, ethnicity, religion or gender. And every day that passes sees increases in this activity by employers.

Knowing this, you can make social media work for you, not against you. As you begin your employment search, study your social media sites for postings and pictures that reveal the “dark” or nonprofessional side of you. Clean up your sites, just as you should clean yourself up for an interview. Another way to turn this potential liability into an asset is to post or tweet positive comments about your encounter with an employer after your meeting with them. For example, right after the meeting, tweet, “Met this fantastic employer and would be honored to get to work for them.” You don’t need to lie (never do), but if you really are excited about the new employer and the job, say so with a secret thought that they might read your positive comments.

So, social media is a force for good marketing and a danger zone for bad marketing. Now, you know what you need to do to make it (net)work for you.

Resumes

Here’s a subject that everyone has an opinion about. You can take even a “super” resume to anyone who pretends to know something about resumes and they’ll always tell you where it can be improved. Everybody is an expert (about what they like) and has an opinion.

The truth is there are no absolute truths about resumes. However, there are some general tips to follow which can help you approach the subject. Here they are.

- Have a resume – You need a resume as soon as possible. Don’t delay another minute. When you begin networking, the first thing a potential good contact will say to you is, “Send me your resume and we’ll talk some more.” If you don’t have one already prepared, by the time you might write one, this contact may have forgotten all about you and the opportunity will have passed. Many people delay the writing of their resume because they don’t think they have enough to say. Remember: just because you’ve written a resume now, doesn’t mean you can’t re-write it as new experiences and facts reveal themselves to you. So, write a resume immediately. Also, be sure to have two versions of that resume: 1) a print or hard copy resume and 2) one better suited for electronic usage and is digitally or computer friendly. What makes a resume computer friendly? It’s more “searchable” and scanner friendly but doesn’t need to look as flashy as a print version.
- Study and choose a resume format you like — There are dozens of great-looking resume formats on the internet to adopt as your own. Some document programs, like Microsoft Word, have resume formats built in. Just search them out and pick the one that looks the best to you. If you like it, it will both show your personality and encourage you to share it more freely.
- Create the resume content – Of course, having content is step one to developing a resume, but often the exact words you’ll use depend on the format you choose. The guidepost on how to develop the content for your resume is described in Lesson 3, “Workplace Proficiencies” (KSA’s & the “deeper” skills). With these prompts or tips in view, try to capture all the activities and experiences you’ve had in school, working (including summer and part-time jobs), volunteering, and/or from your life experience which serve to describe both your KSA’s and deeper skills. If

you follow the KSA format or table offered in Lesson 3, you will be matching your resume's description of you with the employers' wish list of qualities they want. Also, make sure you describe results, not just experiences. If you worked at a summer job writing a report, what was the outcome or result of your effort? Employers are impressed with results, not just accomplishments. Plus, keep the resume content short. Don't write long sentences. Take the extra time necessary to edit your copy down to only the important points. The interview is the time to expand on all the items in your resume. And lastly, if there are weak things in your resume, like significant periods when you did not work or had 5-6 jobs in 3 years, explain them on very briefly on your resume. If you don't mention good reasons why you have these gaps or other classic weaknesses, your resume is likely to be tossed.

- Create an attractive resume – It's not just enough to have great resume content; your resume also has to be presented or framed in a way that catch's the employer's eye. It's just like any other piece of advertising copy trying to capture the consumer's eye. When you apply for a job, your resume is likely to be reviewed in a stack of other applicant's resumes. Imagine there are 40-80 resumes in that pile and the employer is about to wade through them. The dull and boring looking resumes, no matter how impressive their content may be, are likely to be disadvantaged by not being visually attractive. In about 6-30 seconds, employers glance at a resume and decide whether or not to read it more carefully. So, makes your resume a piece of visual art and slow them down to want to read yours. Here's how:
 - ✓ Pick a theme with related graphics, type face and use a good paper quality. For example, if you're showcasing your talents as a problem solver, place colorful lemons in the margins and say, "I make lemonade out of lemons." If you're an engineer or architect, you might give your resume a "blueprint look" to it.
 - ✓ Know that when people glance at a page for the first time, they often begin by looking in the upper left-hand corner and glancing diagonally down the page to the lower right-hand corner. This is the valuable real estate in your resume. Begin your best fact or statement in the upper left hand corner of the page to slow the eye down.
 - ✓ Keep your resume short and to the point. Be specific. Don't go over one page.
 - ✓ ALWAYS re-write your resume to fit the actual job position description and/or vacancy job announcement you're applying for. Employers are creatures of habit: if you use the same words in your resume that appear in their job description and/or vacancy announcement, it makes it easier and more logical for them to take a closer look at you. Employers can also spot "generic" resumes easily, as well as especially generic statements-of-interest in longer job applications. Failure to tailor your resume content to fit the specific job you're being considered for makes applying a waste of time and may ensure your failure.

Here are some general tips on what not to do when writing your resume.

- ✓ Don't waste space with an "Employment Objective." Everybody knows that your employment objective is the job you're applying for at the moment. Plus, these statements get so lofty and vague that employers often laugh at them.
- ✓ Prioritize prior experiences that align well with the job you're applying for. If you need to save space, eliminate prior work experiences that aren't related to the job or career you're applying for.
- ✓ Do not include personal information like marital status, religious preference, phone numbers and social security numbers. Electronic resumes are search by criminals for personal information which might help them hack into your accounts. Instead, list your name and email so they might communicate with you via e-mail. And make sure to check your account for replies!
- ✓ Don't include a less-than-professional looking email account name like sugarpiehoneybunch@himail.com. Set up a new email account if needed (ideally one that includes your full name or a first/last name and the other initial). It takes minutes and it's free. This way, your identity is further protected and a professional email address can be crafted.
- ✓ Generally, don't let your resume exceed one page. In some situations, more is better, especially if that more is really great and important stuff. A second page will usually list any publications or projects that you have done, which turns your resume into more of a "CV."
- ✓ Don't list your outside-of-work interests, hobbies or sports.
- ✓ Don't list your birth year and give them the chance to guess your age.
- ✓ Don't write your resume in the third person – they know you wrote it. Write your information in bullet points, not sentences that require "I" or "employee."
- ✓ Don't include your current business contact info. Your boss might be upset that you're looking for work elsewhere. Some bosses will fire you if this is where you're heading.

There are two types of resumes to consider. They are:

Reverse chronological resume -- A reverse chronological resume lists a candidate's job experiences in reverse chronological order. So, the top job experience listed on the resume is the current one, next is the prior one, and so forth. Positions are listed with that job's start and end dates. The reverse chronological resume works to build the applicant's credibility through experience and increasing responsibility, while demonstrating career growth over time, as well as showing a steady employment history. A reverse chronological resume is not recommended when the job seeker may have wide gaps of unemployment in their career.

Here's an example of a reverse chronological resume for a student.

Prior Work Experiences

Aug 2017-Present Committee member of the Student Council

- New Membership Committee: Interview and select candidates
- Administrative Committee: Review conduct cases and advise on policy rules suggesting changes

August 2015-June 2016 Teacher's Aide at St. Mary's Elementary School

- Spanish Language Reading Tutor
- Worked with K-3rd grades students to improve their Spanish reading skills
- Developed 5 lesson plans and independently initiated a "Student Needs Assessment" survey
- Created 10 reading materials and 5 games to better engage students in learning

Functional resume -- A functional resume lists work experience and skills by skill areas or job functions. This type of resume format is used to focus on key professional skills that are specific to the type of job being sought. This type of resume emphasizes the person's professional competency instead of prior work experiences. The functional resume works well both for those with a wide range of prior work experiences or with little work history as it gives them a chance to focus more on what they know, their skills and abilities (KSAs). A functional resume is preferred for applications to jobs that require a very specific set of skills. A functional resume is a good method for highlighting relevant skills or experience, even those which were learned some time ago. Rather than focus on the length of time that has passed, the functional resume allows the reader to identify those skills right away.

Achievements

Research Information and Analyze Data

- Researched and implemented a new marketing campaign designed to promote campus student services to new students, which resulted in a 10% increase in their participation
- Collected research data for improving campus entertainment events, which resulted in a 14% increase in ticket sales
- Completed customer satisfaction survey for community theatre, which was used to create the next year's performance schedule

Manage People and Projects

- Organized and managed a team of 10 staff to re-organize the company's marketing campaign
- Successfully completed a year-long project which changed campus events team's strategic plan

Effective Communications

- Created marketing campaign materials for print, electronic (social media) and presentations to key official and groups
- Wrote press releases and articles which were published by school, local newspaper and other media outlets

Experience

- Senior Marketing Specialist, 2017 – Present
Hay Street Theatre, Berkeley, CA
- Activities Chair, Campus Event Planning Committee, 2015 – 2017
University of California, Berkeley
- Sales and Marketing Staff Member, 2013-2015
Berkeley Department Store
Berkeley, CA

Remember: there are plenty of people available to you to give you feedback on how to make your resume better, but only you can first write it. So, get started now. You can always improve it as you move forward, but you can't make it better if you don't have one to begin with.

Cover letters

Often, when you are applying for a specific job, it will become necessary (or required) for you to submit a cover letter with your resume or job application. Here are some tips on the art of crafting a winning cover letter.

First of all, think about the importance of the cover letter. It's not just a meaningless or boring requirement to be done. It's your chance to create a powerful and compelling short story about your experiences, qualities and passion for a specific job. It's likely that your cover letter will be read first – and if it's poor or dull, that might end your chances for the job. So, you must put as much thought and effort into your cover letter as you do in preparing the resume or job application.

Think of the cover letter as your first chance to be evaluated and considered (and it may be your only chance if it's not so good).

Here some important considerations in its preparation.

Make it interesting to read. Tell an interesting story about yourself. Tell it briefly. The letter should be one page if possible, but no more than two. Remember the reality that it takes more time to write a short, meaningful and powerful letter than it does to write a long one. So, put the time in that's required to get it just right. Be sure to have someone else read and review it with you.

As already mentioned, you should adjust your resume to best match the specific job you might be seeking. Similarly, always customize your cover letter to match the specific requirements of the job being sought. Read the job vacancy announcement or job description and actually use some of their language in your cover letter to build your case. Don't just use the same cover letter for every job – employers can spot a “generic” cover letter a mile away.

The cover letter (not the resume) is the chance to make your sales pitch on why you might be a great candidate for the job. Be sure to make your claim in a good way. Be a good bragger (see Lesson 1 the “Art of Bragging”). Be sure to back up your claims with examples such as related experiences and accomplishments or results. And write your letter in the first person (“I have experiences in...”).

Always express a passion for the line of work involved as well as an enthusiasm for the job you are seeking. Employers like to know you might be bringing those added dimensions to the workplace. Such qualities are worth a great deal to them and can help you get picked for an interview.

Target the letter to a person, not “To Whom it May Concern.” Almost all vacancies identify a person to send your resume or application to and that might be the person to whom you should address the letter. Better still, if you can determine who the actual hiring manager is, address your cover letter to him or her. Also, if you know someone at the company or organization who may have encouraged you to apply, mention this person's name. Do so in a way that expresses both some familiarity with the person as well as appreciation for their encouragement.

Lastly, if you don't have the time to prepare a cover letter, and none is required or suggested, you would be better served not to submit a hastily-prepared one. Of course, if it's required, follow the suggestions above and put the time in it that it deserves.

The art of the interview

The interview is an art form.

It's a performance.

The employer has a script of questions to ask you; and you, as the person being interviewed, must also have prepared and practiced your lines in reply. As is true with any performance, in order to be successful, you must create, edit, practice and learn your lines before the curtain rises. No actor takes the stage without a script and rehearsing. Nor should you before a job interview.

Far too many job candidates think they can show up at the job interview, without any preparation, and perform to the best of their ability. Too many job applicants think that they'll be able to spontaneously listen to the employer's interview questions and make up their answer on the spot. They further fool themselves into believing that these answers will be their best work. Unfortunately, this approach to the interview is likely to end in disaster and no job offer. Don't make this mistake – prepare like you would for a stage performance. Only with a lot of preparation and practice will you be at your best. And you must be at your best to have a strong chance to get the job.

Preparation and practice

After you apply for an advertised or open job you want, you should immediately begin to plan what you will want to say during a possible interview. Make notes while you wait to see if you'll be getting an interview. Don't wait for the interview invitation before you start this process, as often the interview appointment will happen only a few days after the notice may arrive. So, use your time wisely.

Begin your preparation by studying the job's vacancy announcement and/or position description, as well as general facts about the organization or company involved. Learn as much as you can about the job you're going after before an interview gets scheduled.

When you study the job vacancy announcement or position description, you'll find key information about the job which will become the basis for anticipating and preparing for your interview questions. Here's an example of a job duties listing for a budget analyst position which should be reviewed, understood and establish the basis for your preparation for your job interview.

Duties

- The primary purpose of this position is to serve as a budget analyst performing a variety of budget functions involving the formulation, execution, and/or analysis of budgets and provide financial management services.
- Formulates and justifies major segments of the department's budget, including all acquisition and annual service contracts. Performs multi-year budget formulation work involving

preparation of detailed analyses and estimates for assigned organizations/programs into a consolidated budget request for one or more future budget years.

- Performs budget execution and administration work involving the monitoring of obligations incurred and the actual expenditures of a budget with different sources and types of funding, such as direct annual, multi-year, and no-year appropriations; apportionments; allotments; transfer of funds from other agencies; reimbursements and refunds.
- Provides advice, assistance, and guidance on budgeting and related information. Devises and recommends the adoption of procedures to implement budgetary processes, policies, and regulations issued by headquarters.
- Conducts analyses, reviews and special studies of budgets and/or related information.
- Develops and prepares necessary correspondence, documentation, budget policy papers, reports, training materials, and special projects. Specifically, prepares exhibits for annual Execution Plans, Budget Execution Reports and Program Objective Memorandum inputs.
- Protects classified information.

When studying the vacancy announcement and the job description, seek to identify the key responsibilities and tasks that are involved. Make a list of all of them because you're likely to be asked questions about your ability to perform them. Also, make notes about the current status of the office or department where the job is located, the organization's mission statement, as well as the general circumstances facing the organization. To this end, study their website and search the internet for articles and information about the organization's latest news and developments. Take a look at any trends in their industry if you have time: an Internet search, following the right news sources, or even downloading some podcasts are good places to start.

Next, alongside the job/company-specific information you have gathered during your research effort, add the listing of top general skills employers are known to be looking for such as:

- ✓ Ability to work in a team structure
- ✓ Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization
- ✓ Ability to make decisions and solve problems
- ✓ Ability to obtain and process information
- ✓ Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work
- ✓ Ability to analyze quantitative data
- ✓ Proficiency with computer software programs
- ✓ Ability to create and/or edit written reports
- ✓ Ability to sell to or influence others

In addition, consider adding a listing of classic or typical job interview questions to those indicated by the study steps above. Here's a sample of these types of questions you might add – also remember that employers often follow general questions by asking for specific examples, so keep some stories on hand.

Frequently Asked Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your background and how it qualifies you for this job.
3. Why do you want to work for our organization?
4. How do you think you can make a contribution here?
5. If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you ask about?
6. What do you know about our organization?
7. Why did you leave your last job? Your last three jobs?
8. What do you look for in a supervisor?
9. Can you explain any gaps in your work history, if there are any?
10. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
11. What personal qualities make you stand out?
12. What you find most/least attractive about this position?
13. What motivates you to do a good job?
14. How do you organize or prioritize your work?
15. How well do you handle pressure?
16. Have had any challenges getting along with your supervisors? Coworkers?
17. How do you handle criticism?
18. What was one of your major accomplishments or achievements?
19. What have you invented or created to find a new solution?
20. Tell me about a time you had to take a chance and risk your job or position for the greater good of your cause or organization.

And, lastly, come to realize that every question that an employer asks a job applicant centers on one single question. That core concern or question is, “What can you do for me?” In the end, this is the heart of the interview, so approach any and all questions with this most important concern upper-most in mind as you give your answers.

While you should prepare yourself to answer all the questions suggested above, be careful about the last three (18, 19 & 20).

With regard to question #18, part of what the interviewer is looking for is your sense to teamwork. When you answer this question, be sure to use the pronouns “we” and “us” at least as much as you use the word “I.” Show your sense of teamwork, even at the expense of sounding more powerful.

Question #19 is looking for an answer that shows you have the ability to think and act “outside of the box” or are able to find solutions in new and innovative ways. You don’t need to have invented a robot to do your homework. Rather, look for examples of where you may have devised a new and different approach to correcting a problem or situation.

Question #20 is about passion. Develop an answer which shows that you have the courage to take a chance to do something bold because you care more about the good of an organization rather than

protecting yourself. It's designed to see if you have the passion to succeed which is greater than your instinct to survive.

Behavioral Interviewing Questions:

An increasingly used interviewing technique is called "behavioral Interviewing". It's considered by many employers as the most effective type of interviewing technique for nearly any type of organization. Behavioral interviewing focuses on a candidate's past experiences by asking candidates to provide specific examples of how they have demonstrated certain behaviors (knowledge, skills and abilities) in key performance areas.

It is believed that behavioral interviewing is the most accurate predictor of future performance since it measures past performance in similar situations. You should be ready to respond to these types of questions.

Here are some behavioral interview questions based on some of the top ten (10) qualities that employers generally look for in job candidates.

Q1: Describe a time when you were working on a team, and you and another team member did not agree on how to proceed. How did you handle this (teamwork)?

- What did you do/say to bridge the difference?
- Did you reach a compromise?
- What was the result?

Q2: Tell me about a time when you realized you weren't able to complete an assignment for your supervisor by deadline. How did you handle this (solve problems)?

- How did you communicate this to your supervisor?
- When did you communicate this?
- What was the outcome? (When was it completed?)

Q3: Tell me about a project you had to complete with multiple stakeholders. How did you keep them updated on progress (plan, organize and prioritize work)?

- Tell me more about your communications with the stakeholders.
- Tell me more about how and when you updated them.
- What was the outcome?

Q4: Tell me about a time when you knew that your customer might not get what he or she needed on time. How did you handle this (sell or influence others)?

- Tell me how you communicated with the customer.
- What did you do?
- What was the result?

Understand that certain job-specific questions are likely to be also asked depending on the job opportunity – and it’s important to prepare for these ones as well. Using the information about the budget analysis position example above, here’s a good guess on the job interview questions to anticipate and prepare for:

1. Tell me about yourself (education background, work experiences and career goals).
2. What are your strengths? And what are your weaknesses?
3. Tell me about your ability to formulate, execute, and analyze budgets as well as provide financial management services.
4. What experience have you had formulating and justifying budgets?
5. Why do you want to work for this department and organization?
6. What kind of a workplace culture do you like?
7. Give me examples of working in teams. What do you or don’t you like about teams?
8. How would you handle the situation where you discovered that money was not appropriately handled?
9. What questions do you have for me (your interviewer)?

From all of the information above, you are now in a good position to begin to create a listing of anticipated questions that you might be asked in the interview. It’s really not that hard to anticipate job interview questions when you analyze the job description and vacancy announcement.

While the lists above suggests many possible questions, these groups and types of questions can be distilled down to a more manageable number, depending on the specific position you are applying for. Still, test yourself on all of the possible questions suggested above, because while you can trim this listing down somewhat, it’s a great idea to have prepared some kind of a response for them all. That way, you will give yourself a competitive edge over the other applicants who might prepare less thoroughly.

The purpose of this preparation strategy is to identify the most likely potential questions you will be asked for a specific job, so that you can more easily answers those expected question. It’s like knowing what the questions are going to be on a final exam. If you know them in advance and prepare for them, you’ll be ready to get an “A” on the exam. With serious preparation, you’ll be able to get close to guessing what the interview questions will be. And that’s a great advantage to your performance in the interview. Plus, preparing like this even helps you to manage your nerves because you’ve increased your self-confidence.

The next step in the process is to write down your answers to these anticipated questions. Yes, write them out. The value in doing this is it gives you an opportunity to re-think, re-consider, and add onto that written answer as you continue to consider your best answer. By writing your answer, you can engage in a process of continually improving your answer. Since it’s in writing, you have your prior thoughts documented, which makes your editing and improving process more productive. You’ll have a written answer and when your read it a day or two later, or ask someone else to read it, that new perspective will help you get better and better with your answer.

The act of writing also creates “memory muscle” which makes key thoughts come more readily to mind because your eyes, hands, and thoughts essentially memorize your written statements. Of course, when you enter the interview, DO NOT try to say these points as written. Say them in your own words of the moment. Your answers will sound more fluid and natural, and not rehearsed. Plus, if you try to memorize and repeat your answers and get lost, that’s likely not to end well (ouch).

Following the strategy above will greatly increase the likelihood that you’ll get the job. And even if you don’t, you won’t feel as badly because you will know that you did your very best.

Take the stage

Okay, you’ve prepared well for the interview. Now, it’s time to enter the interview room. It’s show time!

- ✓ Dress and groom yourself appropriately. It’s always best to err on the side of caution and look extra-professional, even if you think the office might have more of a business-casual dress code.
- ✓ Practice the “over the top” (OTT) exercise (mentioned at the end of Lesson 1 above) before your leave home. By doing so, you will start the interview at your peak performance, just like those athletes who “rah-rah” themselves (OTT) before their game begins.
- ✓ Be on-time. No, don’t be “right on-time.” BE EARLY! Plan to get to the interview location 20-30 minutes early. If you need to wait in the lobby for 20-30 minutes, that’s a great time to settle yourself and control any nervousness by reviewing your key talking points, getting comfortable in the space and knowing you’re there on-time. Your interviewers might have tight schedules, so they may appreciate starting early as well – and in that case, they will also have time to ask you extra questions if they really like you.
- ✓ From the minute the location for the interview comes into view, start smiling and looking confident. Continue to carry that attitude until you leave the building and are well out of sight. You never know who might see you on your way in or out: you’ll get extra points if another team member asks the interviewers, “Who was that upbeat candidate?”
- ✓ Be pleasant to all you meet, especially on way into the interview room. Interviewers love to ask the receptionist who greeted you, “What did you think of that applicant?” So, be sure to leave a good impression with everyone you see. You never know who’s watching and reporting.
- ✓ When you’re invited into the interview room, enter with a smile and a warm and heartfelt greeting. Say something human and friendly like, “Thank you very much for seeing me today.”
- ✓ When the interview is over, be sure to say, “thank you” – but also say something professional like, “I wish you the best in your search for the right employee” or “I really enjoyed our meeting, this sounds like a terrific place to work.”

One last point

You probably noticed that the last question in the sample listing of possible interview questions for the example budget analyst position was, “What questions do you have for me (your interviewer)?”

This is a very important time for you to show your initiative and desire for the position by asking relevant and insightful questions of the interviewer.

Here are a few possible questions you might ask of the interviewer.

- “If I’m lucky enough to get this job, what tasks or projects will I be first asked to undertake?” The answer may tell you more about how well-suited you are for this position. Plus, the answer may spark something else you might want to say about your qualifications for the position.
- “What do you (the interviewer) like about working for this organization?” This can tell you a good deal about what it’s like to work here.
- “What possibilities are there for training in your company?” It is important to show any prospective employee that you are the type of person who is interested in growing and improving.
- “Is there anything you have seen in the other candidates which you have not seen in me?” The answer may give you a chance to say something more about that missing piece of your qualifications. Or, it may help you improve your performance in the future.
- “What is your timeline for making a decision and announcing the results of this process?” This can be especially useful information to know if you are applying for multiple jobs. Knowing the timeline between the decision and the hiring date also helps when notifying a current employer that you will be changing jobs.
- “Is my application complete? Is there anything else I can submit to you that might help?” If your application is complete, then congratulations – and if something is missing, get it to the potential employer as soon as you can.

By asking serious questions like these, you will appear more professional and a more worthy candidate.

Avoid asking questions about salary, benefits and working conditions at this point in the process. Save those technical questions for when you might be offered the job. You will be in a better position to ask such questions then. It will also be useful if you have multiple job offers and need to compare them – or negotiate a higher salary from the lower-paying opportunity.

Remember, the job interview is a complex encounter. It’s unlike anything else you may have ever experienced before. You want to present yourself as the best candidate possible; at the same time, it is also a great opportunity to learn about a potential job as you are making a major life change.

Further illustrating these points and appearing below are the typical questions going on in the interviewer’s mind as they evaluate a job applicant during an interview. These six (6) different sets of concerns or questions are not likely to be asked of you directly, but they are what the interviewer will be thinking about when scoring your answers to the questions they ask out loud. Be prepared to answer both the specific questions asked, as well as the remaining “unasked questions” below. Find ways to weave into your responses to the asked questions answers to the unasked ones below. Imagine these thought bubbles are in the room with you, waiting for you to address them.



1. PERSONALITY & STYLE

Do I like you? (Are you the right fit for our workforce?)

Are you professional?



2. SPIRIT

Do you have passion for the job? Do you want the job?

Do you have loyalty & integrity?

Do you have self-confidence & humility?



3. QUALITIES

- Do you have ability to work in a team structure?
- Do you have ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization?
- Do you have ability to make decisions and solve problems?
- Do you have ability to obtain and process information?
- Do you have ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work?
- Do you have ability to analyze facts and data?
- Are you good with technology/computers?
- Do you have ability to create and/or edit written reports?
- Do you have ability to sell to or influence others (leadership)?



4. KSA's

What are your job specific related
Knowledge, **S**kills & **A**bilities?

5. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Did you answer the questions I asked?
- Were your answers good?

6. DISABILITY

- How can you do this job with your disability?
- Disability accommodations are expense, aren't they?
- If I hire this person, what will my boss, fellow workers or customers say about my hiring decision?
- I have other job candidates without disabilities, why don't I just get to the next applicant?

Get ready for your job interview by studying, preparing and practicing what you want to say about yourself during the interview in a way which also tries to answer all the questions above.

Lesson 6 — Workplace Pathways to Employment (resources to assist you with your employment)

When we consider the various “pathways to employment” in this section, it’s important make the point that not all people with disabilities are the same. One size doesn’t fit all. The programs that are listed below may not be well-suited for some individuals with disabilities. For example, many post-secondary education (junior/community college, 4-year college, or graduate schools) options may not be available to some of our friends with disabilities. The entrance requirements may be restrictive or the instructional methods being used may not be effective for them. The same consideration about suitability may be said about most of the “pathways” or programs reviewed below.

Does that mean they have little value or few opportunities for some of our friends with disabilities?

Not necessarily.

Where such doubts arise or when little potential for help seems probable in these “pathways,” please dig deeper into them before giving up on them.

For example, some post-secondary education programs may offer courses for nontraditional students. Some have begun offering courses for students with intellectual disabilities who have never been accommodated before in post-secondary schools. Here’s one place to start your search for a post-secondary program which may have the needed accommodations in place:

<https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>. And, if your area’s post-secondary college doesn’t have these adjustments in place, the examples in this website might encourage those that don’t to start such a program.

In addition, there are several variations in many employment services which may also open up the seemingly closed doors to the “pathways” or programs listed below.

The first is something called “supported employment.”

Supported employment is based on the principle that individuals with severe disabilities have the right to be competitively employed where they can earn comparable wages, work side-by-side with co-workers with or without disabilities, as well as experience all the same benefits as other employees. Supported employment assists people with severe disabilities by providing individualized supports that enable them to choose the kind of job they want and to become successful members of the workforce.

Supported employment programs offer job coaches who work directly with their clients to help ensure a successful placement and ongoing workplace performance. The coaching can include assistance with finding job opportunities, completing job applications, practicing interviews, organizing transportation, and providing supports with disability-related workplace needs and accommodations.

Accessing supported employment services may vary by state, but the typical path is either through county Developmental Disabilities programs or through federally-funded Vocational Rehabilitation agencies (possibly referred to as VR, DVR, DOR or DRS in your state). Some states have separate Vocational Rehabilitation agencies for persons who are blind.

Here is more information on supported employment:
<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/rsasupemp/index.html>

Another employment program variation which may be more appropriate for some individuals with disabilities is “customized employment.”

Customized employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on an individualized match between the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Customized Employment utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development: one person at a time and one employer at a time. Customized employment will often include:

- **Task reassignment:** Some of the job tasks of incumbent workers are reassigned to a new employee. This reassignment allows the incumbent worker to focus on the critical functions of his/her job (i.e., primary job responsibilities) and complete more of the central work of the job. Task reassignment typically takes the form of job creation, whereby a new job description is negotiated based on other current, unmet workplace needs.
- **Job carving:** An existing job description is modified — containing one or more, but not all, of the tasks from the original job description.
- **Job sharing:** Two or more people share the tasks and responsibilities of a job based on each other's strengths.

Less common, though becoming more established throughout the country, is Self-Employment as a form of Customized Employment. Self-Employment allows for an individual to receive assistance in the creation of an independently-owned small business (typically a micro-enterprise with fewer than five employees) based on the strengths and dreams of an individual and the unmet needs of a local market, while incorporating the individualized planning and support strategies needed for success.

Here's more information on “customized employment”:
<http://www.leadcenter.org/customized-employment>

So, if at first your area's disability-related and general employment programs, which appear below, are not suitable to your needs, think about how they might incorporate elements of the strategies above which would help. Since your area's programs may not yet have been prompted this way before, start from the premise that they are committed (ethically and by law) to serve all eligible participants – then push them to change for the better. Advocacy to this end can be very effective, especially when these more general programs are shown examples of their counterparts (locally or in other areas) already making appropriate program adjustments.

With that said, here are the general “pathways to employment” to consider as you attempt to transition to the world of work.

Transition programs

At the high school or secondary school level, there are educational staff members employed who specialize in transition planning for students with disabilities and have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The purpose of these teachers or staff is to assist students with their transitional planning from school to either the next education level or a job and the workplace.

The legal framework establishing and guiding these transition services is the set of implementing regulations of the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>) These regulations say:

The purposes of this part are “To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living;” [34 CFR §300.1(a)].

Transition services are designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation” [34 CFR §300.43 (a) (1)].

According to a study by Asselin, Todd-Allen and Sharon deFur, published in the Teaching Exceptional Children Journal, the following list shows the types of duties and services which transition coordinators often provide a local school system. Of course, there will be variations from school district to school district.

School Activities

- Disseminate transition information to teachers/administrators
- Assist families, parents, and students to access transition services
- Serve as a liaison between vocational/trade schools and special education teachers to monitor student progress
- Facilitate appropriate referrals to school-based programs
- Assist school staff in interpreting assessment results and recommending appropriate placements
- Assist vocational teachers in adapting curriculum

Interagency/Business Linkages

- Identify, establish, and maintain linkages with community agencies and businesses or local employers
- Facilitate student referrals to other agencies
- Link students with postsecondary special support coordinators

Assessment and Career Counseling

- Identify and refer students for vocational assessment within the school
- Identify and refer students for vocational assessments at regional centers
- Coordinate the development of career awareness and explore activities as part of the career counseling process

Transition Planning

- Identify transition services provided by other community agencies
- Attend/participate in team and IEP meetings
- Assist in planning and placement decisions
- Identify appropriate assistive technology
- Monitor adherence to federal laws

Education and Community Training

- Train special education teachers and employers to understand the need for self-advocacy
- Coordinate school and community work-based learning opportunities
- Identify job placements
- Develop community-based training and sites and school-based training
- Implement job support services for work adjustment and success
- Manage/coordinate job coaches
- Coordinate community-based instruction
- Coordinate teaching of daily living skills
- Examine/identify postsecondary training and education options

Family Support and Resource

- Develop and provide parent training
- Promote understanding of laws, eligibility requirements, availability of services
- Assist students/families in understanding the system and accessing services

While you're in high school, it's extremely important that you take advantage of these services in order to get your career planning efforts underway. These services can not only help with employment: they can assist and guide you to further educational opportunities.

Post-secondary education

Higher, post-secondary, tertiary or third-level education is the stage of learning that occurs at universities, academies, colleges and institutes of technology. Higher education also includes certain college-level institutions, such as vocational schools, trade schools, and career colleges, which award academic degrees or professional certifications.

After high school (secondary school), there is whole array of additional education opportunities available for you to consider. It's always a good idea to begin to think about these options while you're in high school. Of course, many people wait and may work for some time after high school before they consider their options for a post-secondary degree. Whenever you begin to consider these options, there are at least two important strategies to follow.

First, think about what type of work you might want to pursue. Examine your vocational or career interests. Some ways to do this is to consider what kind of work seems most appealing to you. Obviously, if you like certain types of work, you'll be both happier and more successful in them. Explore Think about your favorite subjects in school and which careers they might point towards, or take summer or online courses in a sampling of areas to test your true interest in them. You may also want to take various vocational or occupational tests or assessments to see how you do (never let the results of these test make the decision for you – make it for yourself). Or you could simply surf the internet for jobs and careers and see what seems to interest you. In short, engage in various career exploration activities like these. If you're not sure, that's fine: most people don't know which types of jobs or what fields they would be happiest working in, and many people discover new interests while in post-secondary education that lead to successful careers.

Second, with some broad understanding or preferences learn by you, seek more information from others who know more about the fields and occupations you may have identified. Ask people in those fields to tell you more about them. Ask your school or career counselors for information about them. You might even seek summer jobs, part-time work or internships in these fields to test your interest in committing to a particular occupation.

The Career Plan which is in the next Lesson below will further help with these considerations or thoughts.

It's important that you do this preliminary work before you explore your post-secondary education options. Post-secondary schools cost money (unless you get a generous scholarship and/or help from Vocational Rehabilitation). As always, you should not buy something you don't want or need. The same is true with the spending of your money for tuition and fees for a postsecondary program.

Having said that, many people go on to a post-secondary education without a clear focus on a career goal. In fact, most young people just don't know themselves well enough yet or understand the types of occupational options available to them, yet still go on to a post-secondary education program to get more education, take a range of courses, and continue to consider their career options. The truth is that most people can't really make up their minds about what work they would most want to do for a long-term career until they've experimented with various jobs. For young adults, college internships and summer jobs are a great way to do just that. So going on to college and getting a degree will likely serve you well in whatever becomes your chosen field of work, especially because more job opportunities open up with a post-secondary degree or certification; taking on summer jobs and internships will only further build your resume and expand your career horizons.

In addition, going to college exposes students to new subjects and, in turn, new fields which may lead to answers about work might be interesting to them. So post-secondary education can work for you either way, with or without a career goal in mind.

Generally, the vocational or trade schools work better for you if they are related to your career goals, and colleges and universities may be a better course to follow when you're still exploring career possibilities or if your chosen career requires a "conventional" bachelor's degree (or a graduate-level degree like a Master's, PhD, medical degree, or a JD from law school).

In the end, talk to your school's counselor, family and friends for advice on how best to proceed with this option. If you already have a job but want to go back to school, you may talk with coworkers or even your boss to get their thoughts. Whatever you do, don't spend your post-secondary dollars on a program that doesn't make sense for you. Make a good investment. Seek long-term value.

Speaking of value, here are some interesting facts about the value of a post-secondary education.

Of course, how much education you receive should always be based on your personal factors such as your abilities, desires, resources, and career ambitions. Still, you should understand the average potential earning gains associated with pursuing post-secondary education. You should never continue your education just for the money suggested by the data below; however, if you can and want to continue your education after high school, there are increased financial rewards possible around such an investment.

Consider these facts.

On average, college graduates earn \$2.2 million during their careers versus \$1.3 million for High School graduates with no college.

A college student's focus of study (major and/or minor) has impacts on potential life time earnings. For example, on average, an education major has the potential to earn \$1.8 million during their careers. Arts majors can expect to earn about \$2 million. Financial majors earn \$3.1 million.

On average, those with master's degrees earn \$2.8 million in average lifetime earnings. Doctorate degree holders take home an average of \$3.2 million. People with professional degrees (law, medicine, etc.) average \$3.6 million.

Plus, know that during this nation's last recession, even though the number of jobs lost has returned, most of these jobs now require some post-secondary education.

Another interesting fact about the last recession was that 7 percent of job seekers with at least a bachelor's degree were unemployed, while three times as many (24 percent) of those with only a high school diploma were unemployed.

In the mid-1970s, less than 30 percent of jobs in America required any education beyond high school. Today, the majority of U.S. jobs require a post-secondary degree or credential. This shift has happened

quickly and continues to rise every year.

Again, don't be driven by these facts alone; just be informed by them as you make your choice which educational options might be best for you.

If post-secondary is the right choice for you, know that how you take advantage of your educational experience has an impact on potential work earnings. Of course, grade and majors matter. But, there's more to getting the most out of college.

A 2014 survey taken by the Gallup-Purdue Index of 30,000 college graduates attempted to identify factors which enhanced students' potential for success in employment.

(<https://www.gallup.com/services/176768/2014-gallup-purdue-index-report.aspx>) This study identified the "Big Six" college experiences that "increase the odds the graduates will be engaged at work." The study showed that graduates were anywhere between 1.8 and 2.2 times more likely to be engaged at work if they had one of these experiences in their post-secondary program, depending on the experience; they were a full 3 times more engaged in their jobs if they had all six (although only 3% did). Employers are becoming increasingly aware of these factors and might even ask you if you experienced them while you were in college. This is one more way for employers to predict your potential for success with their organizations and, in turn, for you to improve your competitive edge.

So, if you do invest in post-secondary education, be sure to try to experience some or all of these factors. The factors in the chart below are as follows: find a professor who made you excited about learning; have a professor who cares about you; find an encouraging mentor; work on a project that takes a semester or longer to complete; find an internship that helps you apply what you are learning; be extremely active on extra-curricular activities.

<u>"Big Six" Experience</u>	<u>Odds of being engaged at work if graduates had this experience</u>	<u>Strongly agree they had this experience</u>
Had at least one professor who made them excited about learning	2.0x higher	63%
Had professors who cared about them as a person	1.9x higher	27%
Had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams	2.2x higher	22%
<i>All of first 3</i>	<i>2.3x higher</i>	<i>14%</i>
Worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete	1.8x higher	32%
Had an internship or job that allowed them to apply what they were learning in the classroom	2.0x higher	29%
Was extremely active in extracurricular activities or organizations	1.8x higher	20%
<i>All of second 3</i>	<i>2.4x higher</i>	<i>6%</i>
<u>All 6</u>	<u>3.0x higher</u>	<u>3%</u>

Remember, your decision about further post-secondary education should be based on personal factors such as your abilities, desires, resources and ambitions. If you enroll in post-secondary education, though, pursue these experiences: find good professors, seek out a mentor, start a long-term project, get an internship, and sign up for extracurricular activities and organizations. You don't have to do all 6, but each one is likely to improve your career in the long-term.

Lastly, if you do choose to enroll in a post-secondary education program, most of these programs have student career counseling centers which you should use to your advantage. Go and visit your campus's Career Center and learn what they have to offer. Most college career centers sponsor both "Career Fairs" and internship programs which are of great value. When you get involved with career fairs and Internship programs, here are tips on how to get the most out of these post-secondary employment resources.

Tips to get the most out of career fairs

Career fairs are special events (often once or twice a semester) which bring employers on campus to meet students who are beginning their search for employment. These employers are interested in meeting you because they know you are likely to have the basic skills they are looking for in their job applicants. They are looking to meet students about to graduate to fill full-time positions, or students earlier on in their education who may be interested in internships, summer jobs, or simply networking

for employment when they finish school. Career fairs have a similar look wherein each employer has a table, room or exhibit where they will be ready to meet students like you.

Do your homework and come prepared.

Before the fair, go to the sponsor's website (usually your Career Center) and review the online directory of employers who are coming. Note their job opportunities. If you spend a little time getting some background on the organizations that will be present, then you can ask very focused and specific questions. This will impress the employers you'll meet because it shows a genuine and thoughtful interest in them.

Dress appropriately. First impressions are very important. While campus attire may be acceptable for fairs, you will probably be more impressive if you at least dress in "business casual." Go early, and if you notice you're under-dressed, go back home and enhance your outfit to match or exceed what you see other candidates or students wearing. Remember, this is a competition.

Allow yourself adequate time. Again, come as early as possible. Typically, fairs are less crowded in early hours and are busiest during the lunch hour and at the end of the event. Come early, while traffic is light and the employers are fresh and attentive. That way, you'll get more of the employers' time and attention.

Also, when you go to a career fair, be sure to bring a dozen or more copies of your resume to give to the employers you may meet. Your resume will help the employer remember who you are and how to reach you later. Because you will be handing out your resume to a range of employers, you may want to include diverse types of skills and experiences – or even have multiple versions of your resume ready (for example, one version focused on technical skills and project work for scientific jobs, and one showing more community and student-group experiences for political or public-service work).

Upon arriving at a career fair, take a moment or two to get your bearings straight, as it's likely to be a loud and busy place. Review the map or directory for the fair. You may feel more comfortable first walking around and locating the employers you want to meet. This will confirm their location and alert you to any crowds or lines of students waiting to talk to the employer(s). This will help you manage your time better.

Prioritize the employers you're most interested in meeting. If your schedule allows, you may find it easiest to start with the least promising employer. This will give you the chance to practice your comments, which will make you more relaxed and confident when you approach the employers you're especially excited about meeting. Be sure to balance this practice tip with the reality that you may have little time and that many other students may be interested in the same employers you want to visit.

Be flexible. Some positions may no longer be available and other openings may have just emerged. No single employer representative is likely knowledgeable about all the positions available, especially in a large organization. If the employer does not know specifically about jobs/internships of interest to you,

ask for the name of someone who can help you. If you have other questions or concerns, be sure stop by the Career Center's information table or booth to ask.

When you meet an employer, introduce yourself using your workplace presence skills (Lesson 1). Smile, extend your hand, say "hello" and introduce yourself (state your name, major and job question). Welcome the representative to your school or campus. Have your resume ready to give to them when that moment might arise.

Take notes when you inquire about next steps and the possibility for follow-up with an employer. Try to learn about any information sessions, on-campus interviewing visits and projected hiring dates that they have planned.

Ask the employer representative for his/her card, and then promptly send a thank-you e-mail or note to him or her to keep the relationship building.

Respect employers' materials/sample items at their table or booth. Always ask employers before taking any materials from their tables.

Be courteous. In addition to representing yourself, you also represent your department and the college. Demonstrate sensitivity to other students waiting to speak with employers by keeping your questions brief and offering to continue your conversation at a later time.

Tips to get the most out of internships

The biggest regret or lament that recent college graduates tell us after they've left school and have been looking for that first job is: "While in school, I really should have taken a job or an internship in addition to my course load."

Well, unfortunately for them, this lesson was learned too late. However, you can benefit from their mistake by not making it yourself.

Get an internship!

Many students tell themselves that, because they've worked hard all school year, summer is a time for a well-earned rest. While they're resting, however, their fellow college students are engaged in summer internship work experiences which are building their skills and resumes, as well as helping them meet potential employers who often use the internship experience to decide who they want to hire permanently after graduation. Meanwhile, back at home, the relaxing students are not only resting during the summer break: they are also falling farther and farther behind the job competition race because the people who they'll be competing against are working during the work-week while still getting their rest on weekends. (That's not to say that students with summer jobs don't take a week or two between final exams and starting an internship to relax – but by working for *most* of the summer, they are getting ahead.)

Consider the fact that having professional work experiences, like an internship (or two or three), is a pre-requisite for many employers when deciding who to hire in entry-level jobs. Having work experiences

helps build the employers' confidence that you will be successful in your first job. You might be thinking, "Hey, the first job is my first job, and prior work experience seems illogical." A more accurate reaction is to re-define the idea of your first job as something other than full-time work after graduating. Think of your first job as your first internship, summer job or evening job. Add to that understanding the advantages of having several internships or summer jobs to be able to show your readiness to compete for your first permanent job.

At the very least, get any type of summer job. Even waiting tables will teach you those all-important workplace skills and values which can increase your attractiveness to a future employer. If you do wait tables, take a moment to chat with your customers about your work ambitions after college (of course, without interrupting their meals). That's networking – remember, employers love to dine out.

Plus, consider taking on internships associated with what you're studying in college. They can give you very relevant work experiences as well as academic or course credits for working.

Most of all, understand that internships are becoming the major pathway to employment for college graduates. A survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers showed that internships are an integral and critical part of getting your first job out of college. The survey finds that employers draw approximately 40 percent of their new college hires from the internship ranks and co-op programs. These figures demonstrate the central role that internships play in the overall college recruiting and hiring process.

Now, if you're serious about your future career, start looking for internships as soon as possible. Begin during your freshman summer vacation and continue every summer until graduation. Start beating your competition.

State Department of Rehabilitation

Every State and Territory has a State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR, DVS, or DOR). Many states (currently 15) have separate State Departments of Rehabilitation for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

These programs provide their state's residents with disabilities with a wide range of services designed to help them prepare for and engage in gainful employment consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

Eligible individuals are those who have a physical or mental impairment that results in a substantial impediment to employment, who can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services for employment, and who require these services. If a state is unable to serve all eligible individuals, priority must be given to serving those individuals with the most significant disabilities (this is called an "order of selection").

Under these programs, an applicant for these services must first apply and be admitted based on various State criteria for eligibility. To determine your State's current DOR eligibility criteria, contact your nearest office. To locate your nearest office, go to your State's Department of Rehabilitation and look for their link to find it. Begin with either one of these links:

http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_cd=SV

<https://askjan.org/concerns/State-Vocational-Rehabilitation-Agencies.cfm>

Here is a sample listing of the kinds of employment-related services your State Department of Rehabilitation may be able to offer you should you qualify for their services:

- Employment counseling and guidance
- Referrals and assistance to get services from other employment agencies
- Job search and placement assistance
- Vocational and other training services may be provided or supported
- Evaluation of a disability with respect to employment potential
- On-the-job personal assistance services
- Interpreter services (for deaf or hearing-impaired persons)
- Rehabilitation and orientation/mobility services
- Assistance with getting occupational licenses, tools, equipment and initial supplies
- Technical assistance for self-employment
- Rehabilitation- or employment-related assistive technology
- Supported employment services (job coaches)
- Services to family members
- Transportation assistance as required to enable clients to participate in their services
- Post-employment services to help you maintain your employment
- Transition services helping students from school to work

In order to increase your chances of being accepted into your State's DOR program, of course you must have a disability; but also, the more focused and determined you appear to be about your intentions to seek employment, the greater your potential for acceptance into their program. In addition, don't be discouraged if you feel your disability isn't severe enough. Let them decide that for you. Many people with disabilities assume that they would not qualify for these services and, after being encouraged to apply, are pleasantly surprised when they are determined eligible. Always ask. They can't say "yes" unless you ask.

Other community-based programs

In addition to the state-run public Department of Rehabilitation programs described above, there are many private and public community employment programs, including Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and business to assist people with disabilities. Many of these community programs are run by non-profit organizations. They serve to help their customers get ready to live independently, find and secure jobs. Many of these programs are supported, in part, by the state Departments of Rehabilitation and/or other funding supports.

Here are some key programs to consider.

Centers for Independent Living

There are over 400 Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and 300 more branch offices across the country. Some of the services they may offer are:

- Peer counseling/advice
- Systems Change or Disability Advocacy
- Independent Living skills training
- Information and referral
- Assistive technology
- Employment services
- “Living well” supports
- Accessible residential housing
- Personal attendant referrals
- Youth services

To locate a CIL near you see: <http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory>

Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs

Some major CBRs are Goodwill Industries of America, National Industries for the Blind (NIB), National Federation for the Blind (NFB), SourceAmerica (formerly “NISH”), Committee on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) or The Arc (serving people with intellectual disabilities). In addition to these major national organizations, many local independent community-based rehabilitation programs exist. To locate them in your area, contact your State’s Department of Rehabilitation and ask them for a listing or search the internet for one near you.

Here’s a broad listing of the possible services which might be available with CBR programs. Each one may be different.

- Medical, psychiatric, psychological, social, and vocational services
- Testing, fitting, or training in the use of prosthetic and orthotic devices
- Recreational therapy
- Physical and occupational therapy
- Speech, language, and hearing therapy
- Psychiatric, psychological, and social services, including positive behavior management
- Assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs
- Rehabilitation technology
- Job development, placement, and retention services
- Evaluation or control of specific disabilities
- Orientation and mobility services for individuals who are blind
- Extended employment
- Psychosocial rehabilitation services
- Supported employment services and extended services

- Services to family members when necessary to the vocational rehabilitation of the individual
- Personal assistance services

American Job Centers (“Career One Stop” centers)

American Job Centers, sometimes known as “Career One Stop” centers, are the places to visit to access the nation’s various state and federally funded public employment training and placement programs. They are sponsored by the US Department of Labor. These Centers identify themselves as:

- Your source for employment information and inspiration
- The place to manage your career
- Your pathway to career success
- Providing tools to help job seekers, students, businesses and career professionals

American Job Centers or Career One Stop products include:

- America’s Service Locator connects individuals to employment and training opportunities available at local American Job Centers. The website provides contact information for a range of local work-related services, including unemployment benefits, career development, and educational opportunities. (www.ServiceLocator.org)
- The Career One Stop Toolkit helps individuals explore career opportunities to make informed employment and education choices. The website features user-friendly occupation and industry information, salary data, career videos, education resources, self-assessment tools, career exploration assistance, and other resources that support talent development in today’s fast-paced global marketplace. (www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit)
- mySkills myFuture helps laid-off workers and other career changers find new occupations to explore. Users can identify occupations that require skills and knowledge similar to their current or previous job, learn more about these suggested matches, locate local training programs, and/or apply for jobs. (www.mySkillsmyFuture.org)
- Competency Model Clearinghouse provides the business community with a means to communicate its skill needs to educators and the workforce system in a common industry-driven framework. The models and other competency-based resources support development of curriculum and increased awareness of careers in high-growth industries. (www.CareerOneStop.org/CompetencyModel)
- Worker Re-Employment provides employment, training, and financial assistance for laid-off workers. The website includes a Job Search tool with job listings for all fifty states updated daily. Users will also find resources for getting immediate help with unemployment insurance, healthcare, and other financial needs; job searching and resume tips; changing careers and understanding transferable skills; and upgrading skills through education and training. (www.CareerOneStop.org/ReEmployment)
- Veterans Re-Employment is a “one-stop website for employment, training, and financial help after military service.” The website includes the Military-to-Civilian Job Search tool where veterans and service members can search for jobs based on the skills and experiences they

gained in the military. The site also includes tips for job searching and links to national, state, and local resources specifically for veteran job seekers.

(www.CareerOneStop.org/ReEmployment/Veterans)

On July 22, 2014, the current law overseeing these programs was passed. It's called the "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act" (WIOA). Here are the enhanced supports for people with disabilities in this program:

- American Job Centers (AJCs) will provide physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services for individuals with disabilities.
- Youth with disabilities will receive extensive pre-employment transition services so they can successfully obtain competitive integrated employment.
- State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies will set aside at least 15 percent of their funding to provide transition services to youth with disabilities.
- A committee will advise the Secretary of Labor on strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.
- Vocational Rehabilitation state grant programs will engage employers to improve participant employment outcomes.

As you can see, a new and higher emphasis has been placed on providing employment support services to people with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities moving from school to employment.

To find the American Job Center nearest you search: <http://www.servicelocator.org/>

Self-employment and the Small Business Administration (SBA)

What if you're interested in working for yourself?

There are many advantages with self-employment. You can set your own work times and avoid some of the complexities of the regular workplace. Of course, it's still work. In fact, many self-employed individuals actually work longer and harder than those in the general workplace. Plus, most small businesses fail, which can leave their owners in difficult financial situations. So, it's not the easy way out; however, it may be both more interesting and better employment option for you and your disability.

Be sure not to move in the direction of opening your own business without a great deal of thought and analysis, both about your business idea (especially its potential for success) as well as what might be most productive or best option for you.

There is a federal government agency that can assist you with this, if you wish to consider it. It's the Small Business Administration (SBA).

The SBA helps Americans start, build and grow businesses. Through an extensive network of field offices and partnerships with public and private organizations, SBA delivers its services to people throughout the country. The SBA and its nationwide network of resource partners help millions of potential and existing small business owners start, grow and succeed in the marketplace.

Whether your target market is global or just your neighborhood, the SBA and its resource partners can help at every stage of turning your entrepreneurial dream into a thriving business. If you're just starting out, the SBA and its resources can help you with business and financing plans. If you're already in business, you can use the SBA's resources to help manage and expand your business, obtain government contracts, recover from a disaster, find foreign markets, and make your voice heard in the federal government.

In addition to SBA's district offices which serve each state and territory, the SBA works with a variety of local resource partners to meet your small business needs. SCORE chapters, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), and Women's Business Centers (WBCs) are all part of this network of supports. More than 13,000 business counselors, mentors and trainers are available through over 900 Small Business Development Centers, 110 Women's Business Centers and 350 SCORE chapters. These professionals can help with writing a formal business plan, locating sources of financial assistance, managing and expanding your business, finding opportunities to sell your goods or services to the government and recovering from a disaster.

You can access general SBA information at www.sba.gov or visit one of their local offices for assistance.

The SBA also offers guidance for veterans who acquired a disability during their service through the "Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business program." If you acquired a disability while in the military, they can assist you in several ways such as: starting a business, financing a business, tax information, and trade and professional resources. The federal government also sets aside a certain number of contracts for qualifying small businesses "at least 51% owned and controlled by one or more service-disabled veterans." For more detail on this program, go to: <https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/service-disabled-veteran-owned-small-businesses-program>

Lesson 7 — Workplace Planning (developing and advancing your career plan)

Workplace planning refers to the process of developing a personal "Career Plan."

A "Career Plan" is a statement of direction regarding your future, along with an outline of the goals and timelines necessary to reach your goal. In other words, your "Career Plan" will help you outline how to get from where you are now to where you want to be in the future.

Who successfully builds a house, car, bridge or anything without a plan?

Success in any endeavor can be further assured by taking the time to develop a plan on how to move forward and achieve your goals. Without a plan, the future is often left to chance – and when things are left to chance, there's usually a greater chance for failure. So, increase your chances for success by building, updating and following a "Career Plan."

Also, know that plans are ultimately projections about what should be done or accomplished. Plans get changed all the time. As you move forward, new circumstances and opportunities arise that may suggest

the need to change or modify your plan. So, as you build your “Career Plan,” always be ready to update and improve it.

The career plan

Your career plan is going to be the story of your work life.

As with any good story (and we want yours to be a great one), it should always be guided by the basic framework needed to have a full and complete narrative. All good stories should attempt to answer the questions represented by these interrogative words: who, what, where, when, why and how. These single word questions constitute the guide on how to compose your career story.

Therefore, as you begin to formulate your career plan or the story of your “work life,” let’s be guided by these key words so they can guide you.

(NOTE: A Blank “Career Plan” is Appendix D on page 241)

First, the “Who?”

Answer this question about yourself: “Who am I?”

Reflect, think deeply, and study yourself.

Talk to those you know and trust to possibly help you find the answers to this question.

When you have free time, what do you first think about doing during that free time? What are the fun things you like to do? Think about these questions and then list your interests, activities, hobbies, and sports. Once you’ve created this list, try to identify from these activities the key elements or qualities which represent the reasons why these things appeal to you.

For example, if you LOVE to play video games, ask yourself “why?” Maybe you love to solve problems. Maybe you love to see your score go higher and higher. Perhaps it’s the technology that appeals to you. Or, maybe you love to work on complex projects which have many stages to complete before success can be achieved (game over). These are the deeper reasons why you like an activity and they may begin to reveal to you what attributes or qualities you need to have in your dream job.

Another example might be if you answer this question by saying you love sports. Again, ask yourself why you love them. Maybe you love the challenge of having to practice and repeat skills until they get better and better. Maybe it’s the idea of winning or it’s the joy of competition. Maybe it’s because of the teamwork involved or maybe it’s the friendships that come from having people on your side or team. Maybe it’s because of the physical aspects: staying in shape, getting an adrenaline rush, and so on. Again, these types of questions and answers can build a foundation for understanding which careers offer you the attributes or things you like the most.

Let’s start to explore “who” you are, as you begin to build your story. To help get you started, the first three lines are possible examples of entries.

Things I like to do -- interests, activities, hobbies, sports, etc.	Which parts most appeal to me & why
1 collect old things	1 learn history
2 swimming	2 be near the water
3 playing basketball	3 physical activity
4	4
5	5

And, on the other side of the ledger or coin, here are the things I don't like to do.

Things I don't like to do -- Interests, activities, hobbies, sports, etc.	Which part(s) don't appeal to me & why
1 writing	1 spelling and grammar
2 sports	2 being clumsy
3 meeting new people	3 feeling shy
4	4
5	5

Next, as you consider other things relative to learning more about “who am I?” begin to think about the qualities you have or want to develop in yourself – not necessarily related to jobs (they can be), but overall. Let’s first look at identifying some of your good qualities.

Good Qualities – Qualities I have that I like about myself	Ways of improving
1 I like to solve problems	1 Take more science or math courses
2 I like to play video games	2 Invent new video games
3 I get good grades	3 Ask for extra credit
4	4
5	5

Next, let’s go negative on your qualities. What are the things about you that you don’t like and may want to work-on and improve?

Not-so-Good Qualities – Qualities I don’t have which worry me	Ways of improving them
1 Afraid of change	1 Try new things & talk about them with others
2 Don’t speak well in public well	2 Join “Toastmasters Club”
3 Can’t make friends easily	3 Read a book about making friends
4	4
5	5

Second, the “What?”

Answer this question about yourself: “What’s my situation?”

What are both your assets and liabilities? What are your work-related strengths and weaknesses? What education opportunities, work resources or experiences do you already have that strengthen your situation as a job applicant? What are you missing or needing to improve to become a desirable job applicant?

Take stock of your current situation with regards to what you already have and what you might need next to keep moving forward. Make a listing of your strengths and weaknesses. (If you completed the SWOT exercise in Part I of this book, refer to it for use here.) Call this listing your “current location or

status” and keep updating it as time passes, because things change. If you always know where you are in your journey or story, you will be better able to direct yourself to where you want to go.

What’s my situation right now?

List your assets or strengths (education, work, volunteer activities).	What makes you proud about it?
1 Sing in the church choir	1 I like giving to others
2 Getting my college degree	2 Am completing my educational goals
3 Had two summer internships	3 Gained workplace experience I can mention
4	4
5	5

And, the negative is...

List your liabilities or weaknesses (lack of education, work, volunteer activities – be sure to include your emotional fears and anxieties)	What’s needed or missing?
1 Failed a course in college	1 Take it again & improve grade
2 Never had an internship	2 Make a plan to get one
3 Not sure anyone would hire me	3 Talk about it with people you trust
4	4
5	5

Third, the “Where?”

Answer this question about yourself: “Where do I want to go with my career?”

Dream, dream, DREAM!

Think about the ending of your work-life story: where do you want to be when you retire? Also, develop your ultimate dream in increments of 5 years. Where do you want to be after the first 5 years of working? In 10 years? In 15 years, etc.? What kind or type of success would make you proud? With your future goals in view, the overall picture of where to begin and how to progress will become clearer.

As you do this exercise, imagine the places you might like to work. Think about the jobs you might like to hold on the way to the “top” of your dream job/career and if they are useful “stepping stones” to your ultimate goals. Also, consider where you might want to live. Do you dream about living somewhere else? Plus, do you have dreams about making major contributions to a specific profession or occupational field? Think about all these aspects surrounding your career and consider them as your dream about what’s best for you.

Dreaming is vital to building a strong career plan. Having a well-considered dream or plan will excite, focus and motivate you to make it happen.

Possible Dream Jobs	Where should I be in 5 years?	Where should I be in 10 years?	Where should I be in 15 years?	Where should I be in 20 years?	When I retire?
1 Educator	Teacher	School Principal	Area Supervisor	Educational Consulting Firm	State Superintendent
2 Pilot	Regional Airline Pilot	Major Airline Pilot	Pilot Trainer	Airline Supervisor	VP for Airline Operations
3 Business	Regional Sales	National Sales	Start Company	Have Successful Company	Chair of Board
4					
5					

Fourth, the “When?”

Answer this question about yourself, “When do I get started?”

Remember, time flies by.

Before you know, it will be tomorrow and you will be finishing school – and if you don’t start your planning right now, you’ll not only lose precious and valuable time, you’ll also increase your anxiety and fears about this important subject.

We already know that subject of getting prepared, seeking and going to work is a frightening subject: it’s notorious for developing a severe case of avoidance behavior in everyone, especially students. Don’t let this behavior attack you!

Get started immediately and set dates to do the various tasks necessary to keep you moving forward. Stick to your plan and timelines. For example, decide on a timeframe for when you should change any of your habits that aren’t going to help you become an attractive or appealing professional; decide exactly when you should apply to the next level of education (if appropriate); decide when you should work in internships, summer jobs or as a volunteer; decide when you should start preparing for and looking for work; decide when you should begin to apply for jobs; and decide, decide, decide! Make a plan. Then, keep to your schedule.

Your plan will be your coach and guide. And your fears will begin to melt away because you have a plan and are acting on it.

Tasks needed to be completed	On this date I will (fill in the step to completion)	On this date I will (fill in the next step to completion)	Date to be completed
1 Summer Internship	By March 1: Apply	April 1: Check-in	June 1: Start Job
2 Apply for Vocational Rehabilitation Services	By June 1: Research Completed	July 1: Apply	Sept. 1: Get intake appointment
3 Write Resume	By Sept. 1: Finish draft	Oct. 1: Get draft reviewed by Career Center	Nov. 1: Complete master resume to be adapted for each job application
4			
5			

As a student, please remember to avoid, at all costs, delaying your career planning and searching until you graduate from school because you’re too “busy” with school.

As we’ve discussed earlier, employers want to get the cream of each year’s graduating class. This means they think that the best students are out looking for work before they graduate (and they are). These

are the students who seem the freshest and some of the most promising of all students emerging from college each year. As time passes after graduation, each month makes the late starting candidates less and less interesting to employers. They think, “Why hasn’t anyone hired them yet?” “Are they overlooked because they are less desirable?” “Are they lazy?”

Don’t fall into this trap.

Start your job search before you leave school.

Fifth, the “Why?”

Answer these two important questions about yourself: “why do I want to work?” and “why don’t I want to work?”

Let’s begin by listing the reasons why you want to work – in general and for specific jobs. What’s your motivation? Is it to accomplish certain things in your life? Is it to help a cause that’s important to you? Is it for power, prestige or money? Is it to impress certain people? Try and discover what your underlying motivation might be to work.

If you don’t want to work or are somewhat negative or fearful about working, let’s list these items also. Does work scare you? Are you just a tad lazy? Or is it more fun not to work and just play? With these basic facts revealed, talk to someone you trust about your feelings and see how they hold up, evolve or advance with some more consideration. Dig deeply into your feelings and discover what the basic truths are about you and working – both the good and not-so-good reasons. Deal with them early on, especially “the not so good ones,” as they will trip you up if you don’t address them right away.

Why I want to work?	What does this reason really mean to me?
1 To make money	1 I want to have a house, car, family, and kids
2 To improve people	2 I feel good when I help people
3 To make changes in the world	3 I want to save the environment
4	4
5	5

Why I don't want to work?	What does this reason really mean to me?
1 I have a fear of rejection	1 I'm afraid of failure
2 I just like to party	2 I'm still immature about life
3 It seems hard	3 I've not identified work that would be rewarding and motivating
4	4
5	5

Sixth, the "How?"

How can I make this all happen?

This last section can help you answer this question.

This last step in the career plan process (for now – remember, your career plan is a “living concept” which should change and evolve over time, so you won’t be finished updating it until you retire) is to make an actual plan to get a specific job.

The section below invites you to list realistic first (or “starter”) jobs upon completion of your schooling. These starter jobs might be the first step needed to begin the track to your dream job. You’ve got to start somewhere. If your dream job seems currently out of reach, pick a lesser job which may position you better for your dream job. Your starter job might be in the company or office where your dream can be found. Or, because there are many jobs and organizations in each industry, a starter job might be viewed as an experiment to see if you like that particular type of work.

In this section, list realistic entry-level, first or starter jobs for which you are likely to be qualified for.

After each of the jobs you may list below, begin to develop your actual steps to make it happen.

Pick job to go after	Qualifications required	Missing Qualifications	Plan to get missing Qualifications	Networking activities to get job	Time, place & effort to apply and interview for specific jobs
1) Entry Level accounting job	Degree in accounting. Internship in accounting. Knowledge about a specific type of accounting.	Internship in accounting.	Apply to five (5) accounting firms for their summer internships.	Visit accounting firms for an informational interview. Attend area accounting events/conferences. Find accounting firms at school job fair.	Apply for five (5) internships at (federal government, state government, company X, company Y, & nonprofit X) by December.
2) Starter job in the aviation field	Customer service skills. Knowledge about the industry. Knowledge about aviation science.	Knowledge about aviation science.	On-line courses.	Meet professionals in the field to learn more about opportunities and pathways to employment. Attend career fairs in the field.	Complete three (3) informational meetings by December. Go to Air Show and meet people in January.
3) Starter job in medical field.	Specific field's medical license.	More education.	Work at doctor's office in administration.	Talk to your doctor about opportunities.	Make appointment with doctor and have your questions prepared.

			Volunteer at area hospital.	Talk to various specialists you meet while volunteering at hospital to learn what they do.	Volunteer at hospital this summer.
4					
5					

This last component of your career plan gives you a strategy to follow to get from point “a” (the job you wish to get) to point “b” (employed in that job).

But what if I cannot decide on a career plan or dream job?

No dream jobs come to mind.

Are you sunk even before you get started?

Well, of course you’re not. Most people starting out don’t know what their dream job might be. Only 5-10% of students getting out high school or college know exactly what they want to do for their careers. For the majority of us, it’s less than fully clear. That’s why the questions and planning exercise we did above can be helpful.

For the 90-95% of us who don’t know what we want to do for a career, answering the first five question sections above gives us some hints as to what types of jobs to explore or seek out for a test drive. In addition, if you’re in the majority of new job seekers who just can’t find their passion, don’t worry. Instead of worrying about finding it – relax and let it find you.

Such things take time to reveal themselves. Instead of looking for that perfect fit or dream job, look for a job that seems mildly interesting and good enough for now. You never know where it might take you. While it may not be the right door, it’s a door and what lies beyond it may prove revealing. It will surely give you more experiences and new opportunities to find your way forward.

As you keep moving forward, even if it’s slowly, be alert for signs and signals which suggest the next step or direction to take. That’s how most people ultimately find their passion. It can be sometimes a random and slow process, rather than an “ah ha!” revelation.

Additional strategies that can help you find dream jobs are:

- ✓ Pay attention to what people are doing for a living. Look around you, at your parents, family and friends – what do they do for a living? If what they do seems mildly interesting to you, ask them questions about what they are doing and how they got to their current job. This is a powerful and personal way to gather more information about career options.
- ✓ Talk with career counselors about jobs. Listen to what they tell you and think carefully about what they suggest. Career counselors can be found in schools as well as the community. For example, you might call, write or visit your area's American Job Center (mentioned in an earlier Lesson) to find a community career counselor to talk with and help you with this research.
- ✓ Surf the internet. Search key terms about what you might like to do or general words about qualities in work that appeal to you and see what appears. Explore the links that emerge, then see what you can learn or discover about jobs and fields that you may have never heard about. Use the power of the internet for career exploration. In addition, there are some key search sites that might prove useful. One is the nation's listing of possible jobs. It's a program of the U.S. Department of Labor and is called O'NET. Here's the link – surf it at:
<http://www.onetcenter.org/tools.html>
- ✓ Networking is a great strategy to use for exploring careers. Whenever you find a job that might seem interesting to you, try to talk (network) with someone who is doing that kind of work. Most workers are happy to talk with students or young people about their jobs. So, just ask people. Tell them that you're trying to find the right career path for you and you are wondering if they would be willing to talk with you about what they do. Tell them of your interests and that you want to learn more. They will be very likely to want to help you with your research.
- ✓ Volunteering or taking summer jobs or internships with organizations that seem interesting to you are other ways to further test your interests. The added advantage of this strategy is that you become known to the organization (make sure it's as a good worker) – and this direct experience with you will make those organizations more likely to hire you in the future.

While you are exploring various jobs and careers, be sure to keep a record of those that seem most interesting to you. Once you've compiled your listing, strive to learn more about each. Read and study what you can about these jobs. Talk with others about your interest in these fields. They can help you refine your understandings and thoughts about which ones might be best for you. Contact the professional or trade associations related to the job that interest you. They often have a great deal of information what will assist you in your research.

So, those are some things to do if you can't decide on a dream job.

Most of us who have gone before you have found our dream jobs by accident or chance. Action creates opportunity. So, don't hold back waiting for the clouds to part and a voice from on-high to boldly announce, "Your dream job is ____." Instead, go find it yourself.

Don't let your uncertainty hold you back. Get a job, any reasonable job, and you will find that over time and with workplace experience, your future will come to you.

The job action plan

Your “career plan” is half the battle. Think of your “career plan” as the big picture or the storyline for your career success. It’s a blueprint. Think of your “career plan” as your game plan on how you hope to win the career game.

However, in order to be successful with your grand strategy, you need sound tactics or moves to follow whenever the next job is to be pursued. Think about the relationship between your career plan (above) and your job plan (below) as the relationship between strategy and tactics. The strategy (your “career plan”) is your broad vision or goal to achieve overall success. Along the way are intermediate steps or tactics (jobs) which must be successfully gained to keep moving your career strategic plan ahead.

So, supporting a “career plan” should be a specific “job action plan.” These are the tactics you need to follow to successfully accomplish the next step in your career plan. For example, as you graduate or leave school, the career plan helps you define what career field you want to pursue; and you may even know the job you first want to go after. But, you need a plan on how to get that job you want – and that’s the purpose of the “job action plan.”

So, when you have your sights on the job you want, be sure to follow the “job action plan” below.

Job Action Plan

(One for Each Job Wanted)

Week or Month Timeframe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Search for Places to Work												
Create or Update Resume												
Identify/Contact Resume References												
Constantly Monitor Vacancies at Place You Want to Work												
Find Actual Vacancy Announcements												
Submit Tailored Application for the Job You Want												
Research Company for Interview Ideas												
Anticipate & Prepare Answers for Interview Questions												
Practice Interview												
Define Disability Accommodations												
Give Interview												
Send Thank You Message												
Decide Your Salary/Start Date												
Prepare for First Day of Work												

The steps to follow are outlined in the chart above and are for each and every job you seek. These steps are as follows: search for place to work; create updated resume; identify/contact resume references; monitor vacancies at place you want to work; find actual vacancy; submit tailored application; research company for interview ideas; anticipate and prepare answers for interview questions; practice interview answers; define disability accommodations; give interview; send thank you message; decide your start date and salary requests; prepare for first day of work.

Lesson 8 — Voices of Experience

Just as we ended Part I of this book, we shall end Part II. That is by listing the key advice former students with disabilities, who have been working for several years, want current students to know and pay attention to as they prepare for their transition from school to work. At the end of our “Professional Development and Disability” course, we invited former students who are currently working to come into class and give us their words of wisdom or advice on how to be smart about preparing for, seeking and managing oneself in the world of work. Their advice always reinforced the lessons of this book. Here’s what these “voice of experience” wish they had done better or earlier to make their transition to a career easier and smarter. Here’s their advice for you to follow. Here’s what they want you to know.

"I would have actually networked."

Networking seems scary and abstract. The idea of going up to strangers, introducing yourself and then trying to impress them about who you are seems like a very unnatural and comfortable act. Yet, it’s critical to finding a good job.

Since it seems so awkward, most do not attempt to develop their networking skills while in school. It just doesn’t seem like the time or place to practice networking. However, our returning former students told us that not networking while in school was one of their biggest regrets.

They explained that they felt this regret for several reasons. First, that was the time they should have learned and practiced the skill. As a student, people want to help you learn, practice and polish all your skills, including networking. School is the place for learning things such as how teachers and career counselors are they to help you. Second, employers and other key contacts (teachers, family members, neighbors and even fellow students) often have ideas and even contacts to suggest for students as they hear about those students’ career ambitions. As long as students are gracious and thankful, people love helping them. Lastly, by practicing the skill of networking, even in elementary ways, you become better at it; and as you improve, you become more a confident and skillful networker. Think of networking as simply the art of talking to people and sharing basic information about your career dreams and ambitions. Make the art of networking a regular part of your everyday conversation. The more you do it, the greater the possibility that others will help you with employment ideas and job possibilities. It pays to advertise.

"I would have taken on a job or an internship in addition to my course load."

When you look for a job after you leave school, there's no substitute for workplace experience.

Employers want some evidence that you'll be a good worker for them. This evidence comes from prior work experience. Get it! Get it! Get it!

This means you must seek summer jobs and internships to both get that experience and to have references and examples of your potential to be a good worker. Whatever you do, don't get distracted by a school culture which suggests, "You worked hard this school year, summer is the time to relax." Well, while you're relaxing, your competition (other students who you will compete against for jobs) will be working. Don't let yourself get behind your competition. Get to work each and every summer you're in school. More is better when it comes to work experience.

Having some professional experiences before entering the workforce has become a necessity for many employers. It's nearly impossible to find an employer who will want to hire someone straight out of school without prior work experiences or internships.

You might even look for internships that provide college credit. If you can't find summer jobs or internships that are *directly* related to what you want to do for a career, don't give up: take anything. Even if you're a pool attendant or wait tables, that's work experience with responsibilities and references that can speak up for you. Also, any summer job is a great place and time for networking. For example, if you wait tables, talk with the people at each and every table and look for an opportunity to tell your guest what you hope to be doing someday as your career. Employers eat out all the time and many job leads are found this way.

If you can't find either a full- or part-time summer job, try going to the Internet for virtual work. There are jobs you can get without even leaving your room. "Freelance writer" or "freelance software developer" can be done from home and look great on a resume. And they certainly look a whole lot better than explaining to an employer that you "rested" during your summer breaks.

"I would have gotten more involved in career-relevant extracurricular activities."

On-campus groups, clubs, events and activities are great places to get experience which translates to the world of work. Skills are skills. For example, you can show you have gained relevant experience by planning concerts on campus or working as a freshman orientation assistant.

Employers want to hire people who understand how to manage projects, work alongside other people, and have proven communication skills. If you were involved in a sports team, school newspaper, student group, club, or even intramural activities, you can draw from these experiences to demonstrate your workplace skills. It's a matter of framing your extracurricular experience in a professional way. Keep track of accomplishments as a member or leader of any extracurricular activities and use them to build both your resume and networking talking points.

"I would have started looking for jobs earlier."

Putting off your job hunt until after your graduation or the end of your schooling isn't a wise move. Such procrastination makes you appear to be a less ambitious and organized and, therefore, a less desirable job candidate. It's not a good look.

Also, waiting or procrastinating actually makes you feel less self-confident about yourself (because of the guilt one feels when we know we didn't do what we were supposed to do). These negative feelings about tardiness actually make you less aggressive and confident about your value as a potential job applicant – and employers can see that low self-confidence a mile away.

If you start your job search before you graduate (at least by the start of your senior year), you will feel and appear more mature, confident, and serious (professional) as a job candidate. Employers like to see student job candidates who are applying for jobs before they graduate because it's a sign that they are good planners and are aggressive about their future. Those are the qualities they value.

Plus, the procrastinator (late starter) will have fewer and less interesting job openings to apply for as the early birds will have gobbled up the better jobs.

Know that all students have fears about their job search, so it's not just you. Don't be afraid of being afraid. Tell yourself that such fears are natural and normal. Expect them. Just make sure that you don't let those fears hold you back. When you do, it just makes the fears grow and the process becomes much harder. Push past your fears. Get busy. Get to work on finding work right now, not one minute later.

"I would have applied for more jobs."

This does not mean sending out hundreds of resumes to hundreds of employers and hoping that this mass-marketing technique will improve your chances to get a job (any job). Don't do this, as it makes you look desperate for someone – anyone – to hire you. When employers get resumes not targeted to a specific job vacancy, or they learn that a particular job applicant is flooding other employers with their resumes, they often shy away from such an applicant because they see them as unfocused and undisciplined. Employers also want employees that are passionate about their organization's mission and industry, so generic "copy-paste" applications and resumes are likely to get tossed aside.

So "yes," apply for more jobs, but do so with a sense of purpose, strategy and focus. Apply for a job that is actually being offered. Don't just send in a resume when no job has been advertised. Instead, identify six or more jobs that you seemed qualified for and apply for them. If you truly find a company that you would love to work for but don't see any open jobs on their website (or any that fit your skill-set and desired career), you can send a professional email to the hiring manager with why you like their *specific* company and what your skill-set is – and ask them to reach out if opportunities open in the future. Still, that's just a form of networking; applying for open jobs takes more focus.

This is similar to the process you followed when you applied (successfully) for college. First, you narrowed things to a certain number of schools which you seemed qualified for, and then you applied within the application framework which each school required. Plus, you tailored each individual application to each school's entrance requirements and what they likely wanted in their application

essays. Your essay noted specific qualities of each school: maybe a famous professor (by name), a great class they offer, or something nice about the town or region the school is in. Follow a similar strategy when looking for work. Find jobs being offered which you believe you are qualified for; follow each employer's guidelines on how to apply; tailor your application to each job vacancy that you are applying for; and, within this context, apply for a healthy number of jobs to improve your chances of being hired.

"I would have focused more on becoming 'professional.'"

Don't fall into the trap of wearing pajamas, sweatpants and T-shirts to class. Here's where being professional should begin. Wear clothes that are clean, pressed and at the very least "business-casual-Friday" appropriate – even when you're going to class! You may think that dressing well every day doesn't matter, but the professors you will be asking for recommendations will remember your style (professionalism) largely by how you looked in class. You also never know whom you might run into after school and how a chance encounter could help (or hurt) your networking. So, begin establishing your professional look while attending classes.

Another way to show your professionalism is to pick up the tab for networking coffees with new contacts and send these contacts "thank you" notes for their help (even before they may actually do something). Saying "thank you" encourages further support. Saying "thank you" doesn't cost a thing. Forgetting to say "thank you" may cost you your new contact's future support.

And, of course, monitor your online professional appearance. Clean up your social media accounts. NEVER trust that your social media privacy settings will keep a potential employer from seeing your sites. When you're a job applicant with most any organization, your social media sites are likely the first place they'll go to begin their research on who you really are. Keep them professional. In fact, use these social media sites, including your e-mail name and voice mail messages, to send out a positive professional message about who you are. Delete or change all unprofessional features, comments and photos as you begin your work search, especially "cute" nicknames or unsavory news about parties and classes you're skipping.

"I would have done more to figure out what my career goals were."

Your first job out of college isn't likely to be your dream job or position, assuming you have a vision about a dream job or career. Still, you want to try to find a job that's in the field that interests you or has possibilities for future growth. It's never too early to start your analysis of what your dream job and career should be. Failure to think about this idea can slow you down, side-track you or even hold you back, so take the time to constantly analyze what it is you want to do for your career. Ask others to help you in this analysis.

If you still have no idea, don't give up. The fact is that most people don't have a clue as to what their dream job should be until they sample many jobs and fields. So, if you're just not ready to decide on your dream job, that's okay. In this case, try various jobs or fields that seem promising to you. Look for jobs that might further develop your thinking about your dream job. Go ahead and experiment.

And don't be afraid to try something that you may be initially excited about. Many people “fall” into their dream jobs this way. Be brave and just get started – because all jobs give you additional valuable experience.

"I would have gone to the career center."

This is a "no-brainer." You might not think you need your university's Career Center's services, but you're wrong – you do. They're just for you and nearby, probably in walking distance from your classes. Do yourself a big favor and walk over to your Career Center and learn what they can do for you. After all, your tuition paid for this service, so why not get your money's worth?

In addition, your school's Career Center gives you an advantage that other job applicants may not have. And in the competitive world of work, gaining an advantage is something worth doing. Not only does your campus Career Center have employment help, they often have great employer contacts who are either the school's alumni who favor the school's students (because they were one once) or are employers who traditionally recruit at your school. Those employers' offices are also often close-by, which can provide great opportunities for internships and make it so you won't have to move far after graduation. In other words, these employers are looking for you. Don't be hard to find. Get to your Career Center while you can (before you graduate).

Finally, your Career Center is a good place to practice your elevator speech, draft introductory e-mails, cover letters, perfect your resume, and more. Career Center staff can give feedback on all these things, making you that much more successful when you network and apply for jobs.

"I would have kept better track of my achievements."

Understand that many of the accomplishments you gained during your school years probably belong on your resume.

Learn how to document these accomplishments so you can include them in your network, interviewing and resume presentations. Think about what workplace knowledge, skills and abilities you're gaining while in school and learn how to express them in workplace terms and values.

For example, imagine that you were a student worker in the Disabled Students Services' office and you greeted people as they entered the office, scheduled appointments and explained the office's services. This is work experience. You had to report regularly, be on-time, developed customer service skills and more. Maybe you helped create a better filing system or helped make improvements to the office's website. Another example of developing workplace skills might be if you were a member of a campus club: you organized membership recruitment events, or even kept certain records or wrote “minutes” to the club's meetings. Again, these are all valuable workplace skills which you should be documenting so you can present them to employers as you describe your professional qualities and qualifications.

All your accomplishments can impress an employer. Even the class projects you completed (project management), the study teams you participated in (teamwork) and other group activities you may have directed (leadership) demonstrate valuable skills and experience. The magic is to recognize when these things are happening to you, record them and learn how best to report them.

"I would have focused more on developing relevant skills."

School is a wonderful time to develop your employment skills by seeking out opportunities which are more likely to pay dividends for you when you go to work. For example, take courses, do projects, join clubs, and work on campus in activities which will help you build your experiences around specific job skills. Gaining experiences like these will give you specific examples which you can speak to during networking or interview sessions.

Of course, a summer job in the field you may aspire to is a very valuable key strategy. Don't waste your summer by "resting." That's a big mistake. Plus, it puts you further behind your competition for a job because they worked during the summers. Don't let yourself fall behind.

A great way to identify which skills are important to develop is to talk with your instructors about your future employment goals and ask them which skills they suggest you develop. They might even tailor your instructional program to help you have these experiences as part of their course instruction. Plus, involving them in this way sets up a valuable job reference, as they're likely to see you more favorably.

"I wish I had learned more about education and employment programs that could have helped me along the way."

As a person with a disability, you may encounter many employment-related programs that you might qualify to use. It's amazing how many people with disabilities don't know what employment support systems there are for them. Here are two key employment resources to be sure to consider reaching out to, if you haven't already.

Disability Rehabilitation – This is a public disability employment preparation and placement program which has local community rehabilitation offices all across the USA. They offer career assessment and counseling; job search and interview skills; independent living skills; career education and training; and assistive technology. Go to the webpage of your State's Disability Rehabilitation Program to find the office nearest you. In California, go to: <http://www.rehab.cahwnet.gov/DOR-Locations/index.asp>

America Job or Career Centers – This is your local employment and training program, which can help you with a full range of employment supports. See: <http://www.careeronestop.org/>

There are many additional resources to consider in benefits, civil rights, community living, education, emergency preparedness, employment, health, housing, technology, and transportation. For specific state and local resources to consider in all of these areas go to: <https://www.disability.gov/>

"I would have volunteered more."

Almost half of employers evaluating job candidates say that they consider volunteer experience to be equally as valuable as paid work experience. This means you have no more excuses if you couldn't find a summer job. Just volunteer whenever you can!

Not only will this enhance your resume for employment, it will give you a chance to sample jobs and careers which might be interesting to you. Such a strategy gets you closer and closer to identifying your dream career.

In a competitive labor market, volunteering can be the thing that ends up differentiating you and getting you the job over your competition. Plus, it gives you contacts and supports that can generate both job leads and recommendations for employment.

Lastly, our returning students shared these workplace sayings which they hope will inspire you as well.

- ✓ “When I fall on my face (and I will), I just be sure to fall forward.”
- ✓ “I would be unstoppable if I could just get started.”
- ✓ “Look for opportunities, not guarantees.”
- ✓ “The difference between try and triumph is a little ‘umph.’”
- ✓ “Even if I’m on the right track, I’ll get run over if I just sit there.”
- ✓ “I couldn’t wait any longer for an opportunity, so I decided to go ahead without one.”
- ✓ “Success is a ladder I cannot climb with my hands in my pockets.”
- ✓ “Others can stop me temporarily but only I can do it permanently.”

Final Thoughts

Let’s end this course for career success with some final thoughts.

First, millions of people with disabilities have gone before you and have had successful employment careers. These were people just like you. People who, like you, had all the same fears, insecurities, and uncertainties about their work potential. Yet, they did it. So can you.

Second, while there are many things to consider in this book, the truth is even the most seasoned and successful professionals are still working on these skills. They know that these skills need continuous improvement. So, don’t burden yourself with the idea that you have to learn and be good at all of these skills right away as you begin your career. The goal of this book is to give you a basic training on these concepts, so you have a “big picture” or full view of what is meant by being a professional. In this way, you can begin your employment journey with the right foundation in place while continuing your life-long learning.

Hopefully, this book has helped you learn more about “Disability and Competitive Employment.”

And, it has given you, “A Course for Career Success” to follow.

Now, you’re ready to “Make it Work”



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professionally, I had the good fortune of working for three great disability leaders who taught me key professional skills.

The first was a gentleman named Harold Russell. Harold Russell was a disabled veteran from World War II who had lost both his hands while handling explosives as a member of the U.S. Army. As a result of his injury, he used prosthetic hooks in place of his amputated hands. Harold Russell taught me how important it was for people with disabilities to be people first. His confidence and personality effectively swept aside negative reactions to him as a person with a disability. The minute you would meet him, he stuck out his hooks to shake your hand and, by doing so, made you forget about his disability. The power of his humanity, his friendliness, sense of humor and broad smile won him both favor and followers. His disability label disappeared one minute after meeting him. He was a great example of the “power of personality” in the work place. While he is no longer with us, if you’d like, you can still “meet” Harold Russell. Just view the major motion picture called, “The Best Years of Our Lives.” This film offers an example of how one’s personality can frame a disability in a human and positive manner. If you take the time to see the film, notice when he picks up an America flag lapel pin from the ground with his hooks or prosthesis. You see hooks, but you will feel his spirit. He won two Academy Awards (Oscars) for his performance in this film and he wasn’t even an actor! He was just being his best and authentic self. Watch the movie and see how Harold Russell helps us to understand how a person’s spirit or inner strength can define a disability.

The second great leader I want to acknowledge is Justin Dart, Jr. Justin was a key figure in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). During this time frame, I had the honor of assisting him as a staff member with various activities related to this historic effort. What impressed me most about Justin was his sense of strategy or the “big picture” in everything he did. Everything he said and wrote fit into his overall sense of strategy and purpose. All his efforts, no matter how small or routine, were crafted to fit together into a common theme or thread. And the fabric he was weaving was the passage of a law ensuring the civil “rights and responsibilities” for people with disabilities. Notice how he carefully and deliberately combined both words together, as one complete thought – “rights and responsibilities.” He never said the word “rights” without pairing it with the word “responsibilities.” He was telling us that with rights come responsibilities. For example, if you have a right to nondiscrimination in employment (as you have now) you also have a responsibility to exercise that right by seeking to become a contributing member of society. While Justin died in 2002, his leadership continues to be felt long after he left us. His battle cry or words of encouragement can still be heard by those who heard him often say, “Lead on.”

The third great leader I worked for and want to offer you as an example of what this book is all about is former Congressman Tony Coelho (CA-D). While Harold Russell taught me about the humanity of disability and Justin Dart about always thinking strategically and to “Lead on,” Tony Coelho taught me about the discipline needed to get things done. Timelines, tracking, updates, progress reports and

evaluations were always in play. Tony taught his followers to leave footprints in the sand, so others will know the way forward and that we were here before them. Tony's motto for us all is, "Do something that makes a difference and positively impacts people with disabilities." Lastly, he taught me about having a passion about your work. Seek to find work that interests you – embrace it, make it your passion and even your ministry.

All three of these disability rights leaders give us real life examples of people with disabilities who demonstrate the highest degree of "professional development" skills. Let us follow their examples. And, in turn, let us set an example for others to notice and follow.

With regards to this book, I owe a special "thank you" to Peggy Klaus of Berkeley, CA, who so unselfishly shared with our students her knowledge and techniques regarding the important workplace skills "presence" and "bragging." With her permission, both of these subjects are covered in this book. Peggy teaches these and other workplace skills to top corporate executives and, by sharing them with our students, has given our students a BIG competitive advantage. For more information about these and the other workplace skills taught by Peggy Klaus, read her two books titled, "The Hard Truth About Soft Skills" and "Tooting Your Horn: The Art of Bragging without Blowing It."

In addition, I want to thank Tom Foley and the World Institute on Disability (WID) for their involvement in the development of the course's content, especially around benefits and financial planning (managing your money). Tom Foley, a UC Berkeley alumnus, came back to his alma mater to help teach our students. More can be learned on both subjects by contacting the WID website. Go to their website (<http://www.wid.org/>) and look for the book called, "Equity: Asset Building Strategies for People with Disabilities, A Guide to Financial Empowerment." An additional "thank you" to Elizabeth Layman of WID, also a UC Berkeley alumna, for all her hard work editing and formatting the book. And, a "thank you" to Alex Ghenis of WID for his editing and reviewing of this book. When I arrived at UC Berkeley, he was one of our students. Now, he's our future.

Also, I want to thank both Barbara Butz at Policy Works and Elaine Katz at the Kessler Foundation for their support advancing the implementation of this course in other locations. As a result of their support, the State for Florida has accepted the course for their post-secondary schools.

Plus, a "thank you" to the J. Milbank Foundation for its support with the development of this book and something called WID E3 (see: <https://wid.org/wid-e3/>).

Finally, I want to add personal "acknowledgements" to the professional ones above. I want to thank my family for their support and encouragement. I want to thank Janie Rose, my supportive wife who helped in the production of this book, including reviewing and improving the manuscript. In addition, I want to thank our dear and very professional daughters Sarah Anne Hippolitus, Molly Rose Hippolitus and Lotus Halbower. And, our grandchildren Makayla and Aiden Halbower, with congratulations to Makayla for writing her book called, "Dyslexia Rules." She was eight (8) years old when she published it without my ever knowing about it! Each semester, at the end of my class on "Professional Development and Disability," I would end the last class in the course by reading her children's book "Dyslexia Rules" –

then, ask our students, “Are there any questions?” There were none. See:

<https://www.amazon.com/Dyslexia-Rules-Makayla-Patricia-Halbower/dp/151516442X> .

As a father, allow me to add a word of advice to the family members of children and adults with disabilities. I can’t tell you how many successful working professional people with disabilities I’ve encountered. When I ask them, “What made you go to work and become successful?” They would always respond in the same way: “It was my parents, teachers, or counselors who told me I was going to work.”

Parents, teachers, counselors – contemplate this truth.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A (see pages 102-105)

BRAG! A Self-Evaluation Questionnaire

1. What would you and others (friends, teachers, parents, coaches, supervisors, etc.) say are the three best traits or habits you possess?

1.
2.
3.

2. What are the five most interesting things you have done or that have happened to you in life so far?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

3. What do you think is your strongest ability and how did you end up being good at it?

4. What do you like/love most about your life?

5. What are you most proud of having accomplished recently or in the past?

6. What new skills have you learned in the last year?

1.
2.
3.
4.

7. What difficulties have you overcome to get where you are now?

1.
2.
3.
4.

8. What important lessons have you learned from making mistakes?

--

What training or educational experiences have you completed and what did you gain from those experiences (academic, athletic, artistic, etc.)?

1.
2.
3.
4.

9. What groups are you involved with (school clubs, church groups, teams, etc.) and in what ways (member, officer, captain, etc.)?

1.
2.
3.
4.

10. How do you spend your time outside of school (hobbies, interests, sports, friends, family, and volunteer activities)?

11. In what ways are you making a difference in people's lives?

From these answers you can start building your personal “brag-a-logue” content, which will give the brag nuggets you’ll need to tell people about your accomplishments. Be sure to create a short 30 second or less statement around these facts which you can tell people while networking, going to career fairs, looking for jobs and even telling people at work something important about you (what you’ve accomplished or what needs to be accomplished).

SWOT Analysis Form

“Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT)”

“My SWOT analysis for getting a job”

	<u>Strengths (Pluses)</u>	<u>Weaknesses (Minuses)</u>
Your Personal Situation		

	<u>Opportunities (Pluses)</u>	<u>Threats (Minuses)</u>
Outside or External Forces		

The Top Qualities Employers Want versus Your KSAs

	Knowledge: I know about/how to...	Skills: I can do it...	Abilities: I'm good/ experienced at it...
1-Team Work			
2-Verbal Communications			
3-Make Decisions & Solve Problems			
4-Get and Use Information			
5-Plan, Organize and Prioritize			

6-Analyze Data			
7-Specific Job Skills (to a specific job you're applying for)			
8-Proficiency with Computers			
9-Create/Edit Written Reports			
10-Convince or Influence Others			

“Workplace Planning” Worksheet — Your Career Plan

WHO am I?

Things I like to do -- interests, activities, hobbies, sports, etc.	Which part(s) most appeals to me & why
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

And, on the other side of the ledger, here are the things I don't like to do.

Things I don't like to do -- Interests, activities, hobbies, sports, etc.	Which part(s) don't appeal to me & why
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

WHAT is my situation?

List your assets or strengths (education, work, volunteer activities)	What's my bragging points about each
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

And, the negative is...

List your liabilities or weaknesses (lack of education, work, volunteer activities – be sure to include your emotional fears and anxieties)***	What 's needed or missing
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

WHY do I, or don't I want to work?

Why I want to work	What does this reason really mean
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Why I don't want to work	What does this reason really mean
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

WHERE do I want to go with my work life?

Dream Careers or Jobs	Where should I be in 5 years	Where should I be in 10 years	Where should I be in 15 years	Where should I be in 20 years	When I retire
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

WHEN do I begin?

Tasks needed to be completed	On this date I will (fill in the step to completion)	On this date I will (fill in the next step to completion)	Date to be completed
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

HOW can I reach my career goals?

Pick Job to Go After and List Job Name/Place	Qualifications Required	Your Missing Qualifications	Your Plan to Get the Missing Qualifications	Your Plan to Go After the Job	Time, Place & Preparation to Apply and Interview for the Job
1					
2					
3					

Pre- and Post-Course Survey

Instructions: Have the students complete the “pre-course” survey before any discussions take place so as it accurately measures where the students are on these subjects before learning begins. By doing so, we can more accurately evaluate their learning gains by comparing the “pre-course” survey results with the end of the course or “post-course” survey results (use the same survey for both). No names are requested, so encourage students to be as honest as possible. Of course, if they have any questions about the survey, you should try and answer them.

(Note: The survey data collected is most valid and comparable to the Kessler findings (Background, page 6) when you are able to deliver all of the major topics in this book. If you use less content, you can still attempt to measure students’ learning using this survey technique; however, you might eliminate those survey questions which relate to the Lessons you did not teach. And, your resulting data may not be as dramatic or comparable with the data in the Preface because of the greater potential impact on student learning when all of the suggested instruction can be delivered. So, offering fewer of the book’s Lessons is still to the good and will have a positive impact on your students; but, you might not be as dramatic.)

Survey begins on the next page.

Professional Development and Disability Survey

Circle or fill in your answers:

Please check which survey you are taking:

Pre-course survey _____

or

Post-course survey _____

Age: _____

Grade You Are in Now: _____

Gender: ☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Other

(Check one)

Disability: ☐ Visual

☐ Hearing

☐ Physical

☐ Cognitive (Autism)

☐ Head Injury

☐ Cognitive (Learning)

☐ Psychological

☐ Not Applicable / None

☐ Other _____

Do you have an employment plan (internships, summer jobs)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you have any ideas about a job resume to give an employer?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please circle if you agree or disagree with the following statements: The seventeen statements below are written as personal opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. Based on your feelings, please circle a number if you agree or disagree with these statements.

If you firmly agree circle "4"

If you agree at all circle "3"

If you disagree at all circle "2"

If you firmly disagree circle "1"

1. My disability can be an advantage to me when looking for work.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

2. I have an idea on how to begin a career plan.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

3. I am thinking about the question, "What work do I want to do?"

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

4. I know what is expected of me at the workplace beyond just doing the job (how to be a professional worker).

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

5. I feel ready and comfortable to do a job interview.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

6. I feel comfortable working with people I don't know.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

7. I feel comfortable telling people about myself and my accomplishments.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

8. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

9. I understand what an employer is really looking for in a job applicant.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

10. After I finish school, it will be harder for me to get a job because I have a disability.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

11. My self-confidence about getting hired and working is strong.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

12. I feel ready and okay to talk about my disability related job accommodation needs with employers and bosses.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

13. I understand what employer's fears are about hiring a person with a disability and I am ready to talk positively about it.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

14. I know about disability employment laws and the history of the employment of people with disabilities in the USA.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

15. I am confident that an employer will want to hire me.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree

16. I am proud of being a person with a disability.

Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Agree