

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 of the *Make It Work* book at <https://wid.org/wid-e3/employment-empowerment/>.

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?

<i>1. Being on time</i>
<i>2. Listening to people</i>
<i>3. Being friendly</i>

2. What are the five most interesting things you have done or that have happened to you in life so far?

<i>1. Traveled to New York City</i>
<i>2. Volunteered to a summer camp for kids</i>
<i>3. Won a sports award</i>
<i>4. Spoke to a group about my disability experience</i>
<i>5.</i>

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.)?

- | |
|---|
| 1. <i>I'm getting my High School diploma in a month.</i> |
| 2. <i>My summer camp job taught me how to develop my leadership skills</i> |
| 3. <i>I won a sports award and I learned that my team mates helped me to win it</i> |
| 4. |

10. What groups are you involved with (school clubs, church groups, teams, etc.) and in what ways (member, officer, captain, etc.)?

- | |
|---------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Belong to the YMCA</i> |
| 2. <i>Captain of our sports team</i> |
| 3. <i>Volunteer at the dog rescue</i> |
| 4. |

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.



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