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# SOFT SKILLS & PRODUCTIVITY PACKET

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After working hard to get a job, you want to keep it! Job Seekers often mistakenly think once they have landed a job that their work is finished. However, the truly important work is just beginning. What kinds of skills and behaviors should you exude once beginning your job? What can you do to become valued by and indispensable to your employer, and thus have a better chance of job security?

Employers need employees who possess relevant technical skills **and** soft skills. If you are currently enrolled in, or have graduated from some sort of post-secondary education, most likely you have learned the technical skills needed to perform on the job. Often times what we learn in college are the technical skills needed to be educated persons with the necessary training for our respective careers (for example, a nursing student will learn how to administer a shot). Sometimes students will finish college and yet not truly be prepared for the workforce because they lack the soft skills that employers are looking for. In addition to Soft Skills, employers desire productivity and simple etiquette from their employees. Let's take a look at each of these independently and assess your level in these areas.

## SOFT SKILLS

**SOFT SKILLS ARE THE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS SUCH AS PROBLEM-SOLVING, DECISION-MAKING, CREATIVITY, CUSTOMER SERVICE, COMMITMENT TO QUALITY, SELF-ESTEEM AND RESPONSIBILITY.**

### Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you know right from wrong and always strive to do the right thing?
- Do you pay attention to details and always strive to do your best?
- Do you consistently arrive to work on time?
- Do you display a positive attitude at work?
- Can you handle feedback without becoming defensive, upset, or angry?
- Are you willing and open to learning new things?
- Are you aware of the things you can and cannot do; do you try to improve upon your weaknesses?
- Are you able to be polite, friendly, flexible, interested and participative at work?
- Can you make tough decisions based on an internal system of decision-making?
- Do you try to find solutions to customer issues and recognize when you need assistance from a manager?
- Can you communicate in a positive manner even when faced with difficult situations, customers, or patients?
- Can you understand information, and remember and follow instructions that are given to you?
- Can you communicate with others in a way that is easy to understand?
- Can you "read" people well and are you sensitive to others feelings?

If you cannot answer “yes” to most or all of the above questions, then you probably need to do some soft-skill development in order to be successful in the workplace.

Now, try your hand at these workplace scenarios (*adapted from Learning Resources Inc*):

1. Soft Skill: **Self Management**

Assume that you work in a company that does commercial printing. Your supervisor asks you to show a new employee how to operate the large hole-punch machine in the shop. You know a little about the hole-punch machine from having seen other employees operate it a few times, but you have never actually operated it yourself. How would you handle the situation with your supervisor?

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS	SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS
➤ Accept the assignment and just try your best	➤ Candidly inform the supervisor of your own knowledge and experience with the equipment.
➤ Simply suggest the supervisor have someone else do the training activity.	➤ Ask the supervisor to be trained on the equipment at the same time as the new employee.

2. Soft Skill: **Integrity**

Assume you are at work and one of your co-workers decides that he wants to leave work 15 minutes early, but does not want the manager to whom you both report to know that he is leaving early. As your co-worker is leaving he explains to you that he is leaving early and asks you to “cover for him” in case your manager comes by and asks where he is. What would you do in this situation?

Assume the Manager comes by and asks you directly where your co-worker is. What would you say? What would you say to the co-worker before he leaves?

SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS	SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS
➤ See nothing wrong with the co-worker’s behavior (e.g., it’s not my business).	➤ Indicate disagreement with the co-worker’s deceitful actions.
➤ Agree to “cover” for the co-worker or play dumb if questioned by the manager.	➤ Inform the co-worker you will not lie to the manager.
➤ Indicate disagreement with co-workers actions, but don’t say so to the co-worker.	➤ Indicate that you will tell the manager the true story.

3. Soft Skill: **Decision-Making**

Assume you are working and a customer comes to you and wants to return a product she purchased from your store three months ago. You know that your store’s policy is that all returns must be made within 30 days of purchase unless the product is defective. In situations where the product was purchased more than 30 days ago, but is being returned

and it is defective, only a supervisor can approve the return. What would you do and say to this customer?

<b>SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>	<b>SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>
➤ Explain return policy to customer prior to asking why he/she wants to return the product.	➤ Question the customer to determine the reason for wanting to return the product.
➤ Say that only a supervisor can approve the return.	➤ Attempt to handle the problem without involving the supervisor.
➤ Simply telling the customer “no” or “it’s against policy”.	➤ Recognize that accepting the return would be inappropriate.
	➤ Apologize for any inconvenience.

4. Soft Skill: **Responsibility**

Assume that you work in a large Department Store and that your manager just told you to take your morning break. Your break is only 15 minutes long and you need to be back at your workstation in exactly 15 minutes. You are on your way to the break room when a customer approaches you and asks you where she can find picture frames. You know that picture frames are on the completely opposite side of the store, in the Home Furnishing section, and are pretty difficult to find. How would you deal with this customer?

<b>SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>	<b>SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>
➤ Tell the customer you are “on break” and cannot help them right now.	➤ Cut the break short and walk the customer to the location of the picture frames.
➤ Tell the customer that picture frames are located in the Home Furnishing section of the store and provide no more direction or suggestions.	➤ Attempt to locate a co-worker who can take the customer to the picture frames.

5. Soft Skill: **Sociability**

Assume that one of your co-workers, with whom you are somewhat friendly, is currently undergoing a divorce and often wants to talk with you about personal problems he is having because of the divorce. However, the supervisor that both you and the co-worker report to has told you that he (the supervisor) believes you and the co-worker have tended to spend too much time talking and need to pay more attention to your work. How would you deal with your co-worker?

<b>SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>	<b>SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>
➤ Overreact- i.e., tell the co-worker, “I can’t talk to you anymore.”	➤ Indicate an awareness and willingness to use non-work time (i.e., breaks, lunch time, after work) for discussions.
➤ Deal with the co-worker in an insensitive manner- i.e., your problems are getting me in trouble.	➤ Recognizing the need to inform the co-worker of the need to decrease personal conversation time in a sensitive

	manner.
➤ Suggest the supervisor talk to the co-worker directly about the problem- i.e, it's the co-worker, not me that always wants to talk.	

6. Soft Skill: **Customer Relations**

Assume that you work as a customer service rep for a utility company. A customer calls you and explains that she just received a notice from your company informing her that her monthly payment is 2 weeks late. She explains that she is absolutely certain that she mailed her check for the payment to your company more than 2 weeks ago. You check your computer and see that the payment has not yet been received, but you also see that she has been a customer for three years and has no other late payments. The customer is concerned that a late payment will hurt her credit rating and wants the situation cleared up as soon as possible. What do you tell her or suggest to her, and why?

<b>SAMPLE INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>	<b>SAMPLE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS</b>
➤ Take a “tough” position (“its 2 weeks late so you need to write another check and your account will now show a late fee.”)	➤ Give her some special consideration because of her excellent past payment record & the fact that she had called the company.
➤ Show a “helpless” attitude (“your payment is late and there is nothing I can do.”)	➤ Attempt to put the customer at ease regarding the issue of the credit rating.
➤ Ignore the relevance of the customer’s good payment history to the overall situation.	➤ Suggest she contact her bank to determine if the check has cleared; suggesting giving it another week to show up and offering to waive any late fees.

Developing your Soft Skills will help you keep your job and be seen in a positive light by your employer. To excel in your job, you will also strive to be viewed as a Productive employee.

# PRODUCTIVITY

**PRODUCTIVITY IS “GETTING A LOT DONE, IN AS SHORT A TIME AS POSSIBLE, AND MAKING SURE THE WORK IS DONE RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.” – LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION**

Here are some examples of productive and unproductive Workplace Behaviors:

PRODUCTIVE	UNPRODUCTIVE
➤ Pays attention to time	➤ Unaware of when tasks should be completed
➤ Takes responsibility for actions	➤ Does not follow directions
➤ Asks for clarification	➤ Does not ask for help
➤ Accepts criticism	➤ Places blame on others
➤ Looks for more work to do	➤ Plays on computer or gossips
➤ Changes habits to be more productive	➤ Has “good enough” attitude

Why do you think it is important to employers to have productive employees? A recent survey conducted by Salary.com calculated that employers spend \$759 billion per year on salaries for which real work was expected, but not actually performed! So unproductive employees waste a lot of employers’ money! The top 10 time-wasting activities found were:

1. Surfing the Internet for personal use
2. Socializing with co-workers
3. Conducting personal business
4. Spacing out
5. Running errands off-premises
6. Making personal phone calls
7. Applying for other jobs
8. Planning personal events
9. Arriving late / Leaving early
10. Other

In fact, Indiana and Kentucky employees rate highest out of the states for having the most time wasted at work, with both states’ employees averaging 2.8 hours wasted per day!

You can enact productive behaviors while in school that will carry over into the workplace. Here are some examples of productive and unproductive College Behaviors:

PRODUCTIVE	UNPRODUCTIVE
➤ Goes to class and pays attention	➤ Skips class
➤ Introduces self to Instructor	➤ Makes no effort to meet Instructor
➤ Asks relevant questions when uncertain	➤ “Spaces out” and day-dreams
➤ Establishes payment plan to pay tuition	➤ Does not pay tuition or establish payment plan on time

## **ETIQUETTE**

There are some simple behaviors you can enact that will make your supervisor, co-workers, and customers/patients happy. In addition, you will increase your chances of being considered a professional.

- Be aware of how you smell and look.  
Tip: Wear deodorant, brush your hair and teeth, and don't smell like a cigarette.
- Return phone calls and emails in a timely manner. Think about how you feel when someone doesn't call you back!
- Inserting emoticons and abbreviations into your emails may be okay with your friends, but at work, don't go ovRbrd w/ abbrv., symbols, & emoticons b/c its not considered professional. ☺
- When you are at work, talk like a grownup, okay "dude?"
- Dress professionally, not like Bridget Jones. You can purchase relatively inexpensive clothing that still looks appropriate for the workplace at Wal-Mart, Target, and K-Mart. Model your dress after people in the organization who are respected and higher up than you.
- Before calling someone on the phone, prepare everything you need before you place the call. That way, you will not be shuffling through papers as you're talking to someone or leaving them a voice mail message. If you are leaving them a message, always leave your name and phone number first so if you get cut off, the recipient will at least be able to contact you.

Finally, remember these final bits of advice to keep you in tip-top shape in the workplace.

## **TEN COMMANDMENTS OF KEEPING YOUR JOB**

Texas Business Today, 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Quarters 1998

1. Be on time.
2. Call in if you know you will be tardy or absent.
3. Try your best.
4. Anticipate problems and needs of management.
5. Show a positive attitude.
6. Avoid backstabbing, office gossip, and spreading rumors.
7. Follow the rules.
8. Look for opportunities to serve customers and help coworkers.
9. Avoid the impulse to criticize your boss or the company.
10. Volunteer for training and new assignments.