

TEAMWORK AND WORK HABITS LESSON

Respect the Rights of Others

It is often easy for us as individuals to get caught up in our own problems and isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. Although this tendency seems to be virtually harmless (even if a bit selfish), it can actually be detrimental to our success as students or employers.

Each person possesses his or her own set of beliefs and values. Many of these values are a direct result of the individual's upbringing, while others have been tainted or colored by the individual's experiences. Because no two people have the same upbringing and experiences, no two people will have an identical set of beliefs and values. This diversity creates conflict among classmates or co-workers. This is compounded in today's environments due to the cultural diversity that makes up our classrooms and workplaces.

In order to maximize our learning/working experience, we must be aware of how we differ from our classmates and co-workers. However, being aware of these differences is not enough! We must take these variances into consideration when making a decision that will affect others.

Once we get into the habit of taking others' value systems into play, we actually begin to establish better relationships with others. Oftentimes, we are prejudiced against others without even realizing it; but by making a conscious effort to respect every person as a human being with valid values and beliefs, we begin to see the benefit of diversity and begin to learn from others. The synergy that results from a good working relationship with our classmates and co-workers is well worth the initial sacrifice in time that it takes to begin the process of understanding and appreciating others.

Be a Team Worker

Teamwork has become the buzzword in the last few years. You may have heard of it in the form of group presentations, study teams, quality circles, self-directed work teams, or many of the other guides used. Despite the different names used to express the idea, the concept is the same. We must all learn to function in teams and work together toward a common goal or to solve a common problem. The synergy that results from working together leads to a better solution than any of the members could have developed alone.

In the ideal organization, co-workers are more empowered than they were a decade ago. That is, each employee's opinion is taken into consideration and they have more of an input about the

direction of the company. Employees today are not typically given instructions to follow without their having provided input into the process development. This new respect and responsibility is a great opportunity for the employees of today, but only if they possess the necessary team interaction skills!

To be a team player, an individual must possess a team spirit and a willingness to work with others. He or she must be tolerant of the ideas and viewpoints of others and assertive enough to offer his/her own opinions. Team members must be careful not to criticize their teammates. They must also be willing to share the spotlight or glory of success with their fellow team members.

The team will undoubtedly be comprised of individuals with different personalities, beliefs, and levels of experience. Again, we must strive to work together and maximize our working or learning experience by respecting and learning from each other.

Be Cooperative

A cooperative attitude is always a must. Each person, including students and employees, is always judged on his/her willingness to cooperate with and get along with others. Cooperation often calls for the compromising of certain values or ideas. Although the solution reached from such a compromise will not be your original solution, it will be the optimal solution because you have worked together to solve a problem.

Cooperation also involves a willingness to learn from others and to bend your beliefs. It also requires a willingness to work together.

Displaying a cooperative attitude encourages others to be cooperative. This creates a win/win situation and a positive environment for all people involved. In such an environment, employees are happier and more productive, and the outcomes reached are greater than they would have been with the absence of a cooperative spirit.

Be Assertive

Another desirable workplace behavior is assertiveness. Assertiveness is speaking your mind or making your opinions known without being brash or pushy. Being assertive is speaking boldly and with self-confidence. One assertive person will promote candor in the classroom and/or work environment. This candor will encourage others to voice their opinions. The benefit of having each person's input is invaluable. First of all, if each person feels that he/she has contributed to the solution, he/she will be more committed to its implementation. Second, the voicing of one's opinion tends to stimulate development of opinion from others.

Assertiveness can also lead to increased awareness and respect for an individual. Those employees who speak up for themselves and voice their opinions earn respect from their peers and their superiors. The old saying that the squeaky wheel gets the oil is a prime example of the benefit of assertiveness. After all, who is more likely to receive the outcome he/she desires—the person who is brave enough to express concern or to ask for particular treatment or the one who sits back and does not utter a word?

Displays a Customer Service Attitude

A customer service attitude is, without a doubt, the most important aspect of an individual's attitude. This applies even to students in a typical classroom and to employees who have little or no direct contact with the external customer. Customer service is more than knowing that the customer is always right. Customer service is knowing who your customers are and how to treat them. Customers take the form of classmates, instructors, co-workers, supervisors, subordinates, and the traditional external customers.

Customers can be anyone whom we serve or who may potentially benefit from the work that we do. Customers should be treated carefully and respectfully because if they do not feel that they have been treated so, they will no longer be our customers. Too many people provide the same service that we do for a customer to choose to remain dissatisfied for very long!

Seek Opportunities for Continuous Learning

The person who coined this phrase, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," obviously did not have to function as a student or an employee in today's competitive market. Today all "dogs" must constantly be on the lookout for learning new and improved ways for performing the "tricks" that they already know as well as learning as many new tricks as possible.

We have to face the facts that lifelong learning is the key to retaining success over a long period of time. We cannot afford the luxury of being complacent in today's rapidly changing world. Technology forces us to constantly re-learn how to perform a task. Those of us who realize the value of continuous learning and take advantage of the increasing opportunities for obtaining new skills or improving old ones are the ones who will remain successful for the long haul. Those who do not recognize the value of continuous self-improvement or fail to seize opportunities to learn will be bypassed by those who do. Perhaps the old cliché, "Get on board the train or get out of its path", says it best!

Demonstrate Mannerly Behavior

Manners may seem old fashioned and not a requirement for today's students and employees, but nothing could be further from the truth. The display of manners is becoming more important each day.

Manners are more than saying "Yes, Sir" and "No, Sir" to your elders. Manners are about treating others the way you would like to be treated—in other words, they are what "The Golden Rule" is all about. Displaying manners is about respecting the views and beliefs of others.

Respect Confidentiality

Proprietary information must always be kept in the strictest of confidence. In the working environment, the degree of exposure to such information varies greatly among industries and also among positions within a company. There are not as many opportunities to test the respect of confidentiality in the classroom as there are in the typical job, but it is still very important.

The leaking of confidential information can lead to severe problems on many levels. If the information is of a personal nature, such as the salary of one employee, morale could deteriorate and conflict among co-workers or classmates could arise. If the information is of a financial nature and is leaked to the wrong person (such as the price of an item if price varies by customer), it could lead to the dissatisfaction or loss of a customer. The loss of a customer may even lead to the downfall or bankruptcy of the company.

The examples given above are the obvious results of breach of confidentiality. Sometimes the infraction may appear to be harmless, but it may lead to the loss of a customer. It is best to always keep information that is of a private nature confidential.

If we do become privy to such information, we often fail to keep it confidential because we like to feel important and we like for others to see us as someone who is "in the know." What we don't realize is that divulging private information does not make us appear informed, but rather as the person that nobody can trust and as the leader of the rumor mill.