

Workplace Basics



Introduction: As a beginner in the “world of work” you have lots to learn. It doesn’t matter whether it is a summer job, temporary holiday employment, or even a full-time entry-level position. No matter what the job is, there are many opportunities to learn and acquire skills that will be useful later. But starting your first job can also be very stressful. Starting the job knowing some workplace basics can help relieve that stress. What are some of these basics?

Workplace Basics:

- A. The Three R’s. Employers expect employees to have basic academic skills in reading, writing and computation. If you are writing something that customers or others will read, don’t hesitate to ask someone to proofread a rough copy.
- B. Know the Rules. Every business has a set of rules developed to keep that business running smoothly. New employee are usually given an orientation and told what the rules are; some businesses even have these rules written in a policy manual. If you are unclear about any of the rules, always request clarification.
- C. Dependability. It means arriving at work on time every day, monitoring your breaks, not leaving work early, and notifying your supervisor when you are unable to be there. It also means being productive and completing all assigned tasks.
- D. Reliability. Reliability means following through and completing those tasks which are a part of your job. It also means planning your day--this will help you do your job quickly and use your time wisely and effectively.
- E. Teamwork. Employers want employees who can get along with co-workers, customers and suppliers; who can work with others to accomplish the company’s goals. Employees who are team players are valued higher than those with technical skills but who are hard to get along with. Cooperation, friendliness and being helpful are cornerstones of teamwork.
- F. Follow Directions. In order to keep your job, you must learn to follow directions and do the job the way your supervisor tells you. If you do not understand any directions, ask questions. Even if you know a short cut or a better way to do the job, wait until you have been on the job for awhile and really understand things before you make your suggestions.

- G. Communicate Effectively. Workers spend a great deal of their day in some form of communication. They communicate with co-workers and supervisors as well as customers and suppliers. Verbal communication includes listening actively, for a variety of purposes, as well as being able to express oneself clearly and concisely. It also includes tone of voice, inflection, volume, pace. Increasingly, communication involves the ability to use the tools of information technology, such as e-mail, to communicate with others.

Remember that effective communication also includes non-verbal elements, such as facial expressions, posture and movement, eye contact, gestures, etc. For instance, some gestures indicate impatience--stepping or turning away, pushing back from a desk or table, gathering up materials, closing a briefcase, repeatedly looking at a watch. Patience is often indicated by nodding the head to show understanding, facing the customer, or leaning forward. Physical distance is a part of communication--too close makes the person feel that you are invading his/her space. Standing 2-4 feet apart is generally a good distance for personal conversations--close enough to feel private but yet allowing personal space for each person.

- H. Safety. Safety includes following safe practices in job tasks and use of equipment. You are expected to recognize unsafe situations and report them to the appropriate person. Safety may also involve the use of safety clothing, such as shoes, goggles, gloves or other protective devices.
- I. Work Attitude. Every job provides an opportunity to learn. Once a job has been acquired, show supervisors and peers that you are open to learning new things. Take advantage of all training opportunities. Take pride in your work. Be open to professional growth--attend in-service training when appropriate, assess your own strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan for improvement. Go above and beyond--offer assistance to others when assigned duties are complete, do more than you are asked and contribute more than is required. Volunteer to do things that seem to "fall between the cracks." Respect and value human diversity. In most cases a job is what you make it. Remember, more people lose their jobs because of a lack of "work attitude" than a lack of "job skills."
- J. Accepting Criticism. When you make mistakes, acknowledge them. Accept any criticism from your supervisor and correct the mistake. Examine your mistake and learn from it--determine what you did wrong and how you can avoid doing this same mistake in the future. Focus on avoiding this mistake in the future rather than dwelling on what went wrong. No one is perfect, therefore, everyone has things they need to improve.