

Start Where You Are magazine 2010–2011 curriculum — page 12, lesson 1

## Be an employer

**Objective:** Students look at basic work skills from the perspective of an employer. They learn the importance of basic skills, and the ways these skills transfer across jobs and industries.

**Grade level:** 9–12

**Teacher prep time:** 5 minutes

**Class time:** 20–30 minutes

**Materials:** board and markers

**Format:** advisory session or class discussion

### Procedure

1. Introduce the activity by explaining what an “entry-level” job is — one that normally doesn't require prior experience in any field or type of business, and thus may involve on-site training.
2. Then explain to students that the class is going to imagine themselves as “the boss” of a business in which there's an opening for an entry-level job. Split students into small groups, each of which has to determine the following:
  - the product your business sells or the service it provides
  - the number of employees currently working at the company
  - the types of tasks a typical entry-level worker at the company does
  - the five most essential skills that you want from an entry-level worker
3. Give the groups 15 minutes to develop their answers.
4. Ask each group to share a short summary of the business they created, and then share ONE of their five most essential skills, explaining why it is so important. Write each skill on the board.
5. Once each group has contributed one skill, ask the class if there are other skills not yet included in the list. Add all responses to the list.
6. Ask each student to look at the final list on the board and choose the three skills that he or she thinks are most important for workers to have, no matter where they're employed. Have each student come up to the board and put a check next to his or her top three skills.
7. Tally the results to find the skills with the most checks.

### Questions to consider for follow-up

1. Why are some of these skills vital, no matter where you're employed?
2. Do you have these skills already? How can you develop them?



### **NCDA guidelines for career management**

- master academic, occupational, and general employability skills in order to obtain, create, maintain, and/or advance your employment

### **Vermont's Framework of Standards vital results**

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| <b>Section 2</b> | <b>Reasoning and Problem-Solving Standards</b>   |
| 2.2              | Students use reasoning strategies, knowledge, and common sense to solve complex problems related to all fields of knowledge. |
| 2.9              | Students persevere in the face of challenges and obstacles.  |
| <b>Section 3</b> | <b>Personal Development Standards</b>  |
| 3.3              | Students demonstrate respect for themselves and others.  |
| 3.7              | Students make informed decisions.  |
| 3.15             | Students know about various careers.   |

### **VTSCA career standards**

**Academic Development Domain, Standard C:** Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

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| A:C1.5 | understand that school success is the preparation to make the transition from student to community member |
| A:C1.6 | understand how school success and academic achievement enhance future career and vocational opportunities |

**Career Development Domain, Standard A:** Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.

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| C:A1.3 | develop an awareness of personal abilities, skills, interests, and motivations                                  |
| C:A2.1 | acquire employability skills such as working on a team, problem solving, and organizational skills              |
| C:A2.4 | learn about the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees  |
| C:A2.8 | understand the importance of responsibility, dependability, punctuality, integrity, and effort in the workplace |

**Career Development Domain, Standard C:** Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and the world of work.

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| C:C1.4 | understand that the changing workplace requires lifelong learning and acquiring new skills |
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# DO YOU HAVE what employers want?

Tom Rath: "I don't know anything about public relations."

Coworker: "Who does? You've got a clean shirt, and you bathe every day. That's all there is to it!"  
Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1956 film)

Life has changed since 1956. Today Rath and his coworkers would probably be talking about "core competencies." These are particular strengths that give you a competitive edge in the workforce and enable you to make a valuable contribution to the business or organization for which you work. These are the skills that business leaders will be looking for in future employees, not only because these skills can support business growth, but also because they contribute to creating a positive workplace.

Take a look at the five competencies below, identified by Helen Haste of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

**How many do you think you have?**

**If you don't have them, where do you think you can learn them?**

**If you were a business owner, what other competencies would you add to the list?**



## MANAGING EMOTION

According to Haste, this is about learning "to manage reason and emotion and not to flip to one or the other." It means knowing when to use your head, knowing when to examine a situation from another point of view instead of your own, and knowing how to deal reasonably and calmly with others who may disagree with you. This requires confidence in oneself. The more confidence one has in his or her own abilities, the less one will need to be "right" in every situation, and the more comfortable he or she will be in acknowledging the value of someone else's suggestions.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Knowing what it means to take responsibility is essential to being an effective employee. At Netflix and IBM, employees have no set vacation days. Steve Swasey, vice president of corporate communications at Netflix, says that they don't even keep track of how many days workers are out of the office. "If you hire adults who practice adult behaviors, you don't need requirements like vacation policies." At Best Buy, a "set your own hours" policy helped to increase productivity by an average of 42 percent, but for such a policy to work, managers need to know that employees are honest and won't abuse the system.

## MANAGING TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Given that today's teens are the first generation to grow up in a 24/7 wired world, this is likely to be a lot easier for young people than it is for coworkers in their 40s or 50s. Still, being able to identify and effectively use different kinds of information on the Internet is a learned skill; and being willing to adopt new applications, even if they're not the ones you prefer, will mean you can adapt more easily to change in the workplace.

## BUILDING AND MAINTAINING COMMUNITY

In a work environment that increasingly relies on teams of people working toward a single outcome, this skill is extremely valuable. Haste says it involves "recognizing that one is part of a larger community, not just one's own private little world." In one-third of American companies with fifty or more employees, more than half of the staff works in self-managed or problem-solving teams. These groups organize, staff, schedule, monitor, and control their own work, so being able to communicate clearly to collaborate with others is vital. Being willing to pick up someone's slack if he has an illness in the family, or knowing when you need to ask for help yourself — even knowing a team member's birthday — contribute significantly to building a productive and supportive work environment.

## MANAGING UNCERTAINTY

Are you the kind of person who likes to resolve things quickly? Do you like to complete one task and immediately move on to the next? Are you uncomfortable revisiting a problem, perhaps several times, before you settle on a solution? If you're a very linear thinker (moving forward in a very straight line), then you may find it difficult to sit with a problem for any length of time. It may be hard for you to seek out several perspectives and opinions before you determine the best way to move forward. If so, managing uncertainty may be a skill you want to develop. In today's work culture, problem-solving is likely to be a team effort rather than the result of one person's decision — and reaching consensus takes time and patience.

Test some of your 21st-century strengths. In a group, talk about the following detailed skills and put each of them under one of the five general competencies described on this page. There are no right or wrong answers, and you may be able to put some of the skills under more than one competency. See how well you do at talking in a group and listening to the opinions of others.

- ★ taking the initiative; being a "self-starter"
- ★ being willing to learn and apply new electronic applications
- ★ cultivating your social skills (good manners, knowing how to put someone at ease, being able to interact with people who are different from you)
- ★ adapting to changing circumstances like being reassigned to a new department or getting a new boss
- ★ problem-solving; persevering until the very best solution is reached
- ★ maintaining professional, honest behaviors
- ★ distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources of information on the Internet
- ★ being able to work independently
- ★ identifying opportunities to improve a particular process
- ★ caring about the quality of one's work
- ★ developing good communication skills (written and spoken)