

Do employers have what *you* want? Investigating your work values

Objective: Students will explore their work values and learn why it may be important to find careers and employers that matches their values.

Grade level: 9–12

Teacher prep time: 5 minutes

Class time: 15–25 minutes

Materials: work–values clarification worksheet (attached)

Format: advisory session or class discussion

Procedure

1. Ask students to consider this statement: “Finding a job with values that match your own values — and an employer whose values match your own — is important to job satisfaction.” Why might this be true? What might happen if a job’s requirements don’t match up with your own values? What might happen if you work for a company that does things you don’t agree with?

Example:

You enjoy figuring out how things work and building things. You find work, with good pay and benefits, at a weapons manufacturer. Will you be okay with what you are making?

2. Have each student work independently to complete the work–values clarification worksheet (attached at the end of this document).
3. Ask for volunteers to share their top work value and explain why it’s most important to them.

NCDA guidelines for personal social development

- develop understanding of self to build and maintain a positive self-concept

Vermont’s Framework of Standards vital results

Section 3	Personal Development Standards
3.7	Students make informed decisions.
3.15	Students know about various careers.

VTSCA career standards

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.

C:A1.3 develop an awareness of personal abilities, skills, interests, and motivations



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)

work values clarification

What do I want from a job?

The following list describes a number of work values. Based on the definition provided, rate how important each value would be to you in an ideal job, using to the following scale:

not important at all



minimally important



important



very important



_____ **Self-direction:** I will work on my own with minimal supervision, and will have the independence to complete tasks the way I want to.

_____ **Prosperity:** One of my main goals will be to earn money and perhaps become quite wealthy.

_____ **Respect and recognition:** My work will be respected and recognized by other people.

_____ **Creativity:** I will use my imagination and creativity in my job.

_____ **Leadership:** In my position, I will be a role model and/or leader.

_____ **Risk taking:** I will have many opportunities to take risks and confront challenges in my job.

_____ **Expertise:** I will be considered an expert in my field and will be recognized for my knowledge.

_____ **Responsibility:** I will have a great deal of responsibility.

_____ **Making a difference:** My work will have a visible impact on people's lives and/or on society.

_____ **Producing a result:** My work will involve projects with specific, visible results.

_____ **Supervision:** I will be responsible for the work of others.

_____ **Aesthetics:** I will add physical beauty to the world.

_____ **Time freedom:** I will have time outside of work to do the things I want to do.

_____ **Self-expression:** I will be able to express myself fully through my work.

_____ **Affiliation:** I will be recognized as a member of a particular organization.

_____ **Friendship:** I will have an opportunity to make friends with my coworkers.

_____ **Structure:** I will have a lot of direction on how to do my job.

_____ **Security:** The organization I work for will provide me with steady employment.

_____ **Moral fulfillment:** My work will be consistent with my moral standards and values.



_____ **Location:** I will live in an area or community with many opportunities to do the things I like to do.

_____ **Authority:** I will have authority over others and be able to influence people.

_____ **Recreation:** I will contribute to other's enjoyment of and pleasures in life.

_____ **Social status:** I will enjoy a high degree of social status because of the job I hold.

_____ **Ability utilization:** My work will use my skills and talents to their fullest potential.

_____ **Organizational structure:** The organization I work for will have clearly defined goals, policies, and procedures.

_____ **Working conditions:** I will work in an environment that supports my ability to get my work done.

List the ten values that are most important to you, from most to least important:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

