

Money TALKS

Should I Be Working?



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On the Job

Whether you're already working or not, it is important to know what it takes to keep a job. You've probably seen some people who don't seem to have what it takes. Remember that time you bought something at the store and the checker never even looked up at you but just kept talking to the bagger? Those employees might not be trying to offend customers but they didn't show good customer service.

University of California
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**What's
Wrong
With This
Picture?**

Look at this image of Kate working at The Corner Mart. Can you identify the same seven problems that Kate's boss sees? Circle them on the picture and then write a quick description of each problem in the spaces provided below.

Continued on page 3

Whats Wrong With This Picture? (cont.)

Check below the problems that you caught.

-  Kate is chewing gum. Chewing gum is often discouraged and even prohibited for many employees. It can make you more difficult to understand, can be messy, and may be considered rude.
-  Kate has her cell phone in her hand like she is texting. Whether she uses it or not, Kate's cell phone should be turned off while she is on the clock. Kate is not getting paid to make personal calls, text friends, or download ring tones.
-  Kate's hair is really messy. Employees are a reflection of the company they work for, so employers want to keep employees who look good.
-  Kate is wearing flip-flops. For safety reasons Kate should be wearing closed toed shoes.
-  Kate's top is inappropriate for the work place. Her bra strap is showing and it is too low cut for work.
-  Kate is listening to her MP3 player. At most jobs, it is never appropriate to listen to your MP3 player. Kate may not hear instructions from her boss and may be annoying customers. If she is bored or has nothing to keep her busy, Kate could ask her boss for more work.
-  Kate is rolling her eyes and sending negative nonverbal messages. Communication is about more than just what you say. By rolling her eyes, Kate is saying that she does not take her job seriously.

Characteristics of a Good Employee



Your employer probably chose to hire you, at least in part, because of your personality and the traits that your resume and interview showed. While each company has different needs, there are many characteristics which might be valued by any boss: honesty, responsibility, punctuality, good communication skills, cooperation, reliability, accuracy, good judgment, politeness, and knowledge of company policies. When someone is fired from a job it is most likely because he/she didn't possess or use these characteristics. Chances are that you are stronger in some of these areas than others. To help evaluate your own behavior, fill out "My Behavior Assessment" on page 4.

My Behavior Assessment



The following twenty-one statements reflect the traits that employers may think a good employee should have. Read each statement and decide how often you demonstrate that behavior at work. Circle number 1 if never; number 2 if rarely; number 3 if you do as often as you don't; number 4 if frequently; and number 5 if always.

- | | Never | | | | Always |
|---|-------|---|---|---|--------|
| 1. When I make a mistake, I take responsibility and try to fix it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I am honest about my capabilities and say so if I can't do something. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Punctuality is important to me, so I clock in on time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. My co-workers know they can depend on me to finish my share of work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. If I am unhappy, I communicate my feelings without blaming others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Even when I get a hard task, I keep a positive attitude. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. When I get to work, I turn off my cell, so I can concentrate on my job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. As needs arise, I am flexible and can reorganize my plans. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. When I go to work, I make sure I am properly dressed for my job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Even if I am annoyed at a customer, I am polite. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. My boss knows my desire and willingness to learn new responsibilities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I double check my work for accuracy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Because I carefully follow directions, I rarely have to repeat a job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. When I finish my work, I use initiative and find something new to do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. In all tasks, I am thorough and confident the job is done right. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Since I am aware of rules and regulations, I never get reprimanded. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. At work, I leave my personal problems at home and focus on my job. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I cooperate with all my co-workers, even the ones I don't like. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. If a job really needs to get done, my boss asks me as I am reliable. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I am self-confident. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Look back over the scores you gave yourself. All of the traits marked 4 or 5 are good work characteristics you already have. For the traits you gave yourself a 3, it might be easy to master these good work behaviors just by being aware of them. All of the traits marked 1 or 2 are good work characteristics that you are lacking. You can use this assessment to help you improve your relationships at work and chances for a raise. Pick one behavior that you most want to improve while at work. Can you think of three situations where that behavior could help you at work?

A young man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a striped tie, is smiling and holding a large, light-colored speech bubble. The speech bubble contains the text "Communicate on the Job" in a stylized font. The background is plain white.

Communicate on the Job

Whether you're texting during break, emailing your cousin, answering a question during class, or arguing with your parents, you are communicating. And you probably communicate differently with different people. How you communicate on the job can make the difference between a good day and a bad one, a compliment or reprimand, or between getting a raise and getting fired.

The three most important aspects of workplace communication are probably good listening skills, positive body language, and appropriate subject. Listening carefully so that you understand what is being said can help you build relationships and be successful at your job.

But listening is hard to do. It is easy to let your mind wander when someone else is talking. Even if you don't agree with someone, try to understand what is being said without judging. Then you might ask a question to see if you understood their meaning correctly. If you don't understand, it is your job to ask. When you receive clear instructions, you will know what you're expected to do and you will be more successful.

You can probably tell when your friends are happy, even if they don't say so. Body language says as much as, if not more than, words. The tone of your voice,

look in your eyes, posture, and facial expressions are all good examples of nonverbal communication. If your sister says she likes talking about your friends with you but keeps looking at her watch and drumming her fingers, what will you believe? It is important to remember that more than just polite words will effect how your boss, co-workers, and customers feel about you. You can practice good body language by keeping eye contact, leaning towards the speakers, and watching other's body language for hints about their feelings.

When you are on the job, what you talk about will probably be work-centered. Keep personal stuff to yourself while at work, even if you work with your friends. Aside from not being paid to gossip, you could get a bad reputation from your co-workers, making it harder to communicate and making conflict more likely.

Conflict at work is impossible to avoid. But conflicts do not need to escalate into arguments and hard feelings. Problems can arise when someone doesn't understand what you are saying or if you don't understand them. Practice good listening, avoid aggressive or blaming statements, and try to find a solution that is acceptable to everyone, so that no one needs to lose face.



What ^{Not} to Wear

Your appearance communicates as much about you as your words and body language. It can say something about your age, sex, race, and even your attitude. Maybe you choose your outfit because it's in style, unique, or sexy. Or you might buy something because it's comfortable, cheap, or easy to clean. There are as many reasons to buy a shirt as there are ways to wear it. But when you are at work, how you look says a lot about your company. So, many employers will expect you to dress for your job and not for your personal expression.

Your employer is probably more focused on company image, employee safety, health laws, and employee identification than on fashion. In fact, you may be expected to wear a uniform or conform to a dress code. Whether or not your employer gives you written expectations, there are ways to dress for your job:

- Come to work clean.
- Brush your teeth or use breath mints.
- Use deodorant or antiperspirant.
- Choose a hairstyle that will last for your entire shift without getting messy.
- Check your nails before your shift. Really long

finger nails may make it hard to run a cash register and usually are not allowed in food service. So, make sure your finger nails are shaped right for your job duties and are clean.

- Choose a light perfume/cologne, or just skip it if people you work with are sensitive to fragrances.
- Wear clean, wrinkle free clothes that fit you well.

For Men: Only wear a beard or mustache if you have enough facial hair to fill it out and use a beard trimmer to keep it looking good. Check your company's policy about facial hair.

For Women: Unless you are working at a makeup counter, use makeup to enhance, not distract.





Rights & Responsibilities

Did you know that almost 70 teens will die from a work injury this year and that another 84,000 will have to go to the emergency room? You're more likely to get hurt if you are doing a job that teens are not legally allowed to do (like driving a forklift, operating a bakery machine, or working long hours). But your personal work behavior also plays a part in your level of risk. Ultimately, you are most responsible for your own safety. Know what work you are legally allowed to do, learn all safety rules and instructions, find out what to do in an emergency, and always report safety hazards to your employer.

As a working teen, you have special rights that are promised to you by your state and the federal government. Your rights include:

- refusing to do a job that is immediately dangerous to your health or life
- a work place free from racial or sexual harassment
- the ability to join or organize a union
- reporting safety concerns to OSHA

No matter where you work, your employer must provide:

- a safe, healthy working environment
- health and safety training
- protective clothing and equipment (if applicable)
- at least the federal minimum hourly wage

If you are hurt while working, you are guaranteed worker's compensation benefits, including:

- appropriate medical care

- payments if you miss three days worth of wages or are hospitalized
- access to greater benefits if your injury results in permanent disability

The first few days at any new job can be overwhelming. After all, you're learning about your responsibilities, making new relationships, and trying to be a great employee. Try not to worry about everything at once, just pick one thing to work on at a time. As you develop your work personality and learn how you fit into your company, each shift will get easier and easier. Good luck!



Did You Know?

Punctuality is more than just clocking in on time. When you show up to a meeting, return from a break, or submit an assignment, it all reflects on your timeliness. Timeliness can make a difference in your next review or raise!

Laws and Safety

Can my employer tell me what to wear to work? If your employer has a legitimate reason for a clothing restriction and that restriction does not discriminate against any sex, religion, or disability, then chances are your employer is legally allowed to enforce that restriction. Also, your employer may be required by law to enforce some clothing, hair, or jewelry rules if you work with machines, food, or other areas where safety is a concern.

Tip: If you are uncertain what to wear on your first day of work, remember what other employees were wearing when you went for your interview and select something similar. Ask about dress guidelines sometime during your first day and check your employee handbook.



Did You Know?

The ability to communicate well is one of the most important skills employers look for. If you are really shy or just want to improve your skills when talking with others, consider signing up for a speech or communication course, joining a speech club, or talking to your career counselor for other ideas.

Money Talks... Should I Be Working? is a series of teen guides and leader's guides. The goals of these teen guides and leader's guides are to assist teens in 1) identifying careers that may work with their job personality; 2) understanding the process of finding and keeping a job, and 3) recognizing the benefits and pitfalls of being an entrepreneur. Comments regarding these teen guides can be addressed to: Consumer Economics Department, University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), 135 Building C, Highlander Hall, Riverside, CA 92521. Author: Katherine Wassenberg, Freelance Writer; Development Team: Keith Nathaniel, Karen Varcoe, Brenda Roche, Margaret Johns, Charles Go, Patti Wooten Swanson, Shirley Peterson and the UCCE Money Talks Workgroup; Graphic Designer: Kerry Decker, UC Riverside. 2010



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