

Career
Life
Work

Soft Skills for Work

Workbook

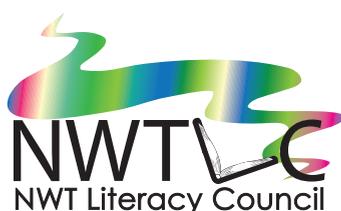
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There are 10 manuals and workbooks in the *Career – Life – Work* series. You will find a list of them on the last page of this workbook. You can find the whole series online at www.nwt.literacy.ca under the adult resources section. If you would like print copies, please contact the NWT Literacy Council.



Box 761, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N6

Phone toll free: 1-866-599-6758

Phone Yellowknife: (867) 873-9262

Fax: (867) 873-2176

Email: nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca

Website: www.nwt.literacy.ca

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About this Workbook

What keeps people from getting where they want to go at work? It's not usually a lack of technical skills that holds them back, but rather a need to develop social, communication, and personal qualities or what we call "soft skills."

Studies tell us that employers are looking for someone who has excellent "soft skills."

What are soft skills?

Soft skills usually fall into four categories:

- **Personal Qualities:** personal qualities like feeling good about yourself and your work, being responsible, being polite, and being motivated to do a good job.
- **Communication Skills:** communication skills include the ability to speak well, listen well, give and understand instructions, and communicate in ways appropriate to the situation and audience.
- **Teamwork Skills:** teamwork skills are those needed to work well with others, to participate as a member of a team, and to resolve conflicts maturely.
- **Problem Solving Skills:** problem solving involves the identification of problems and the formulation and evaluation of alternative solutions by weighing risks and benefits.

Personal Qualities

Personal qualities are how you behave or what your personality is like. Personal qualities are important in all jobs and are one of the key things an employer looks for when hiring.

Some examples of personal qualities are:

- Feeling good about yourself and your work
- Having a good attitude
- Being honest
- Having determination
- Being independent
- Being friendly to other staff and customers
- Using your creativity
- Working hard
- Being loyal to your organization or company
- Taking initiative

Get Started

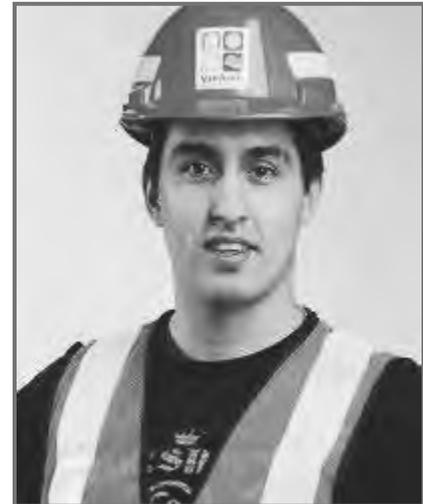
Everyone has different personal qualities. That's what makes us unique. Employers want to know that you have certain personal qualities like the ability to get along with others or that you are honest and trust worthy.

Your Turn!

Read the different scenarios on the next few pages and then determine what skills and personal qualities the person has for the job. The first one is done for you. You can fill in your personal profile on the last one.

Joe

Joe is a builder. He has moved to Yellowknife from a small community and is now looking for a job. He sees a job advertised in the *Yellowknifer* for a Carpenter's Helper. He wants to apply.



Joe's Personal Profile

He is strong, healthy and good at physical work. He can use a range of different tools and maintain them in good condition. He knows how to dig trenches, erect scaffolding and mix and pour concrete. He can prepare and clean wall surfaces for painters. He is reliable, can follow instructions and work at a good pace. He works well with other people and enjoys working outside.

What skills and personal qualities should Joe put in his resume?

Listed below are Joe's skills and personal qualities. You can see that Joe has many personal qualities that make him a good employee and good worker.

Skills	Personal qualities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use and maintain tools • dig trenches • erect scaffolding • mix and pour concrete • prepare surfaces for painters • follow instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong and healthy • good at physical work • works well with other people (a team player) • enjoys working outside • can follow instructions • reliable • can work at a good pace • ambitious

just another example

Jane

Jane worked as an administrative assistant for five years. She then stayed at home to be with her children for a couple of years. She would like to apply for an administrative assistant position at the bank.

Jane's Personal Profile

She dresses neatly and is always well presented. She is friendly, helpful and courteous to both customers and other employees. She can use a range of computer applications such as word processing, email and the Internet. She can type reports and maintain files. She has good telephone skills and is reliable with messages and other communication. She is very organised and careful with her work.



What skills and personal qualities should Jane put in her resume?

Skills	Personal qualities

Mabel

Mabel worked as a Community Health Representative in her community for many years. She had some training in the health field for this specific job. She has recently moved to Hay River and would like to pursue a career in the health field. She sees an advertisement for a home care aide in *News North*. She would like to apply.

Mabel's Personal Profile

She has experience promoting health issues and concerns in her community. She is able to translate health concerns for Elders at the health centre. She's good at keeping records and files organized. She has very good computer skills. She can make posters and type reports. Mabel is very caring and friendly and good with people. She enjoys helping others and is very sensitive to people's needs. She is hard working and always on time.



What skills and personal qualities should Mabel put in her resume?

Skills	Personal qualities

Sam

Sam is a small engine mechanic. He has always worked for himself repairing snow machines, boats and other small engines. He is tired of dealing with his own business and now wants to work for someone else. He sees an advertisement in the paper for a small engine repair mechanic and decides to apply.



Sam's Personal Profile

Sam has been working on boats and snow machines ever since he can remember. He has taken a few courses here and there on small engine repair but for the most part he knows more about small engine repair than the instructors. He is very knowledgeable about engines and can just listen to the engine and know what is wrong. Sam is a very likeable person; he is friendly to everyone and knows how to work well with others. Sam works hard and always gets the job done.

What skills and personal qualities should Sam put in his resume?

Skills	Personal qualities

Your Name:

Your Personal Profile

What skills and personal qualities can you put in your resume?

Skills	Personal qualities

Your Personal Qualities

The following checklist has been developed to help you evaluate personal qualities, which might be significant to an employer.

Your Turn! Check those qualities that you feel apply to you.

- Friendly:** Do you work well with others? Have you served on committees at school? At work? In the community?
- Hard worker:** Do you work hard at your job or at school? Do you put your best foot forward at all times?
- Cooperative:** Do you always do your part in a team assignment? Do you often volunteer to help?
- Decisive:** Are you able to make clear-cut decisions under pressure?
- Trustworthy:** Are you able to keep a secret? Do you guard confidential material carefully? Do you respect other people's right to privacy?
- Efficient:** Do you plan your time well? Do you consciously try to improve your work habits?
- Enthusiastic:** Are you interested in your work? Or studies? Have you ever done extra work because of your interest?
- Honest:** Do you tell the truth? Do you share the praise with others? Do you accept responsibility?
- Self-starter:** Do you take the initiative? Do you see what needs to be done and do it without being told?
- Open-minded:** Are you able to accept other people's ideas? Do you adapt well to change?

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- ___ **Orderly:** Do you keep things where they belong? Do you have a knack for arranging things in a logical way?
- ___ **Patient:** Can you keep your temper? Are you able to train other workers calmly even when you have to explain some procedures over and over again?
- ___ **Punctual:** Do you consistently arrive on time?
- ___ **Sympathetic:** Do you try to understand the problems of others? Do people confide in you often? Do you help them?
- ___ **Strong:** Can you lift things that are heavy?
- ___ **Team-player:** Do you work well with others? Can you work as part of a team to get the job done?

Feeling Good About Yourself¹

Feeling good about yourself and your positive attributes is a great way to be positive at work.

Your Turn!

Write down five of your strengths, for example: friendly, happy, generous, etc.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Write down the five greatest achievements in your life so far, like recovering from a serious illness, learning to use a computer, raising your children, going back to school, etc.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

¹ <http://www.athealth.com/Consumer/disorders/self-esteem.html>

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5. _____

Write down five things you can do to help someone else, like taking care of their children for an evening, visiting someone in the hospital, etc.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Write down five things you can do to make yourself feel better, like calling a friend, going for a walk, having a bath, etc.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Positive Affirmations

Positive affirmations are a great way to feel positive about yourself and your life.

Your Turn! Complete the sentences below and then read them often!

1. I am happiest when I _____.
2. I know how to _____.
3. Everyone thinks I am excellent at _____.
4. I always smile when _____.
5. Lots of people wish they could _____ like me.
6. I am a _____ worker.
7. I am a _____ friend.
8. I am a _____ parent.
9. I believe _____.
10. I am most proud of _____.

Being Positive

Being positive is one of the most important qualities that helps us be successful in work, family and in our community.

Your Turn!

Check off the things that you would like to do to be more happy and positive about your life. Try and check off at least two things that you will do.

- Write down five things that you are grateful for each night at bedtime.
- Write down five good things at bedtime that happened during the day.
- Laugh more. Read the comics each day.
- Stop comparing yourself to others.
- Focus on what you want, not on what you don't want.
- Meditate for 5 – 10 minutes each day.
- Help others. Each day try and help at least one person. Write it down in a journal.
- Start a happy journal. Write down all the great things that are happening in your life.
- Go for a nature walk three times a week.
- Write down one goal for each day, then work to achieve it!

Code of Ethics at Work or School

Write five statements about what is most important for you at work or at school. If being on time is very important to you, you might write a statement like this:

- I will be on time for work/school each day because being on time shows respect to my co-workers, classmates, teacher and boss.

just another example

If working hard is very important to you, you might write a statement like this:

- I will work hard at school/my job so that I can learn as much as I can and do a good job. Working hard shows my teacher/boss that I have initiative and am interested in moving forward in school or my job.

just another example

Your Turn!

1. _____

2. _____

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3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Communication Skills

The number one skill that employers are seeking is good communication skills.. The most surprising thing is that we are not taught communication skills in school.

We all need to learn to communicate effectively, with our families, friends, at work and in the community. When we speak clearly and listen to others we are able to get our message across in a way that people understand.

One definition for communication skills is below:

Communication skills is the set of skills that enables a person to convey information so that it is received and understood. Communication skills refer to speaking, listening, writing, presenting, and body language.

So how do you measure up? Go through the activities in this section to rate your communication skills and learn ways to improve them.

Test Your Communication Skills²

Your Turn!

Fill in the chart below and tally up your communication score at the end.

	Often	Sometimes	Never
1. I can detect the mood of others by looking at them when we talk.			
2. I can tell when someone doesn't understand what I am saying.			
3. I am able to discuss issues without getting upset.			
4. I find it easy to understand someone else's point of view.			
5. When talking to people, I pay attention to their body language.			
6. When I am angry, I admit it.			
7. I express my ideas clearly.			
8. I change the way I talk depending on who I'm speaking to.			
9. I express my opinions even if others do not agree.			

² http://www.queendom.com/queendom_tests/transfer

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10. I can talk about my feelings.			
11. When I know what someone is going to say I finish the sentence for them.			
12. I have difficulty putting my thoughts into words			
13. I fidget while listening to someone talk.			
14. People don't understand what I am talking about.			
15. I find it hard to express my feelings to others.			
16. People tend to misinterpret what I say.			
17. I have to repeat myself often because people don't understand what I am saying the first time.			
18. I find it difficult to understand someone when they have a different point of view from mine.			
19. If I have something relevant to add, I'll interrupt someone to make certain my views are heard.			
20. When other people become emotional around me, I'm not sure how to react.			
21. If I find a conversation boring, I'll let my mind drift away.			
22. I will stop a speaker in mid-sentence if I disagree with a statement he or she			

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has made.			
23. People complain that I don't appear to be listening when they speak to me.			
24. I tend to do most of the talking in conversations.			
25. I find myself struggling to find the right words to express myself.			

Calculate your score!

Questions 1 - 10

3 points for Often _____

2 points for Sometimes _____

0 points for Never _____

Total A _____

Questions 11- 25

0 points for Often _____

2 points for Sometimes _____

3 points for Never _____

Total B _____

Total A _____ plus Total B _____ = _____

50 - 75: You are an excellent communicator!

25 - 50: You have fairly good communication skills but still need some help.

0-25: You need some help with your communication skills!

Non-verbal Communication³

It is important to communicate well at work. You often send messages through your tone of voice, facial expressions or body language.

Your Turn!

Read the following situations and write down what you think are the possible messages that are being sent.

1. A customer approaches the counter where you are standing. You greet the customer by smiling and saying, "Good morning." The customer does not look at you or respond to your greeting.

2. As you approach a table of two in your restaurant, you notice one of the customers looking at his watch. His movements appear hurried and he is talking very quickly.

3. You greet your boss and she smiles back at you.

³ *Ready to Work North Workbook* (p.137)

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4. You ask a customer how her meal was and she says, "OK," with a strange look on her face.

5. Four customers are sitting at the bar laughing and talking loudly.

6. You come in late for work and you say hello to your boss. He grunts a quick greeting and then returns to his work.

7. You forgot to turn off a valve at work. Your co-worker comes in and turns off the valve and then grins and shrugs his shoulders.

Communication at Work⁴

Workers in any job situation need to have good communication skills. You may be working with the public or working on a team to get a project done. You need to be able both to listen and communicate your ideas so that work gets done or your customer is happy. Sometimes good communication skills can mean life and death depending on what you are communicating!

Your Turn!

Read each scenario and each statement. Decide if each statement shows good or poor communication skills. If you identify that the statement uses poor communication skills, write a statement that would improve it.

1. Your co-worker politely asks you to help clean up a mess that another co-worker made. You return to your own tasks, making the following statement:

"It's not my fault the mess was made and I can't help clean up right now anyway because I don't have time."

Good communication skills _____ Poor communication skills _____

⁴ Read to Work North Workbook (p.135)

Career Life Work

2. You are trying to explain where the supply room is located to a newly hired employee who does not understand English well. You show him by pointing with your right hand as you say very loudly:

"You have to turn right at the end of the hall."

Good communication skills _____ Poor communication skills _____

3. A customer is checking in at the hotel where you work. You pass her a form to fill out and say:

"Please fill in the top part of the form, dear."

Good communication skills _____ Poor communication skills _____

4. As a customer is leaving, you say the following with a smile and a wave:

"Thank you for coming in and I hope to see you again."

Good communication skills _____ Poor communication skills _____

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5. You need to talk to the hotel manager about booking several rooms for a conference. You ask to speak to the manager, but you are told that she is away on vacation for two weeks. You sigh and say:

“Well I really need to talk to someone in charge about booking some rooms. Who should I speak to?”

Good communication skills _____ Poor communication skills _____

Assertive, Passive, or Aggressive?

There are three common ways that people respond to difficult situations.

1. **Assertive behaviour** is described as the ability to stand up for your rights in a way that does not hurt the rights of others. Being assertive is the ability to communicate your opinions, needs and ideas in a confident and direct way.
2. **Passive behaviour** is when you don't stand up for your rights. You don't express your feelings and opinions. You apologize for things that are not your fault and you avoid conflict at all costs.
3. **Aggressive behaviour** is when you don't respect the rights of others. You never apologize and you don't listen to other opinions. You are always right and you respond quickly to situations where you feel you have been wronged. You blame others.

What do these behaviours look like?

Here are some common scenarios, with examples of each style of behavior

Scenario A: Someone cuts in front of you at the supermarket.

Aggressive response: You assume they did it on purpose and you angrily say, "Hey, jackass, no cuts!"

Passive response: You let the person stay in front of you.

Assertive response: You assume that they may not have seen you in line, and politely say, "Excuse me, but I was in line."

just
another
example

just
another
example

Scenario B: Your friend, who talks a lot, calls to vent about her bad day. Unfortunately, you have a lot of work to do and don't have time to talk.

Aggressive response: You become angry that she obviously doesn't respect your time, cut her off, and sarcastically say, "Oh, get over it! I have my own problems!"

Passive response: You let her talk for as long as she needs, and figure that your deadline can suffer; she needs your help.

Assertive response: You listen for a minute or two, then compassionately say, "Wow, it sounds like you're having a tough day! I'd love to talk to you about it, but I don't have the time right now. Can we talk later tonight?"

Your Turn!

Read each statement and decide if the behaviour is aggressive, passive or assertive.

1. Someone cuts Judy off in traffic and she yells and makes rude hand gestures at them.

2. Jim thinks the cashier at the grocery store didn't give him correct change. Jim walks away with \$10 less than he thinks he should have.

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3. Jim's friend Kyle borrowed his shirt last month. Jim has asked him repeatedly to give the shirt back, but Kyle keeps forgetting. Jim calls Kyle and offers to come by his house to get the shirt.
- _____

4. Jim is at a friend's house with a group and they all want to see a horror movie. Jim doesn't like horror movies, but he doesn't want to upset his friends. He stays and watches the movie, even though it scares him.
- _____

5. Judy and Michael have been dating for a while and always go out to eat on Saturday nights. Michael always asks Judy which restaurant she'd like to eat at, and she always says, "Wherever you'd like to go is fine with me."
- _____

6. Jim has been dating his girlfriend Carrie for several months and cares a lot about her. At a party, Jim sees her kissing another guy. Jim gets angry and begins yelling at Carrie and hitting the other guy.
- _____

Answers

1. Aggressive	3. Assertive	5. Passive
2. Passive	4. Passive	6. Aggressive

Your Turn!

Get the idea? Now it is your turn. Read the scenarios below and write what an aggressive, passive and assertive response would be.

Scenario One: Your boss has asked you to mop the floors. You start mopping them. Ten minutes later he comes and says rather meanly that he would like you to shovel the front walkway.

Aggressive response:

Passive response:

Assertive response:

Scenario Two: You bring your car to a garage for service. You ask the mechanic to call and let you know how much it will cost before doing the work. He doesn't call and when you call him he tells you he has already done the work and your bill is \$450.

Aggressive response:

Passive response:

Assertive response:

Scenario Three: You go to a party with some people but the person who is driving had too much to drink and refuses to let anyone else drive.

Aggressive response:

Passive response:

Assertive response:

Scenario Four: Your co-worker always asks to borrow a few dollars at lunch each week, but he rarely pays you back. You are beginning to resent him.

Aggressive response:

Passive response:

Assertive response:

Working with Others

Remember what you learned in kindergarten? How well do you play with others? How well do you work with others? Because, for most of us, work is a huge part of our daily life, it is essential to have good relationships at work. Sometimes, this can be very challenging.

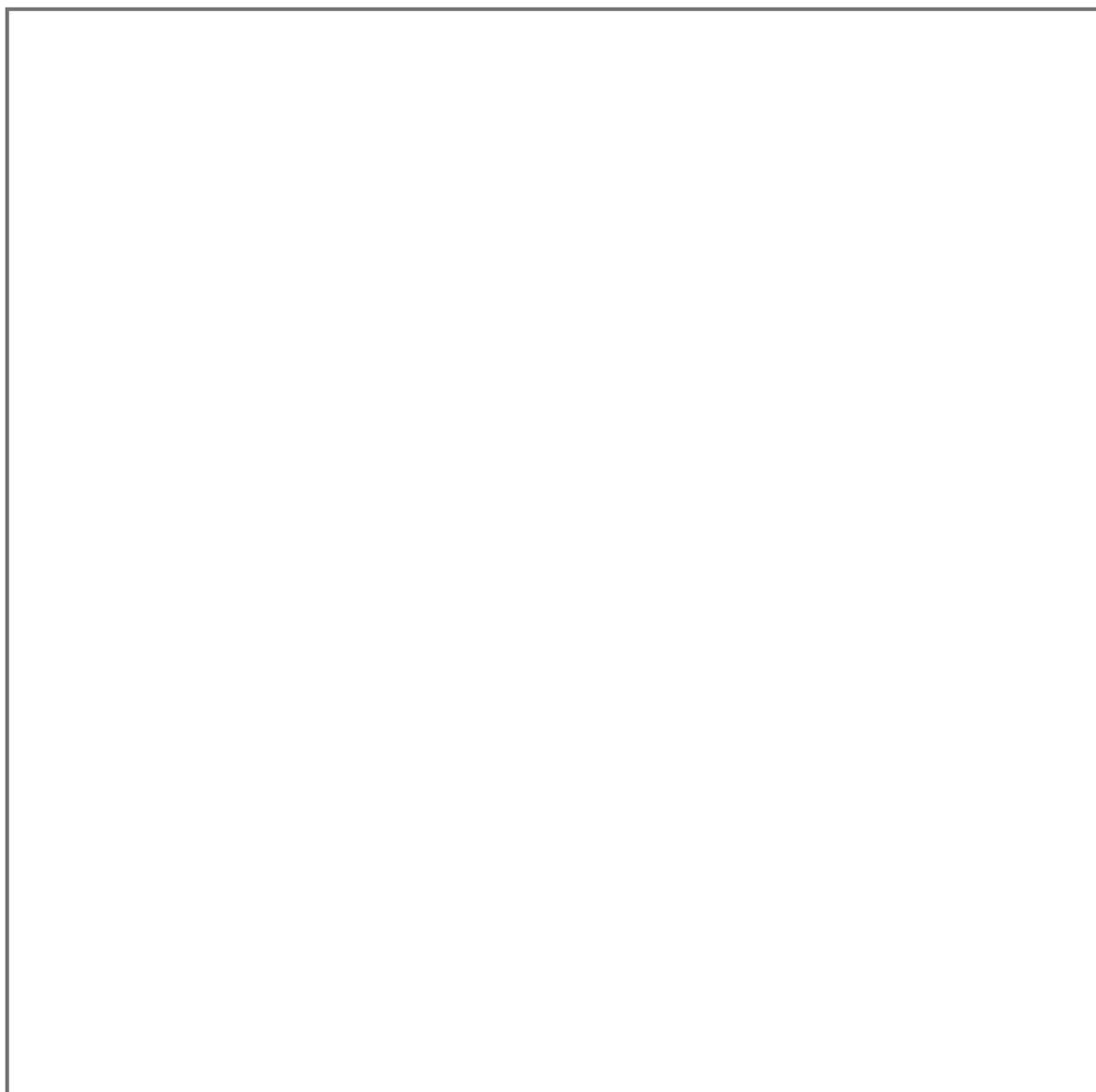
Our “people skills” are learned. We gather them throughout our lives through the relationships we watch and engage in. Sometimes we get lucky and we have great role models. Usually, we don’t. Then, we feel anxious, stressed, conflicted and overwhelmed when we are faced with difficult people, situations and circumstances.

The good news is that working with others is a skill you can learn. The following activities will help you assess your “working together” skills and give you ideas of how you can be a better team member.

Qualities of Effective Team Players

What are some qualities of an effective team player? For example: friendly, cooperative, hard worker

Your Turn! Work with a partner and brainstorm as many qualities as you can think of.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for students to write down their brainstormed qualities of effective team players.

Compare your list with the Top Ten Qualities of an Effective Team Player (next page).

Top Ten Qualities of an Effective Team Player⁵

1. Reliable

Good team members are reliable and consistent.

2. Good Communicator

Good team members express their thoughts and ideas clearly, directly, honestly, and with respect for others and for the work of the team.

3. Good Listener

Good listeners are essential for teams to function effectively. Teams need team players who can absorb, understand, and consider ideas and points of view from other people without debating and arguing every point.

4. Engaged

Good team players are active participants. They come prepared for team meetings and listen and speak up in discussions. They're fully engaged in the work of the team and do not sit passively on the sidelines.

5. Shares their Ideas

Good team players share their ideas. They're willing to share information, knowledge, and experience.

6. Cooperates

Cooperation is the act of working with others and acting together to get the job done. Good team players figure out ways to work together to solve problems and get work done.

⁵ <http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/ten-qualities-of-an-effective-team-player.html>

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1. Flexible

Good team players roll with the punches; they adapt to ever-changing situations.

2. Good Problem Solver

Good team members can come up with solutions that will work for everyone. They're problem-solvers, not problem-dwellers, problem-blamers, or problem-avoiders.

3. Supportive of Others

Team players treat fellow team members with courtesy and consideration — not just some of the time but consistently.

4. Leadership

Every team needs someone to lead the discussion and make sure everyone is heard and everyone's opinion is considered.

Your Turn!

What qualities do you have?

What qualities would you like to learn?

Working With Others Self-Assessment⁶

The ability to work with others on a team is an important skill to have for any job.

Your Turn!

Fill in the chart below to evaluate your skill in working with others.

I can...	Yes	Somewhat	No
Work co-operatively with a partner or team to complete tasks.			
Coordinate my work with my colleagues to complete group projects.			
Complete my assigned work on time so that team deadlines are met.			
Complete my fair share of tasks when working with a partner or team.			
Follow directions from my partner or team members as required.			
Give directions to my partner or team members as required.			
Participate in making group decisions by contributing my ideas and suggestions.			
Contribute to making decisions co-operatively and settling differences respectfully.			
Improve my work based on suggestions and advice I receive from my partner or other team members.			

⁶ http://www.rhdcc-hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential_skills/wwo_self_assessment.shtml

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Look at the “Yes” columns in **Section 1** to identify your strengths, and record them below. Look at the “Somewhat” and/or “No” columns in **Section 1** to identify the areas that you need to develop or strengthen, and record them below.

Strengths

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Areas for Improvement

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Consensus Building

Consensus is a decision making process that ensures that everyone agrees with the final decision. You will need to work with a group of three people for the activity below. You can do this with your family or with fellow learners or friends.

Your Turn!

Read the scenario below and rank the items you think are most important to carry with you. Do this part on your own.

Part 1

It is late in the evening when you and two companions are on your way home in your motor boat. You suddenly hit a rock and your motor shuts off. You try everything to fix the motor but you are unable to get it going. You have a smaller motor for emergencies, so you put it down and try to start it. It doesn't start. Nothing you or your companions do starts either motor. You decide to paddle to shore. Once you are on shore, you decide to hike to a nearby camp which is about 15 km away. Listed below are some items you have in the boat. What should you take with you? List them in order of importance.

1 – Most Important

16 – Least Important

- _____ Bag of potato chips
- _____ Bottled water, a four-pack
- _____ CDs
- _____ Camera
- _____ Can of gasoline
- _____ Compass
- _____ Flares

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_____ Hand tools: hammer, screwdriver, wrench

_____ Sleeping bag

_____ Fishing gear

_____ Fish that you caught

_____ Matches

_____ Pocket knife

_____ Portable boombox

_____ Ropes: one 15 feet long and one 25 feet long

_____ Lake map

Part 2

You can carry only one item. Which items would you most like to take? List your top three.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Part 3

Working in groups of three, determine as a group the three items your group will carry. You are committed to the three you chose. But, remember that each person can take only one item and all three members must agree on the three items. Your group choices are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Part 4

Write your personal observations of what occurred in your group.

What did you learn about yourself in this activity? Did you fight for your choice? Did you just agree with everyone else? Did you have lots to say? Or did you keep quiet?

Working with Others at Work

Almost all jobs require that you work with others in some way. This interaction may include face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, video conferencing, emails, Facebook, working on projects, etc.

Profile: Lisa is a nurse who works at the hospital in the pediatrics unit. Notice how much she works with others on the job. Can you think of any other ways a nurse works with others?

just another example

<p>How often does a nurse have to work with others?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All the time</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A few times a day</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once a day</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A few times a week</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A few times a month</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p>	<p>Nursing includes the following interactions:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Email, telephone, fax</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Video conferencing</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chance meetings in the hallways</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scheduled meetings</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Team meetings</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee meetings</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With the public, patients or clients</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p>
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Your Turn!

Profile: Bill is a carpenter. He works for himself. Fill in the charts below. How much do you think Bill works with others and how does he work with others?

How often does a carpenter have to work with others?

- All the time
- A few times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- A few times a month
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

Carpentry includes the following interactions:

- Email, telephone, fax
- Video conferencing
- Chance meetings in the hallways
- Scheduled meetings
- Team meetings
- Committee meetings
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

Working with Others in Work Situations

Your Turn!

Choose three occupations that you are interested in from the Essential Skill Profiles. http://www10.hrsdc.gc.ca/es/english/ES_Profiles.aspx Create a list of tasks that someone from this occupation might need to do in relation to working with others.

Occupation 1: _____

Working with Others Tasks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Why is it important that a person in this occupation work as a team member?

Occupation 2: _____

Working with Others Tasks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Why is it important that a person in this occupation work as a team member?

Occupation 3: _____

Working with Others Tasks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Career Life Work

6. _____

Why is it important that a person in this occupation work as a team member?

Problem Solving Skills and Decision Making

Employers, managers and employees are faced with problems every day. Having problems to deal with seems to be a fact of life. We cannot always prevent problems from occurring, but we have control over how we handle problems and how we cope with problems.

You need to recognize there is a problem so you can find a good solution. There are no guarantees that the decisions we make will always be the right decisions. People who are willing to work through problems, though, are less likely to make snap judgments or make more problems for themselves. They are more likely to be problem-solvers.

Work is changing with new technologies. You really need to be able to solve problems in today's workforce. Employers are looking for people who can make quick decisions that are safe and within the guidelines of the organization and business.

Decision Making

We have to make decisions every day.

- What are we going to eat today?
- Should I go out to eat?
- Where should we go for our vacation?
- How much money should I save?
- Should I buy a truck or a car?

Your Turn!

Scenario One

You want to buy a truck. You need to decide on whether you want to buy a new truck or a used truck. You have looked around and the new truck that you want to buy is \$40,000 and the used truck that is available is \$15,000. What are the key factors that you need to look at in order to make your decision?

Key Factors

Your Decision

Scenario Two

You have a big final exam on Monday. You need to study but want to go camping at the weekend with all your friends. What should you do? What are the key factors that you need to look at in order to make your decision.

Key Factors
Your Decision

Scenario Three

You just got a full time job and you need daycare for your child. Your friend has offered to look after him for a very reasonable rate, but you are not sure if she will be reliable. The local daycare called and told you that they have space but it will cost a lot more there. The daycare is open every day and there are other children for your son to play with.

Key Factors
Your Decision

Problem-solving Method

So what is the difference between decision making and problem solving?

Decision-making happens every day. What should I have for supper? What should I have in my coffee? These aren't real problems – just quick decisions we make. Of course we often have to make larger decisions like buying a new house or car. Problem-solving is just that – it is about solving a problem that you are having at work, at home or in your community. An example of a problem in your community might be that youth are not staying in school. This is a large problem that will need lots of community people to address.

Your Turn!

Read the following statements and decide if it is a decision or a problem.

- | | | |
|---|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. The neighbours are very loud at night when they get home from a party. What should I do? | Decision | Problem |
| 2. I would like to go out to eat tonight but I'm not sure if I should spend the money. | Decision | Problem |
| 3. Should I buy a laptop or a desk top computer? | Decision | Problem |
| 4. I am not getting my work done on time because we have too many meetings. Should I talk to my boss? | Decision | Problem |
| 5. The families in our community are not coming out for family literacy nights. What should I do? | Decision | Problem |
| 6. I drink five cups of coffee a day. Is that too much? Should I cut back? | Decision | Problem |

There are five steps in a problem-solving method:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the situation.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.
5. Decide on the best solution.

1. Identify the problem.

It is important to correctly identify the problem. Control your emotions so that you can talk about the problem.

2. Gather information about the situation.

You need to know all the facts so you can make a good decision.

3. List possible solutions to the problem.

Think of all the ideas you have that may solve the problem. Be creative. Discuss the problem with others.

4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.

Think through the problem enough to know what might result from your decision.

5. Decide on the best solution.

After you have given the problem some thought, gone through the problem-solving process and discussed the problem with someone you trust, be ready to make the decision you feel is best for the situation.

Rate Yourself as a Problem Solver⁷

Are you a good problem solver? Use this checklist to rate your problem-solving skills. Read each sentence. Put a check in the column that best describes how often you do what each sentence says. Circle the number of the items that you have checked “never” or “unsure.” The circled items are skills you need to learn and use.

Problem Solving Skills	Always	Some- times	Rarely	Never	Unsure
I try to find out as much as I can about a problem before trying to solve it.					
To get information, I talk to others who may be familiar with this type of problem.					
I consult printed or visual resources such as trade journals and troubleshooting guides when trying to solve a problem.					
I go on the Internet and research the problem to see how other people may have dealt with this type of problem.					

⁷ http://www.fayettevo-tech.org/DOCaps/pdf/docaps_04-j.pdf

Career Life Work

I list possible solutions to a problem before choosing one.					
I try to judge how well a solution is suited to a problem before trying it.					
I consider safety precautions and warnings when solving a problem.					
I conduct a test or dry-run of a solution before carrying it out.					
When recommending a solution, I describe the problem, a solution, and its advantages and disadvantages.					

Solving a Problem

As you know, problem solving is a step-by-step procedure. Look at the example below.

You are a server at a restaurant. You serve four people at one table. They all order steak. Two order theirs well-done. One orders theirs medium. And the last person orders his rare. Shortly after they get their order you are called over to the table because the person who ordered the rare steak is not happy with his food. He complains that his steak is cooked too much.

just
another
example

1. Identify the problem.

A customer has complained about his food. He says that his steak is over cooked.

2. Gather information about the situation.

- The steak is supposed to be rare, but it looks pink on the inside.
- The customer is not happy.
- Others at the table look a little uncomfortable.

3. List possible solutions to the problem.

- Tell the customer that it looks pink on the inside.
- Apologize to the customer and do nothing.
- Apologize and ask the customer if he would like another steak.
- Offer a complimentary meal.

4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.

- Tell the customer that it looks pink on the inside. (Customer will not be happy.)
- Apologize to the customer and do nothing. (Customer will not be happy.)
- Apologize and ask the customer if he would like another steak. (Customer should be happy with this, although it will take a few minutes to get the meal out.)

- Offer a complimentary meal. (Customer would be very happy, but management might not be as happy with this decision.)

5. Decide on the best solution.

- Apologize and ask the customer if he would like another steak. Bring the steak out as soon as possible. Talk to the chef to make sure that she makes the steak really rare.

Your Turn!

Work in pairs. Look at each problem and go through each step to determine how you would deal with it.

A customer has a warranty problem with an appliance. The customer needs it repaired, but you can't verify the warranty. The customer has lost the receipt. He is quite upset, and doesn't want to have to pay for repairs.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the situation.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.
5. Decide on the best solution.

Career Life Work

Your boss has put you in an unsafe position at work. He insists that you lock up at night when it is dark and take the money bag to the bank.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the situation.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.
5. Decide on the best solution.

A co-worker sometimes makes comments about my body and it makes me uncomfortable. Although I've told her that I don't like her making comments like that, she hasn't stopped.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the situation.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.
5. Decide on the best solution.

Your computer is always freezing. You have asked the computer tech guy to look at it and he says there is nothing wrong, but you continue to have problems.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the situation.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.
5. Decide on the best solution.

Career Life Work

Now come up with your own work or personal situation that you have had before. How did you handle it?

Problem:

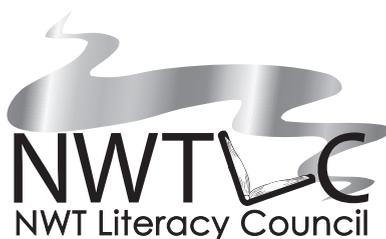
1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the situation.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.
5. Decide on the best solution.

The *Career - Life - Work* Series consists of the following:

- Personal Management Skills Manual
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- Job Success Strategies Manual
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Box 761, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N6

Phone toll free: 1-866-599-6758

Phone Yellowknife: (867) 873-9262

Fax: (867) 873-2176

Email: nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca

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