**Teaching Soft Skills in the Classroom**

**Can We Teach the Soft Skills that Employers Want?**

**Typical Employer Comments Today:**

1. Younger workers today don’t know how to **dress appropriately** for the workplace.
2. They don’t know how to give a firm **handshake** and won’t **look me in the eye**.
3. They don’t understand the need to **be on time** for work; no work ethic.
4. They expect everything to work perfectly and do not know how to **problem solve** when the unexpected happens.
5. They can’t **write legible notes** on a work order, trip log, accident report, or work day summary.
6. They are reluctant to set aside their **hand held phones**, even when a safety hazard.
7. They are not able to **communicate well** with others in the workplace.
8. They don’t seem to **take pride** in their work.
9. They think they know everything and won’t **pay attention to instructions**.
10. They don’t show respect for customers (**appropriate speech and manners**).
11. They don’t know how to **collaborate as a team.**
12. They don’t know how to fill out a **job application**, write a **resume**, or present themselves well in a **job interview**.

**How Did Previous Generations Learn to Practice These Essential Workplace (Soft) Skills?**

1. **Parent’s expectations** for chores around the house or on the farm
2. **School standards** that were reinforced by parents and community
3. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other **youth organizations**
4. Sports teams, bands and orchestras, and other **activities at school or in the community that required teamwork, collaboration, communication, and cooperation**.
5. **Early part-time job opportunities** like paper routes, babysitting, lawn mowing
6. **Summer jobs for teens**

**Culture Is Shifting Away from Early Work and Team Experiences**

1. More **parents working**, so less parental supervision and influence in the home.
2. More **parents feel disconnected from the schools** and do not always agree with the decisions and actions of teachers and administrators.
3. **Fewer young people are joining** clubs and organizations for children and youth.
4. More television and other technological devices are entertaining children and youth, offering **individual games rather than team games**, communication with a screen rather than a human face, and other **activities that minimize the value of actual human interaction.**
5. Parents often **discourage their children from working outside the home** because of safety concerns.
6. **Fewer jobs available for children and teens**, as adults are seeking the same low-pay jobs because of the shortage of good paying jobs.

**How Can We Teach the Skills That Culture No Longer Routinely Teaches Our Children?**

**No sense complaining about it**, so **what can we do about it**? Here are some **suggestions** (NOT REQUIREMENTS – DECIDE WHAT WILL WORK FOR YOU):

1. **Set standards and expectations** for appropriate workplace behavior in the classroom.
   1. Explain why. WHY? IMPORTANT FOR GETTING AND KEEPING A JOB; AND IMPORTANT FOR SUCCEEDING IN THE CLASSROOM/TRAINING PROGRAM.
   2. Be clear about the consequences. IN THE TRAINING PROGRAM – WILL THERE BE POINTS OFF FOR POOR BEHAVIOR, POINTS ADDED FOR GOOD?
   3. Enforce them. IF YOU SAY THAT THEIR GRADES WILL BE AFFECTED, FOLLOW UP. IF YOU SAY THEY MUST BRING TOOLS, SEND THEM HOME TO GET THEM, ETC.
   4. If meeting expectations requires purchasing certain items (clothing, tools, etc.), provide referrals to low-cost or no-cost resources in the college or in the community that may be able to help.
2. **Make students aware** of what the essential workplace success skills are:
   1. Use a self-evaluation checklist.\* SEE LAST PAGE OF THIS HANDOUT FOR EXAMPLE.
   2. Provide a list of workplace success skills that will be expected in your class.
   3. Provide guidelines and instruction as needed so students know how to be successful in achieving the standards set for them.
3. **Reinforce these skills** frequently as part of core content instruction. For example, routine assignments and class activities may require the use of essential workplace skills, SUCH AS:
   1. Listen and follow directions.
   2. Read and follow instructions.
   3. Work as a team to complete a task.
   4. Given a problem that might be faced on the job, offer solutions to solve the problem.
   5. Complete job-related paperwork such as work orders, invoices, daily job reports, timesheets that include overtime hours.
4. Include student demonstration of essential workplace success skills as **part of the grade.** IF YOU DO THIS, GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT TO FINDING AN EASY METHOD.
5. Use **project-based learning activities**, which may include a variety of instructional opportunities related to basic reading, writing, and math skills, as well as problem solving, team work, conflict resolution, and other workplace success skills. IF YOU DO:
   1. The grade for such activities can include points for the intangible soft skills such as hard work, taking initiative, and supporting other team members.
   2. The instructor must decide what to look for when observing student interactions and create a consistent system for awarding points.
6. **Model good workplace behaviors** yourself. SURELY YOU DO THIS ALREADY!
7. **Invite local employers to speak** on the subject of essential workplace success skills.
8. Talk about **what is needed to get and to keep a job.** Provide students with a **means for measuring their job readiness and workplace success skills** so they feel prepared to both get a job and keep the job.
   1. AC’s Career and Employment Services Center on Washington Street Campus offers workshops and presentations on job readiness, resume writing, and interviewing skills.
   2. The Career Center will assist individual AC students with completing a resume.
   3. The Career Center will give AC students an opportunity to make appointments for mock interviews, which include feedback on how well they presented themselves.
9. **Prepare students for the real world of job competitiveness**, for what will give them the edge in the interview and in the work place. For example, incorporate some workplace practices into class routines that reward soft skills:
   1. Conduct mini staff performance evaluations
   2. Give recognition on a weekly or monthly basis for outstanding staff/student performance in selected areas.
   3. Ask students to rate themselves on essential workplace skills (and perhaps to rate other team members if they do work in small teams/groups).
10. **At the end of each semester**, ask what you can do next time to better teach soft skills
11. **Keep records** of what you do in class to teach and reinforce soft skills and **share them** with other staff at meetings and/or via email.

**THESE ARE THINGS WE CAN BEGIN TO DO NOW. YOU CAN ADD TO THE LIST.**

I want you to talk for a few minutes about how you might implement some of these suggestions in your programs. Divide yourselves into groups of 4-6 people. I will assign one of these printed suggestions to each group. Be prepared to share your best ideas with the whole group. (Focus on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9 above.)

**\*Suggestions for using the Self Evaluation Checklist of General Workplace Success Skills:**

1. Use a self-evaluation checklist of soft skills (General Workplace Success Skills) on the **first day of class**. This encourages students to think about the basic skills that employers want and to begin to consider whether they have the necessary skills for success in the workplace.
2. Use the same or similar self-evaluation checklist of Workplace Success Skills **at or near the time for completion** of the training program, to encourage students to think about whether they have improved in these skill areas.
3. Instructors may want to **give points to students for completing** the self-evaluation forms. It is not really something that can be given a grade, but students can be required to complete the forms.
4. **Instructors may want to complete their own evaluation** of students’ Workplace Success Skills at the beginning and/or the end of the training program as a means of documenting student progress.
5. The sample student Self-Evaluation Checklist forms related to General Workplace Success Skills may be **adapted by each instructor** to better fit the needs of each course. The **MS Word versions will be made available to all** those who want to use it.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**General Workplace Success Skills**

Local employers have told Amarillo College which general skills they want all new employees to have, in addition to the technical skills related to a specific job.

Read the list below and give yourself a thoughtful and honest score on how you rate today on each of these Workplace Success Skills. You will have another chance to rate yourself at the end of the course.

Check the number that best represents you.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SELF-EVALUATION CHECKLIST** | **Low** | | | **High** | | |
| **General Workplace Success Skills** | **1** | **2** | **3** | | **4** | **5** |
| 1. Dress appropriately for the workplace |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Arrive on time for work and other appointments |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Treat others with respect |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Pay attention to details |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Listen and follow directions |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Solve conflicts and other problems with logic and reason |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Committed to the success of the team or the company |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Demonstrate leadership qualities |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Communicate successfully through speaking and writing |  |  |  | |  |  |
| 1. Use numbers to solve real-life math problems |  |  |  | |  |  |