Your employer will make a major investment in time and money to help you become an effective employee. He or she will have certain expectations of you as a result. Chances are many of these expectations will not be unique to your employer. All employers appreciate good work habits, honesty, willingness to learn new skills and the ability to get along well with others.

### Personal Qualities as Workplace Foundation Elements

In Chapter 1, “Making the Transition from School to Work,” you learned that effective workers need five workplace competencies. (Refer to Figure 1-3 on page 25.) You also learned that effective workers need three foundation elements to achieve those competencies. One of those foundation elements is a set of personal qualities that includes:

- self-esteem
- individual responsibility
- self-management
- sociability
- integrity

### Objectives

After studying this chapter you will be able to

- explain what your employer expects of you as a worker.
- identify things you can do to promote good working relationships with your supervisor and coworkers.
- build workplace competencies in using resources, interpersonal skills, and information.
You will learn about these qualities later in this chapter as they are discussed with other personal qualities needed by competent workers.

Besides this list of personal qualities, the foundation elements include two other components: basic skills (such as math and reading) and thinking skills (such as reasoning and decision making). Basic skills and thinking skills will be examined in future chapters. All three foundation elements—basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities—are needed to develop the workplace competencies.

**Personal Qualities Needed on the Job**

As an employee, there are certain guidelines your employer will expect you to follow. Your employer will expect you to have a positive attitude, attend work regularly, be on time for work, and perform well on the job. Your company or business will also expect you to be honest, show initiative, be loyal, and be cooperative. You are expected to be courteous and well-groomed as well. Your ability to meet these expectations will depend partly on your health and fitness. You may be thinking you have many responsibilities to meet as an employee. You’re right! When you work for someone else, you will need to follow their rules. Employers expect the people they hire to use their attitudes, skills, and knowledge to help the business operate and make a profit. Your employer will expect you to do the same and to work to the best of your ability.

**Positive Attitude**

Your attitude will play a big part in your success on the job. An attitude is an outlook on life. It reflects how you feel and think about other people and situations.

What types of employee and employer attitudes have you observed on the job? If people have positive attitudes, they usually get along well with other people and enjoy sharing ideas. They tend to be friendly, cheerful, and treat others with respect. People with negative attitudes don’t get along well with other people. They may complain, argue, or get angry easily. Some are unhappy and withdraw from others.

A positive attitude is beneficial to your employer and to you. Your employer expects you to have a good attitude while you are working. When you take a positive approach to your work, you tend to be more productive. Your work performance improves. This makes you a more valuable employee and helps you get along well with other people.

To a great extent, your self-esteem determines your attitudes. Self-esteem is having confidence and satisfaction in yourself. It is a measure of how you see yourself. People who think they will fail have low self-esteem. People who think they will succeed have a positive outlook on life and high self-esteem. Self-esteem is one of the personal qualities listed as a SCANS foundation skill for competent workers.

**Good Attendance**

Both the employer and the school will expect you to be at work every working day. When a person is absent, it causes extra work for others. Poor attendance also reduces the effectiveness of the work experience.

Because absenteeism is a major concern of employers and teachers, many schools require students and parents to read and sign an absenteeism policy. This type of policy stresses the importance of regular attendance at school and at work. By signing the policy, students are saying they will attend school, work regularly, and notify their employer and coordinator if they must be absent. Violating this policy may cause the student to be dismissed from work and the school-to-work program.

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**Case Study**

Carlos started his morning discussing a recent order with a customer on the telephone. The customer ordered additional memory for her computer over a week ago and still hadn’t received the computer part. Carlos explained that he took the order correctly and sent it immediately to the shipping department. He told the customer it wasn’t his fault she hadn’t received her order.

The customer said she didn’t care whose fault it was. She had already paid for the computer part and expected prompt delivery as promised. Carlos insisted it wasn’t his problem and that the customer needed to call the receptionist and ask to talk with someone in the shipping department. The customer became so angry she told Carlos to cancel her order and slammed down the receiver. Carlos lost his temper. He called the customer back and said, “You had no right to hang up on me. I deserve to be treated with respect!” The customer hung up again without saying a word. Still angry, Carlos called the customer back, but she refused to answer.

**Questions to Discuss**

1. Who is responsible for the confrontation?
2. How could Carlos have handled the situation differently?
3. Is there ever a good reason for showing disrespect to a customer?

**Think more about it . . .**

Does your school have an absenteeism policy for your work-based learning program? Why do you think some schools require students to sign such a policy?
Some companies require workers to check in and out by punching a time clock or starting a computer, 3-1. These methods clearly show when employees arrive late or leave early. If you do not follow your work schedule, the company may subtract a percentage of your pay.

**Performance**

Although you will be learning new skills on the job, your employer will expect you to have some basic attitudes, knowledge, and skills in your area of employment. If you will be employed as an office assistant, you will need to have keyboarding skills. You can’t expect your employer to teach you the basics of a skill you should already possess.

You will be expected to possess individual responsibility, or a willingness to answer for your conduct and decisions. People without individual responsibility try to “pass the buck” rather than answer for their own failures. Even competent workers make mistakes, but they admit them and work to correct them.

Your employer will also expect you to put forth your best effort while on the job. As a beginner, you probably will not be expected to do as much as an experienced worker. However, you will be expected to have the same work standards. If you are a secretary, you will not be expected to create a business letter as fast as an employee with five years of experience. You will, however, be expected to complete a letter correctly and accurately. As you gain more experience, you will be expected to increase your speed. Working quickly and efficiently should be one of your goals at work.

**Organizational Ability**

The ability to organize your time and work assignments is another important skill. The difference between average and excellent workers is often not how hard they work, but how well they prioritize assignments. In many cases, you may need to work on several tasks at the same time. You will be expected to determine the order in which your tasks should be completed.

**Initiative**

When at work, your supervisor and work-based mentor will tell you what your job is. When one project is done, you are expected to immediately start working on the next without someone reminding you. This quality is called initiative. It means making oneself do what is necessary.

Another term for initiative is self-management. Employers want employees with self-management for the obvious reason: they cannot afford employees who work only when reminded. They need independent thinkers who can recognize what needs to be done next.

Looking for new skills to learn on the job is another way to show initiative. Once you have gained some job experience, your employer will expect you to find tasks to do without being told. Use common sense, however, and don’t try to do work that you aren’t qualified to do.

**Cooperation**

To be effective at your job, it is important for you to get along with your supervisor and coworkers. This is a sign of sociability. Sociability is interacting easily with people. On the job, you will need to be sociable with employees, customers, and everyone else you meet. Being sociable will make it easier for you to do your job well and get ahead.

To be cooperative, accept your share of the work and perform your job to the best of your ability. Make sure you follow directions carefully. Always ask questions when you do not understand how to do a certain task.

Be friendly, respectful, and considerate of other workers’ feelings. A smile and a few minutes of friendly conversation are good ways to promote good working relationships. Also be enthusiastic about your job. Expressing enthusiasm will help you become a part of the working team, 3-2.

**Being Part of a Team**

Many employers now consider teamwork to be the key to competing successfully in the workplace. You may be asked to work as a member of a team to meet the demands of your employer. Being a team member of a company work group is similar to playing on a basketball or soccer team. Success is measured in terms of the team’s success, not the individual’s.
A key to working successfully on a team is getting to know and trust your fellow team members. You must be willing to admit when you have problems or make a mistake. You also must be able to share your feelings and ideas with others.

Finally, you must be willing to put the team’s goals ahead of your personal goals. Ask questions concerning the purpose of the group.

Be sure you can state the team’s long-term and short-term goals. Understand why the team’s goals are important and how they fit in the company’s overall plan.

Think more about it . . .
Do you feel that members of a work team should vote on important matters? If so, do you believe that each member’s vote should have equal weight?

Working with Your Supervisor

Your supervisor has the role of seeing that work gets completed. The supervisor is also responsible for the quantity and quality of the product or service your department produces. When one or both is lacking, the supervisor must take the necessary steps to correct the problem. The supervisor may suggest a new way of getting the job done. The supervisor may also ask employees to work faster or change roles within the team.

You need to realize that your supervisor probably has a supervisor to whom he or she must report. Therefore, your performance on the job directly influences your supervisor’s job performance. This, in turn, affects the progress of your employer.

Think more about it . . .
What should you say to your supervisor if you are assigned a task you don’t want? Describe your idea of the perfect supervisor. Could your idea of the perfect supervisor differ from your coworkers’?

Accepting Criticism

Another responsibility your supervisor has is giving constructive criticism. Constructive criticism is pointing out a weakness to analyze it and cause improvement. The goal of constructive criticism is not to embarrass an employee, but to help that person do a better job. The term constructive indicates that a positive motive prompts this type of criticism.

Graciously accepting constructive criticism is a mark of a person who wants to improve.

The only way you will know how to work better is by being told how or shown a better way. For example, being ordered to work faster is not very helpful, but hearing tips on how to gain speed is. Another way your supervisor may use constructive criticism is by asking you why you aren’t working as fast as your coworkers. This remark will inspire you to analyze the situation and find one or more answers.

Construcive criticism helps workers improve their skills so they can work more efficiently. This, too, is the purpose of a job evaluation, which is a written review of your work performance by your supervisor. During your work-based learning experience, your supervisor will be asked to evaluate your job performance and provide constructive criticism. A sample job evaluation form is shown in 3-4. Your supervisor’s evaluation should help you and your program coordinator identify your strengths and weaknesses at work.

As an employee, it is your responsibility to accept criticism and improve your performance. Listen to what your supervisor says and follow his or her suggestions. Be thankful your supervisor takes an interest in your work and wants to help you do your best on the job.

Conducting a meeting with the team should vote on important matters? If so, do you believe that each member’s vote should have equal weight?

Personal Appearance

In many jobs, a worker’s personal appearance has a great deal to do with his or her success. Your appearance is a reflection of you. While on the job, you should try to look your best. A neat, clean appearance starts with good grooming. Clean, neatly combed hair; clean hands; and trimmed nails show cleanliness.

Cleaning a building for a boss, but sometimes we get the type that shouts orders. No matter what type of boss you have, work with your supervisor and to respect his or her decisions.

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**Student Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cooperation</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Gets along well with others; is friendly with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Initiative</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Is resourceful; looks for tasks to learn and do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Courtesy</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Is very courteous and very considerate of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Attitude Toward Constructive Criticism</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Accepts criticism and improves greatly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knowledge of Job</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Knows job well and shows desire to learn more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Accuracy of Work</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Makes few errors; is careful, thorough, and neat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Work Accomplished</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Works rapidly, output is above average.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Work Habits</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Is industrious; concentrates very well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Adaptability</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Learns quickly; is adept at meeting changing conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Personal Appearance</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Is excellent in appearance; looks neat most of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Punctuality</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Never tardy except for unavoidable emergencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Dependability</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Never absent except for unavoidable emergencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Identify major strengths of this student-learner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Identify any major weaknesses in the attitude or performance of this student-learner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Is improvement needed in any particular skills related to the student's job?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. List the dates the student-learner was absent from work during this grading period.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your clothes are also important to your personal appearance. Wearing clean, neat clothes that are appropriate for your job shows that you take pride in yourself. Before you go to work, think about your appearance. How do you look to your employer, coworkers, or customers?

**Good Health and Fitness**

Your employer expects you to be alert when you arrive on the job and remain so for the entire workday, no matter how long or short it is. Your alertness and job performance will depend on your health and fitness. To stay healthy and physically fit, you need to follow three basic guidelines:

- Eat well-balanced, nutritious meals.
- Get adequate sleep and rest.
- Stay physically active and exercise regularly. See 3-5.

Looking and feeling your best is nearly impossible if you get five hours of sleep nightly, never exercise, skip breakfasts, and have soda and potato chips for lunch.

In addition to good physical health, you need to stay healthy and fit mentally. You may be in perfect physical health but appear pale and ill if you are unhappy. To keep mentally fit remember to make time for play as well as work. Set aside time to spend with friends and to participate in new activities. Exercising your brain is just as important as exercising your body.

**Ethics in the Workplace**

A very important personal quality in the workplace involves ethics. Ethics is a guiding set of moral values. Long term success for a business is due in a large part to the ethics practiced by its employees. People with ethical behavior use moral values to guide their actions. They do what society considers right and fair.

Outright lying, cheating, and stealing are clear examples of unethical behavior in the workplace, but some examples are not so obvious. Consider the employee who uses the company phone to make personal phone calls. This is unethical in two ways. The employee is wasting the company's money on a nonbusiness call and using work time for personal matters instead of doing the job.

Employers know that workers who disregard moral values will disregard company values, too. Consequently, they look for workers whose behavior reflects moral values. People who firmly follow moral values have integrity. Integrity is one of the five personal qualities identified as a foundation element. The fact that employers consider this quality necessary for effective workers indicates how highly they value integrity in the workplace.

Behaving ethically is often a step above behaving legally. For example, it may not be against the law for you to speak badly about your boss behind her back, but it is unethical to do so. Ethical behavior involves such qualities as honesty, confidentiality, and loyalty. These personal qualities play a part in shaping a person's work ethic.

**Honesty**

Your employer expects you to do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. That means doing the job you are assigned and not wasting time. An employee who loaf's on the job is actually stealing time away from his or her employer. Employers cannot afford to pay employees for services not performed.

Being honest on the job also includes not taking your employer's supplies for personal use. If you work in a grocery store, this doesn't mean you can take groceries without paying for them. If you work in an office, this doesn't mean you are entitled to take home paper, pens, tape, and other supplies. Businesses have been known to go out of business due to the dishonesty of their employees.

Anyone caught stealing company supplies or property from coworkers can expect to be fired. Once a person has a reputation for being dishonest, it is difficult for that person to get hired anywhere else.

Honesty not only involves what you do; it may also involve what you don't think more about it . . .

What types of hairdo, jewelry, and clothing are very popular now, but are not appropriate for the workplace? Bicycling is one exercise that will help you stay healthy and physically fit.
Confidentiality

There are many times on the job when employees have the opportunity to hear or see something that should be kept private, 3-6. Perhaps you will learn of new products the company will make, new employees it will hire, or old plants it will close. Such company matters are confidential, or private, and should not be shared with those who do not need to know. Discussing these matters with outsiders could harm the company’s future and give its competition an unfair advantage.

Just as you keep company matters private, you should also keep personal matters about coworkers private. You would not want someone to reveal private facts about you, and you should never do this to others. Discussing the private matters of others may make you popular with those who spread office gossip, but your reputation with your supervisor will suffer. You will not be viewed as a person who can be trusted for important jobs.

Loyalty

Loyalty means being faithful to your coworkers and to your employer. Workers who are loyal to their employers are proud of their company and the products or services it provides. These workers speak well of their companies inside and outside the workplace. Therefore, you need to always display a positive attitude about your work and your employer.

If you disagree with policies or decisions your employer or supervisor makes, talk with your program coordinator about them. Do not criticize the decision of your supervisor, and never gossip with coworkers at your work station. Most likely your coordinator will be able to help you understand why such policies and decisions were made. He or she can also help you decide how to deal with problem situations.

The Work Ethic

Closely related to ethical behavior is a person’s work ethic. Work ethic is how you feel about your job and how much effort you put into it. People with a strong work ethic view their work as a vital part of their lives. They arrive at work early, take pride in their work, and always do their very best. How dedicated a person is to a job reflects the strength of his or her work ethic.
Summary

Meeting your employer's expectations will help you be successful on the job. Your employer expects you to possess the personal qualities listed as workplace foundation elements. Your employer also expects you to keep a good attitude, attend work regularly, be on time, perform well on the job, and show initiative.

As an employee, you are expected to use your skills and training to the best of your ability. Learning to cooperate, accept criticism, and show courtesy is important. A neat, clean personal appearance shows that you take pride in yourself. Keeping yourself healthy and physically fit will help you meet your employer's expectations. Displaying high ethical standards such as honesty, confidentiality, loyalty, and a strong work ethic is very important.

Facts in Review

1. What five qualities make up the workplace foundation element called personal qualities?
2. Besides personal qualities, name the two remaining groups of components in the SCANS foundation elements.
3. What personal quality is linked to a person's attitudes on the job?
4. Why is it important to be at work every working day?
5. What should a student do if unable to attend school and work?
6. Although a beginning worker probably will not be expected to do as much as an experienced worker, the new worker will be expected to have the same work ______.
7. Describe how to show initiative to an employer.
8. What can a student worker do to show a desire to cooperate with his or her supervisor and coworkers?
9. Why is courtesy to others important to success on the job?
10. How can an employee look his or her best at work?
11. What three basic guidelines should be followed to stay healthy and physically fit?
12. Why is loafing on the job a form of dishonesty?
13. When workers keep private matters private, they are exercising ______.
14. When student workers find it difficult to be loyal to their employer because of a disagreement with policies and decisions, what should be done?
15. What does it mean when someone has a strong work ethic?

Applying Your Skills

1. Write a brief description of a positive example of how an employee handled a sensitive situation with a customer. Analyze what factors contributed to the outcome. Repeat the activity for a negative example.
2. A student intern decided to leave his work station early one Friday although the supervisor had not given the student permission to do so. Discuss in class what, if anything, the supervisor and the program coordinator should do about this student's behavior.
3. List the actions that might cause a student to be fired from his or her work experience. Discuss in class why each behavior might deserve this action.
4. Conduct interviews with at least two employers to determine the importance of dependability, promptness, honesty, and getting along with others. Report your findings to the class.

Developing Workplace Competencies

Research workplace ethics with two or three students and make a group report to the class. Explain the importance of having high ethical standards in the workplace. Find two or three case studies to provide examples of negative effects caused by unethical behavior of some companies and/or employees. What, if anything, did the company do to counteract the negative image created by the unethical behavior? Create a student handout to accompany your presentation. Decide as a group how to divide the work.