

# 14

## Strategies for a Positive Attitude

### Discover

- the three components of work attitude.
- ten strategies for improving your work attitude.

### Key Terms

work attitude  
work ethic  
self-esteem  
self-confident  
priority  
opportunity

*Focus on the positive.*

### Case

## Staying Positive

Mardryka is a nurse's aide at a local nursing home. She works the evening shift, from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. She usually arrives 15 minutes early for her shift. Those extra minutes give her time to talk to the aide from the previous shift. She can find out whether any of the patients on her floor are having difficulty. Sometimes, patient problems during the day mean that some of the duties of the day shift have to be handled in the evening. Today is one of those days. Mardryka receives a quick briefing and plans how she will organize her time to fit in everything that needs to be done.

As Mardryka enters the hall, Eileen calls to her. Mardryka waves hello, but keeps on walking. Eileen, the senior aide on the evening shift, always has a complaint. As Mardryka walks down the hall, Eileen catches up with her.

"It's just you and me again tonight," Eileen says. "That darn Zachary called. One of his kids has the flu, and he can't take her to the sitter's. I'm getting sick and tired of this! I'll bet it's just an excuse to stay home and watch TV. I'll tell you..."

Mardryka cuts her short, trying to keep the irritation out of her voice. "Zachary hardly ever takes time off, Eileen. Why would you doubt his excuse? It's hard raising three young kids alone, and I admire him for working so hard to support them. Besides, the flu can be dangerous to an elderly person. Zachary should stay home rather than take the chance of spreading infection."

"Just makes more work for us," Eileen grumbles.

Mardryka starts the evening routine. Her patients are glad to see her. She always greets them pleasantly. When she has the time, she spends a few extra minutes chatting with them. Mardryka knows that many of these people rarely have visitors. Conversation and attention are important to them.

Some patients are ill and in pain. Some have problems with memory. At times, a patient yells at an aide. Mardryka sometimes hears Eileen yell back. Mardryka realizes that the patients' anger is not directed at her personally. She knows they are angry at their illness and their inability to cope. Mardryka tries to put herself in their place. She treats all her patients as she would want to be treated.

Latoya is the registered nurse in charge on the evening shift. Latoya spends part of every evening checking Eileen's work, even though Eileen is the senior aide. However, Latoya knows that Mardryka will take care of what needs to be done without direct supervision.

Latoya considers Mardryka "her right arm." She often tells her, "I don't know what I would do without you." Mardryka has volunteered to attend in-service training sessions on her own time. She has asked to borrow Latoya's nursing journals. Latoya is encouraging Mardryka to attend nursing school.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Case Discussion

After you have read the case *Staying Positive*, write your answers to the following discussion questions.

- Describe Mardryka's attitude toward her job.  
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- Describe Eileen's attitude toward her job.  
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- What does Mardryka do to keep a positive attitude under difficult situations?  
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- How does high self-esteem help Mardryka have a positive attitude at work?  
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- What advice would you give to Eileen to help her improve her attitude toward work?  
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- Give an example to illustrate each of the strategies.  
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### Analyze

Everyone's life—home, school, work, and social—is full of ups and downs. It is normal to feel positive at some times and negative at others. How can you stay positive at work? First, understand what makes up your work attitudes. Then develop ways to help you maintain a positive work attitude.

### Work Attitudes

Your **work attitude** has three components: attitude toward self, attitude toward work, and attitude toward the workplace.

#### Attitude toward Self

The way you feel about yourself has a major effect on how you feel about work. Attitude toward self is often called **self-esteem**. When your self-esteem is high, you feel good about your self. You are **self-confident**. You know you can handle any task that comes your way.

Your level of self-esteem affects how you deal with people and situations. When your self-esteem is high, you can see other people as equals and coworkers, not threats. It is easier to sympathize and understand what others are feeling. When your self-esteem is low, you tend to see other people as threats. You might not be able to sympathize with others or be understanding.

Think about Eileen's and Mardryka's responses to Zachary's absence. Mardryka's self-esteem enabled her to defend Zachary. Why? She doesn't need to put down another person to feel good about herself because she already feels good about herself. As a result, she is able to see another person's side of things. She gives Zachary the benefit of the doubt and believes his reason for being absent. She also thinks about the welfare of the patients. Being exposed to the flu would be bad for them. Instead of being angry about doing more work, she feels good about filling in for Zachary.

#### Attitude toward Work

A person's attitude toward work is often called his or her **work ethic**. People with a good work ethic feel that work is important. They want to get their work done on time and at a high quality. They don't expect work to always be easy. They get satisfaction from doing a good job, and they feel that the work itself is rewarding. People with a good work ethic are willing to pitch in when problems arise and are willing to put in extra hours when asked.

When Eileen heard that Zachary was not coming in, she was angry. She did not want to do any extra work. Eileen dislikes her work. Her work ethic is poor.

**work attitude.** Attitude toward work that has three components: attitude toward self, attitude toward work (work ethic), and attitude toward the workplace.

**self-esteem.** The feeling of self-worth; feeling self-confident.

**self-confident.** The feeling of being sure of one's abilities.

**work ethic.** A person's attitude toward his or her job.

## Attitude toward the Workplace

Attitude toward the workplace means how you feel about the company or organization you work for. A positive attitude means that you respect the organization and the people who work there. You respect the company's products and are proud to tell people about your work.

Latoya could tell that Mardryka had a positive attitude toward the nursing home. She knew that Mardryka was committed to the nursing home's professional goal of serving elderly people. She saw that Mardryka cared about the patients and gave of herself. Doing the job means more to Mardryka than just earning a paycheck.

No job is perfect, and every job has its ups and downs. It is never easy to be positive all the time. The following are ten strategies that many people use to maintain a positive attitude.

### 1. Examine Your Attitude Regularly

Think about your day at work. Think about your relationships with your coworkers and supervisors. Is your attitude positive or negative? constructive or destructive?

If your attitude is negative, try to determine why. Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I unsuited for my job?
- Are personal problems interfering with my work performance?
- Do I dislike my coworkers or supervisor?
- Do I need more training to perform my tasks effectively?
- How can I change destructive attitudes to constructive ones?

If your attitude is positive, are you projecting that attitude to others? Most likely, you will discover one or two areas where you need to adjust your attitude. Ask yourself these questions:

- How would my supervisor describe me?
- How would my coworkers rate my human relations skills?

You may love your job but find that certain people or tasks cause you problems. When you find a problem, you can work to fix it.

### 2. Balance Work with Personal Life

All work and no play is not healthy, but all play and no work is not good either. Only you can decide how to allocate your time and energy. Figure out a balance that works for you. Decide on your **priorities**. When you know your priorities, it is easier to make the decisions that are right for you.

When you are at home, focus on your family and friends. Leave work problems at work. Similarly, when at work, put home problems on a back burner. Focus on your work. If you do not feel stressed about your priorities, it is easier to maintain a positive attitude toward work.

**priority.** Something that is more important than other things.

### 3. Focus on the Positive

If one aspect of your job gets you down, don't let it overshadow the positive aspects. Mardryka did not enjoy working with cranky patients. However, when her patients were irritable, she tried to make them feel better. Her focus was on the good she could do each day. She used her skills to make others feel better. It gave her satisfaction when they greeted her warmly. She felt that putting up with the occasional cranky patient was worth all the times when she felt good about her job.

Focus on the positive in your work and in your relationships on the job. Remember, you can have good working relationships with everyone, even with those who differ from you in many ways. Focus on the values and goals you share, such as building a productive department.

### 4. Communicate

Communication is your link with others. When you feel isolated at home or at work, your lines of communication need to be repaired. It's hard to keep a positive attitude if you feel misunderstood.

Practice good listening and communication skills every day. Be sure that you say what you mean and that you hear what others are saying. Ask questions if you do not understand something. When you give directions, make sure your listeners understand you. Ask them to repeat your instructions back to you or to explain what you just told them.

### 5. Turn Unexpected Changes into Opportunity

Human beings are creatures of habit. It is the rare person who likes, surprises. We are comfortable with the familiar—friends, supervisors, coworkers, routines, foods. However, change is an inevitable part of life. If



you stay in a job long enough, some unforeseen changes are sure to happen. Companies are bought and sold. Managers and coworkers come and go. Your duties change. New company policies go into effect.

Your first reaction to changes at work may be negative. You might not like a new boss or a new assignment. However, you can learn to accept change and remain positive. Focus on what you can learn. Be honest if something is bothering you, and talk to your supervisor about it. Every new situation can be a learning experience if you are open to learning. What you might learn is how to adapt to something you don't like. Adopt the attitude that every change presents a new **opportunity** to grow.

**opportunity.** Chance for success.

## 6. Educate Yourself

It's tough to be positive if you are having trouble doing your job. Education is the key to being confident about your abilities. You can take courses to keep up with your field. You can read articles and new books by experts in the field. Mardryka pursued her education in both ways, by taking in-service training and by reading nursing journals.

Education is necessary for advancement in many careers. Even if that is not the case, education is never wasted. Be a lifelong learner. The more you learn, the more confident you will be.

## 7. Maintain Your Interest

In the first months on a job, you are learning new things. The excitement and challenge keep you interested, and your attitude is positive.

As time goes on, you might begin to feel bored. You might feel that you are not being challenged, or that the work is not as much fun as you expected. If this happens, look for ways to regain the interest you once felt. Analyze your job duties. Look for areas where you can take more initiative. Come up with new ideas for doing routine tasks.

Supervisors count on workers with initiative and enthusiasm to show new employees the ropes. If Latoya were looking for an employee to train a newly hired aide, would she ask Mardryka or Eileen? Eileen may be the senior aide, but she no longer has any enthusiasm for her job. Her negative attitude affects her relationships with the patients, supervisors, and other aides.

## 8. Maintain a Sense of Humor

Humor can help your outlook on almost anything. Taking yourself and others too seriously will not solve problems. It may cause you to dwell on mistakes or focus on the negative side of situations that cannot be changed. Having a sense of humor does *not* mean joking or clowning around. Having a sense of humor means developing the ability to see

the lighter side of situations. People with a good sense of humor can say just the right thing to make everyone laugh and break the tension. Find someone with a good sense of humor, and learn by observation.

## 9. Take Care of Your Health

Poor health habits can affect your job performance and your attitude. The negative effects of poor health habits might not happen immediately; but over time, such habits can reduce your productivity on the job. An occasional candy bar for lunch will not ruin your health, but a steady diet of junk food will sap your energy.

Staying up too late every night will affect your ability to be alert the next day. A lack of exercise may result in a buildup of tensions and lack of energy. Abuse of alcohol and drugs will impair your ability to perform. In most workplaces, use of alcohol or any illegal substances on the job is grounds for immediate dismissal.

## 10. Dress for Success

Your attitude and your appearance are related. If you look good, you are more likely to feel good about yourself. Everyone has a favorite outfit that can improve a mood instantly. Choose clothes that make you feel good about yourself.

Your appearance also affects others' opinions of you and their reactions to you. Be aware of the dress code for your job. Pay attention to personal hygiene and grooming.

A supervisor might make decisions about your future based on how you dress and your grooming. He or she may or may not ever mention this to you. The supervisor may not even be aware of how your hygiene and grooming affect his or her opinions of you. It is up to you to show your feelings about yourself, your position, and your workplace by presenting an appropriate image.



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### Check Your Understanding

1. List the three components of work attitude.

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2. Why is it a good idea to examine your attitude regularly?

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3. List the ten strategies you can use to improve your attitude.

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### Journal Writing

1. Your work attitude includes attitude toward self, work, and the workplace. Analyze your work attitude. If you do not work, use your attitude toward school instead.

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2. Describe a difficult situation when you needed to maintain a positive attitude, even though it was difficult. What strategies did you use?

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3. Describe how you could use each of the ten strategies to improve your attitude.

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