

Preface

Today's job seeker faces a tough challenge. New technology, high unemployment, and fewer jobs makes it essential that a job seeker sets themselves apart from other applicants. That is, in order to grab the attention of an employer, a job seeker must stand out!

Employers today want more than someone with the necessary job-related skills. They want an employee who exhibits what many refer to as soft skills. **Soft skills** are defined as the personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. Simply put, they are the skills needed to get along and work well with others.

A recent survey found that the number one characteristic that employers want to see in their workers is professionalism¹. Professionalism covers multiple soft-skills, including (but not limited to) communication, time and self-management, leadership, problem solving, and teamwork skills.

The *Soft Skills Solutions* program provides a simple way to learn about and practice skills that will help you stand apart from others in your field. The *Soft Skills Solutions* program includes the following workbooks:

- * *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude*
- * *Make Yourself Heard! Professional Communication Skills*
- * *How You Act & Dress Matters! Professional Etiquette & Image*
- * *Wake up & Work! Keys to Self-Management*
- * *Demonstrate Your Value Through Collaboration! Teamwork & Motivation*
- * *Play Nice & Stay Employed! Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations*
- * *Lead with Integrity! Leadership & Ethics*

Each workbook is designed to help you attain skill mastery in these areas. Whether you are a new job seeker, a person reentering the business world, a recent college graduate or long time employee, mastering the skills discussed in this workbook and completing the exercises contained within, will help you now and for the rest of your life.

Even the most seasoned professional benefits from refreshing their skills from time to time; therefore it is recommended that you complete one skill per week. Although we recommend beginning with the *Goals & Attitude* booklet followed by the other skills in the series, these workbooks are stand-alone pieces that can be used in any sequence.

¹ "Top Five Personality Traits Employers Hire Most," Forbes, October 4, 2012.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2012/10/04/top-five-personality-traits-employers-hire-most/>

Workbook Features

Each of the *Soft Skills Solutions* workbooks will introduce you to each skill and explain its role in employment success. The workbooks provide self-assessments to identify and address your individual needs as well as application activities to challenge you and allow you to practice your skills. In addition, the workbook also includes margin tips and informative sidebars to point out key information.

You will encounter three interactive features in your workbook:

Workbook Thinking Breaks

Part of learning a new skill is being able to apply it to your own experiences. These thought provoking questions require reflection and honesty which when applied, will help you identify your own opinions and beliefs relating to a specific aspect of employment success.

Self-Assessment Activities

The Self-Assessment Activities will help you assess your current soft skill level and will provide you with a brief snapshot of your strengths and weaknesses. The more honest your answers are, the more accurately you will be able to identify areas that could be improved.

If the assessment section indicates that your skill level is high, then it is recommended that you practice the daily workout but make it more challenging by attempting to mentor or teach another person the skill. The ability to teach others how to successfully master a skill is the ultimate test of your knowledge.

NOTE: This tool is for your own personal use. After you have identified areas in which you would like to improve, practice the exercises found in this booklet, and continue to seek out ways to strengthen your competencies in the area you have targeted in your daily life.

Applying the Skills Activities

After skills are introduced and explained, the workbook provides activities that challenge you to apply these skills. We recommend that you complete these exercises daily until you've reached *mastery* of the professionalism skill you are studying. Some of these activities require (or would benefit from) the use of a partner or mentor.

Mentors and Study Buddies

It may be beneficial to find a "study buddy" or mentor with whom you can work through the content.

When choosing a study buddy, you'll want to seek out someone who supports you, wants to see you succeed, and above all, can be honest with you about your current skill level. Your ability to reciprocate is also essential to their success as you will equally share in your progress and take an active role in your individual success, so choose wisely.

Having a mentor is ideal. Your mentor should be someone with whom you have a positive relationship with and a person that is a professional in a position of authority. Some recommendations are: teacher, boss, friend who is a manager or executive at a company, career services advisor, student advisor, Human Resource Manager, your current employer, or parent

NOTE: Employment success largely depends on your ability to identify and address areas that you need to improve. To accomplish this, you need to be willing to receive feedback from others. If you are not able to receive this kind of feedback easily; and if you get upset, angry, or defensive, then seek the help of a trusted expert who can help you learn to give and receive *constructive feedback* prior to beginning the series.