

# The Workplace

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A Fact Sheet

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## Highlights

Job readiness skills are clustered into three skill sets: *basic academic skills, higher order thinking skills, personal qualities*

Employability skills are those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job.

Employability skills are teachable skills.

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## What Are Employability Skills?

The two greatest concerns of employers today are finding good workers and training them. The difference between the skills needed on the job and those possessed by applicants, sometimes called the skills-gap, is of real concern to human resource managers and business owners looking to hire competent employees. While employers would prefer to hire people who are trained and ready to go to work, they are usually willing to provide the specialized, job-specific training necessary for those lacking such skills.

Most discussions concerning today's workforce eventually turn to employability skills. Finding workers who have employability or job readiness skills that help them fit into and remain in the work environment is a real problem. Employers need reliable, responsible workers who can solve problems and who have the social skills and attitudes to work together with other workers. Creativity, once a trait avoided by employers who used a cookie cutter system, is now prized among employers who are trying to create the empowered, high-performance workforce needed for competitiveness in today's marketplace. Employees with these skills are in demand and are considered valuable human capital assets to companies.

Employability skills are those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job. These are the skills, attitudes and actions that enable workers to get along with their fellow workers and supervisors and to make sound, critical decisions. Unlike occupational or technical skills, employability skills are generic in nature rather than job specific and cut across all industry types, business sizes, and job levels from the entry-level worker to the senior-most position.

What specifically are those skills, attitudes and actions, i.e., employabil-



Activities both during and after school, including sports, enjoyed during youth help prepare for jobs.

ity skills, necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job? Employability skills, while categorized in many different ways, are generally divided into three skill sets: (a) basic academic skills, (b) higher-order thinking skills and (c) personal qualities. The three skill sets are typically broken down into more detailed skill sets (see Figure 1).

valuable asset. Application of higher order thinking skills in the use of technology, instruments, tools and information systems takes these higher order skills to a new level making the employee even more valuable. Employers will usually try to help valued employees seek and get more advanced training, thus widening the gap between those with higher order skills

Basic Academic Skills	Higher-Order Thinking Skills	Personal Qualities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading</li> <li>• Writing</li> <li>• Science</li> <li>• Math</li> <li>• Oral Communication</li> <li>• Listening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning</li> <li>• Reasoning</li> <li>• Thinking Creatively</li> <li>• Decisions Making</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible</li> <li>• Self Confidence</li> <li>• Self Control</li> <li>• Social Skills</li> <li>• Honest</li> <li>• Have Integrity</li> <li>• Adaptable and Flexible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team Spirit</li> <li>• Punctual and Efficient</li> <li>• Self Directed</li> <li>• Good Work Attitude</li> <li>• Well Groomed</li> <li>• Cooperative</li> <li>• Self Motivated</li> <li>• Self Management</li> </ul>

and those possessing basic academic skills alone.

If basic academic skills and higher order thinking skills are so important, why then are employers

Figure 1 gives a listing of the employability skills included within each skills set.

Although the academic skill level required by some entry-level jobs may be low, **basic academic skills** are still essential for high job performance. Ideally, new hires will have the ability and will want to learn. They also need the ability to listen to and read instructions and then to carry out those instructions. When asked for information, these individuals should be able to respond appropriately both orally and in writing, including recording and relaying information. Reading ability includes comprehending what has been read and using a variety of written materials, including graphs, charts, tables and displays. Entry-level employees also need the ability to complete basic math computations accurately.

Perhaps even more important to job success than having good basic academic skills is having good **higher-order thinking skills**. The ability to think, reason, and make sound decisions is crucial for employees desiring to do well and advance. A person who can think critically, act logically, and evaluate situations to make decisions and solve problems, is a

deeply concerned with personal skills? Because in most jobs, it is difficult to utilize workers effectively who lack personal skills. Entry-level employees with good personal skills have confidence in themselves and deal with others honestly and openly, displaying respect for themselves, their co-workers, and their supervisors regardless of other people's diversity and individual differences. They view themselves as a part of a team and are willing to work within the culture of the group. They have a positive attitude and take the initiative to learn new things to get the job done. Rather than blaming others when things go wrong, they are accountable for their actions. They also have the ability to set goals and priorities in their work and personal lives so that resources of time, money and other resources may be conserved and managed. These individuals practice good personal habits, come to work as scheduled, on time and dressed appropriately, and are agreeable to change when necessary.

Failure to equip young people with the job readiness skills critical to job success is equivalent to placing employability barriers in their

(Continued on page 3)

path. Allowing students to graduate with these deficiencies has far reaching implications. There are ways, however, these deficiencies may be corrected. For example,

1. Employability skills are teachable skills and may be taught in both school and employment settings. Goals and objectives for teaching employability skills should be set. Instruction should be designed to ensure those goals and objectives are reached.
2. Parents need to be involved in goal setting and modeling behavior for in-school youth.
3. Teach employability skills using a democratic approach so that students' awareness of values, attitudes, and worker responsibilities is increased.
4. Supervisors, trainers and teachers should set good examples of the desired behavior. Students should have the opportunity to observe the type of work place behavior that is being required of them.
5. When possible, classrooms should replicate the features of real work settings.
6. Set and communicate high expectations and hold students responsible for their behavior.

*"The real problem is finding workers who have the employability skills or job readiness skills . . ."*

coach or facilitator.

It is often said that it is too late to teach values after a child has reached or completed high school; that their personality is set and nothing can change it. That is not true. It is, fortunately, never too late. Change may be difficult, but it can be done. Teaching of values should begin in the home as a child, be continued through development to adulthood, and reinforced as an adult. If good behavior is reinforced and good role models are presented, people can change for the better. Good habits can be acquired. Employers, schools and parents should remember that you get the behavior you reward and model.

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