Youth Workforce Development Guide for Businesses

Vermont Afterschool

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The J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Vermont Agency of Education, and Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC)

Overview

This guidebook is intended to assist afterschool and summer programs, as well as businesses, as they support young people's workforce development. Hiring young people as employees within your program is an opportunity for two-way learning, both on the part of the young people and the other staff they work with. Use this guidebook as a starting point or to reflect on your current practices. The approach in this guidebook benefits programs, young people as employees, and youth in programs in a variety of ways.

Table of Contents

Introduction **3**

Benefits to Programs and Young People **4**

Section 1: Supporting Young People as Workers

Appealing to Young People **5**
Hiring 6
Orientation Plans and Starting Out 7
Navigating the Role of Youth 8
Coaching for Job Skill Development 8
Providing Feedback 9
Credit for Work 10
Important Information for Employers of Minors 10
11

Section 2: Preparing Other Staff to Serve as Mentors and Co-workers

Effective Communication **12**
How to Step Back and Let Youth Lead 13
Weekly Check in Topics 14
SMART Goals 18
19

Section 3: Work Information for Young People

Time Management & Punctuality **21**
Professional Orientation 22
Teamwork Ethic 24
Verbal Communication 27
Problem-solving 29
Supervisor/Employee Frames 31
34

Resources **36**

Final Thoughts **37**

INTRODUCTION

Who are we?

Vermont Afterschool is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that the children and youth in every Vermont community are able to benefit from the power of afterschool, summer learning, and third space programs during the out-of-school time hours. We work with afterschool programs, advocates, and partners throughout the state to strengthen the quality of programming, to expand the number and type of programs offered, and to improve access so all children and youth have opportunities to succeed. To learn more about our work, visit:
www.vermontafterschool.org

Vermont Afterschool

Why young people?

Hiring young people who are in high school extends the mission to supporting work-based learning. However, we need to understand the role of youth workers, consider the possibilities, prepare other staff to serve as mentors and co-workers, and support the youth employee themselves as they enter the workforce.

Developed with guidance from and gratitude for the afterschool programs in our STEM Pathways Project, a three-year project funded by the J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation designed to create meaningful job and expanded learning opportunities for students across rural Vermont:

Bellows Falls Middle School AIM Program
Enosburg Middle School/High School LEAPS Program
Mississquoi Valley Union Crossroads Program
Newport High School ENCORE Program
South Royalton High School One Planet Program
Springfield High School All-4-One Program

BENEFITS TO PROGRAMS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Programs

ADDITIONAL WORKFORCE

Finding staff available to work during the typical afterschool hours of 3PM-6PM can be challenging. Employing high school students can increase the pool of available staff, sometimes allowing programs to increase capacity of programmatic offerings.

EXTENSION OF MISSION

Supporting youth is the foundation of any third space program. Hiring young people is a natural extension of this mission.

UNIQUE REFLECTION OF YOUR PROGRAM

High school age students will naturally have a different point of view and bring new energy or ideas.

STRENGTHEN TIES WITH SCHOOLS

With schools fully engaged in Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) for students, it opens an avenue for programs to work collaboratively with Work-Based Learning Coordinators, local partners, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) centers.

Young People as Youth Workers

DEVELOP JOB SKILLS

High school students can develop skills that are transferable to most careers including: time management, lesson planning, communication, how to work with peers, self-confidence, and working with your supervisor.

POSSIBLE PLP CREDIT

In collaboration with schools, youth may be eligible to earn credit as part of their Personalized Learning Plan (PLP).

CONNECT TO DIFFERENT CAREER PATHS

Youth workers can think about their aspirations, confirm their interest in education or a related field, or work in collaboration with their PLPs.

PART-TIME WORK

Since it can be challenging for young people to find part-time work in their communities due to limited businesses, transportation, and school schedules, afterschool programs can be a great fit.

YOUTH AS ROLE MODELS

Your program participants will have older students to connect with and have as role models.

SECTION 1: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE AS WORKERS

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE AS WORKERS

Getting Young People Interested

What do Youth Focus on when Looking for a Job?

- Job progression that follows what career they want to have in the future.
- A work environment that is supportive, fun, and inclusive.
- A culture of community where they can meet new people and build connections.
- Potential to develop skills, such as resume building and communication and collaboration.
- Independence and a good work-life balance.
- A sense of meaning and purpose for what they are doing.

How Can you Appeal to more Youth?

- Highlight your work environment and culture of community, including any events you do to bring your staff together (cookouts, family picnic day, etc.).
- Advertise/explain the supports you have in place to build skills (like resume building) and grow in this job.
- Explain your mission as an organization and how your staff fulfill that mission.

"I was just pretty happy with the fact that I could actually help people and contribute to society—one of the biggest steps into becoming a responsible adult. I was able to apply for at least four grants. So I got to pay for half of my first [college] year. And then I actually got a job which is pretty nice. HireAbility Vermont helped me with my resume and an interview.
I'm hoping that after college that I'll become an art teacher for elementary school. I'm now working, and I'm going to be in college soon. I just didn't think I'd get this far. So it's pretty exciting."

-Dylan Snyder, HireAbility Vermont consumer

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE AS WORKERS

There are many considerations for supervisors as they consider hiring young people. How will you orient these new staff, help them navigate in their new role, coach them in job skill development, provide feedback, and discuss challenges?

Hiring

Before the interview

- Job Description: This should be written with your business or program structure in mind and have clear objectives, tasks, and information about the work environment (i.e. work as a team or individually). Identifying a supervisor and defining responsibilities is key.
- Application and References: Keep this simple. For many young people, this will be their first job and they may not have a resume. Expect a combination of personal references, school staff, and community members who can provide information about a young person.

During the interview

- Frame interviews as a conversation and keep the interview committee small. Some of the best interviews are those that introduce the applicant to the space and culture of the program or business, including a company tour or job shadow in the process.
- Review the job description with the applicant, checking to see if they understand the tasks and what will be expected of them.

Sample Interview Questions

- Tell us a little about yourself and why you're interested in this job.
- How would your teachers or community members describe you?
- Tell us about a challenge you've overcome.
- Describe a time when you contributed more than required to a team.
- How do you manage responsibilities?
- How would you handle this situation? (Give an example of what they may encounter in their role).
- When given something new to complete, how do you learn best?

After the interview

- Selection: Focus on key qualities versus knowledge. Can the young person answer the interview questions confidently? Do they understand the job tasks and responsibilities?
- Contract, employment paperwork, and fingerprinting: Arrange a time to meet with the young person to walk through required paperwork, and steps in the fingerprinting process. It can be helpful to provide written instructions or allow them time to complete the paperwork with you.
- Review the timeline and expected start date.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE AS WORKERS

Orientation Plans and Starting Out

Schedule a block of time for the young person to meet with you and provide them a list of staff members, daily and weekly schedules, and the staff handbook. The best practice is to review this in multiple ways with the employee - orally, in written form, or by showing them. Arrange their first few days to include shadowing other staff members (including other young people) who can act as mentors. Allow time for the young person to reflect, ask questions, and share their experiences.

Navigating Their Role

It can be challenging for youth workers to navigate their role as staff when they are close in age or have outside relationships (family members, siblings, friends, neighbors) with customers of the business or youth in the program. Providing clear expectations and coaching is key. A mentor who can model both the completion of tasks and program/business expectations to help the youth learn the nuances of work is very helpful. Consider reviewing your onboarding process/manual to ensure that the language is understandable for everyone, and provide opportunities for youth to ask questions.

"This program [STEM Pathways] is fantastic for helping teens decide their career paths. In the three years I have done the program, I have seen teens develop clarity around what they want to do after high school. In some cases it confirmed that they wanted to go into education, in others it made them realize that education was not the path for them. For others who joined the program because they didn't know what they wanted it made them think more strongly about education as a career path. Most of the youth who work in the program plan to continue their education in a four-year degree program."

- Heather Moore, LEAPS Program, Franklin Northeast SU

Coaching for Job Skill Development

Build a relationship with the youth workers you are supervising. Remember that young people are best supported by those that understand the value of connection and how it impacts growth and learning.

The power dynamic is important in a mentor/mentee relationship. The mentor's job is not to be the expert and impart advice but to prepare the mentee to work towards goals and become independent and confident in their own skills and strengths. A mentee needs to feel that they have someone they trust who supports them.

Arrange weekly meetings (using Section 3 of this guidebook as a resource) to develop job skills. This can be provided as a group or one on one.

Topics may include:

- Communication skills/customer service: Asking questions, conversation starters.
- Time management and punctuality.
- Professional attire and behavior (including phone use).
- Accountability to peers and supervisor, and responsivitiy to feedback.

"One student began the program very shy and with apparent low self-esteem. She started the program with spotty communication and was often late with paperwork. During her time in the program, she has grown to be seen being a positive role model to the younger students, developed a perfect attendance record, and is often now requested by adult staff members to assist in their classes. Staff are excited to see that the younger students respond positively to her, and one staff member who conducted a formal observation of this teen working commented that this student was turning out to be a 'natural teacher'."

- Orianna Baez, A.I.M. Afterschool & Summer Program

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE AS WORKERS

Providing Feedback

Timely
It is best to provide feedback after a behavior is observed or as soon as it is reasonably possible. Be sensitive to emotion and stress.

Positive and constructive
Positive feedback: to recognize and reinforce what you want to continue. Constructive feedback: to identify what isn't effective and to offer alternatives or suggestions for improvement.

Formal and informal
Informal feedback occurs through everyday interactions or "in the moment." Formal feedback occurs through performance reviews or through meetings with supervisors.

Reflection
Asking an employee to reflect on their experience is a great way to start a feedback conversation. It allows the employee to think about their own growth, what happened in a situation, or what they need for support. Start with open questions like, "What do you think...?" or "How could that situation turned out differently?" or "What do you need...?"

Credit for Work

Think about how teens can document their learning and experiences (video, journal, writing prompts, interviews) and potential transfer to PLPs. In order to foster those opportunities, program directors should meet with Work Based Learning Coordinators in high schools.

"I wish there were more programs where professionals actually helped you decide whether or not you should go down a career by helping you explore that field. More groups that helped our community with things like fundraising."

-Carol D., age 14, Chittenden County, Vermont Afterschool Youth Vision Board

Important Information for Employing Minors

It is critical to know the Federal and State of Vermont Child Labor Laws, and that there are restrictions for age ranges (under 14 years of age, those between the age of 14 and 16, and those between 16 and 18 years of age). These limit the specific hours a young person can work when school is in session, when school is not in session, and on weekends. There are also restrictions on the type of work a young person can do.

Afterschool programs should be aware of the following:

- Fourteen and fifteen-year-olds may not be employed before 7AM or after 7PM, or for more than three hours per day on school days.
- They also may not work more than 18 hours per week during school weeks.
- The full document "Important Information for Employers of Minors in the State of Vermont on Federal and State Child Labor Laws" can be found at: labor.vermont.gov/sites/labor/files/doc_library/WH-30-Information-for-Employer-Child-Labor-Law.pdf

Remember that this is workforce development, not merely just a workforce.

SECTION 2: PREPARING OTHER STAFF TO SERVE AS MENTORS OR COWORKERS

PREPARING OTHER STAFF TO SERVE AS MENTORS AND CO-WORKERS

Effective Communication

There are many different communication styles and taking the time to discover what types of communication work best for those you work with is key to help build a safe and comfortable team environment for effective communication. When working with young or inexperienced staff, think about the ways in which they communicate and remember that these may be different from your own preferences.

Do your staff prefer to text or receive an email or phone call?

Do they need reminders or do they want to look at a staff calendar when they need information?

It may be necessary to have multiple modes of communicating for different learning types. Some examples of this include:

- Provide visual reminders.
- Go over definitions of commonly used acronyms.
- Make sure that everyone knows where to go to find out important information, provide feedback, and ask questions.
- Set time aside for check-ins and brainstorming common challenges so that staff know that they can bring up issues and be supported.

"Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding such that the speaker knows you're truly interested in their ideas, concerns, and opinions. It involves giving the speaker your undivided attention, withholding judgment, and being mindful of your facial expressions and body language because nonverbal communications to show your respect for the speaker."

- Judy Willis, Edutopia

STEPPING BACK AND LETTING YOUTH LEAD

Setting staff up for success includes knowing their strengths and providing opportunities for them to use and hone those strengths. Building a relationship with staff or mentee is the most important piece. Keep the following things in mind as you build working relationship.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is breaking up learning or skill building into chunks and providing a tool, or structure, with each chunk. Tools may include; visual aids, modeling, practice, tapping into prior knowledge, time to talk, pre-teach, asking effective questions. Scaffolding is important to helping youth take small steps towards independence and autonomy.

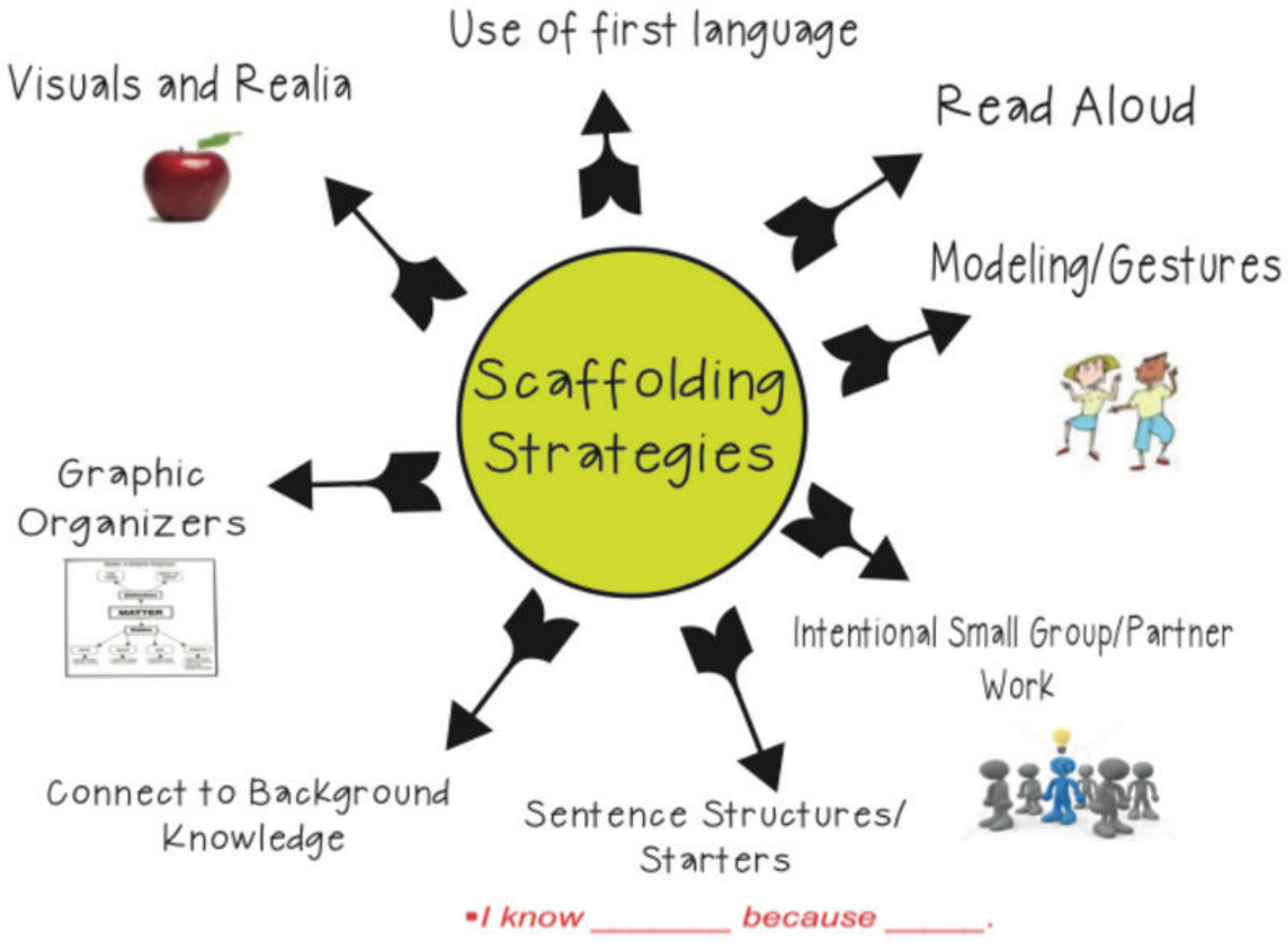
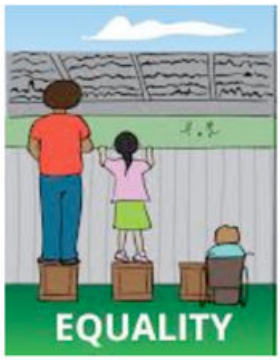


Image from: www.mshouser.com/teaching-tips/8-strategies-for-scaffolding-instruction

STEPPING BACK AND LETTING YOUTH LEAD

Empowerment

Working with young people often shows different triggers and power dynamics than working with adult peers. Know when support will be most needed. If explaining why something went wrong during the program feels like lecturing, they may not be able to actively listen to that explanation. Try another communication style to find the best way to convey message and support staff. If people have lived most or all of their life in an empowerment free culture, they will not feel empowered overnight. It may take them time to change their thinking and acting. They may need scaffolding, practice, and modeling of empowerment.

Equality: Sameness in status, rights and treatment. Everyone receives or has the same things	
Equity: Fairness. Everyone receives or has what is needed to thrive and reach one's full potential.	
Power: The authority and ability to decide who has access to resources; the capacity to direct or influence the behavior of others, oneself and/or the course of events.	

Schools are traditionally hierarchical in nature with teachers and parents holding all of the power. When we seek to empower young people we must remember their own experiences with power. As mentors, sharing power is essential to elevating youth voice and equity. Modeling empowerment and sharing power will also benefit new leaders as they see this as a way to lead and continue to empower others.

STEPPING BACK AND LETTING YOUTH LEAD

Youth Voice

- Youth voice can not happen without scaffolding and sharing power.
- Youth voice is also a slow building process that takes practice.
- Young people are not always used to freely giving their voice and opinion among adults. Their experience may be the opposite, that when they shared their opinion in the past, nothing came of it or adults took over the idea.
- Therefore, there is a need to build trust before youth are willing to show up and share their voice on matters that mean something to them.
- This also proves why sharing power is necessary to build trust in order for youth voice to grow. If adults continue to hold the power in the room, on a project or in the relationship, it is not an equitable situation. Youth will continue to feel incapable, dependant, or disengaged.
- Also note that youth voices looks different within different age groups. Scaffolding youth voice opportunities can help youth be ready to lead.

STEPPING BACK AND LETTING YOUTH LEAD

Youth Testimony on H.775 (Vermont Youth Council Bill)

"I say to you all, legislators, educators, and adult allies who want to support youth, here are just a few examples of ways you can be part of including us in what matters to us all:

- Share respect and recognition. Start from a place of respect for young people's autonomy, opinions, desires, and actual capacity to take part in and lead in their communities and the state.

- Work for our representation at the tables and places where decisions are made. Make it regular and formal.

- Engage in real talk. Don't be afraid to have open conversations with youth about systems of power, oppression, resistance, and liberation and ask for their opinions on how to make changes.

In conclusion, I urge you to pass the Vermont Youth Council bill but also to not stop with this bill. When we started working to create a youth center in our town, we were encouraged to not use the word teen or youth when we talked with prospective partners and community members. We were told that it might have a negative bias. We heard that youth are often dismissed for a lack of engagement, or attacked for being disruptive, selfish, lazy, or not caring. We decided to not listen to that advice and, in fact, decided to put youth and teen front and center in our discussions because the fact is we do care, we do want to be part of the solution, we are the experts on our lives and how best to improve them. So I ask you today to keep working from your place of power to engage all Vermonters including youth, bring us to the table to be involved in the decisions that affect us all."

- Madison O'Brien, senior at Springfield High School
Testimony at the Vermont State Legislature, February 2020

WEEKLY CHECK INS

Sometimes a check-in can just be stating what you noticed went well for the mentee/staff that week. Rigid, constant check-ins do not build trust. However, if you feel unreachable by a mentee/staff, they may not reach out when they do need support. Set up a check-in schedule and plan that works best to continue to build a relationship, work towards a specific goal, and share power.

Set Goals with the Mentee/Staff

- SMART Goals
- Weekly Tasks to Reach Goals

Know the Individual's Learning and Communication Styles

- Relating to a person's communication and learning style helps build relationships
- Sharing power to build confidence and autonomy

Reflection

- What is working for you? What went well this week? List the successes you had this week.
- What did not go well for you this week? What is one thing you would like to improve or change in your work?

"Understanding different communication styles can radically improve the quality of your relationships. That's because your level of skill in navigating difficult conversations depends on your ability to connect."

- Lyn Christian

SMART GOALS

S.M.A.R.T. goals can provide a standard for performance to be measured and reviewed over time. Take a moment to run each of your goals through this process.

Using S.M.A.R.T. Goals

S Specific: Well-defined, clear, and unambiguous.

M Measurable: With specific criteria that measure your progress towards the accomplishment of the goal.

A Achievable: Attainable and not impossible to achieve..

R Realistic: Within reach, realistic, and relevant to your life purpose..

T Timely: With a clearly defined timeline, including a starting date and a target date. The purpose is to create urgency.

SMART GOALS

Specific

Goals that are specific have a significantly greater chance of being accomplished. To make a goal specific, the five "W" questions must be considered:

- Who is involved in this goal?
- What do I want to accomplish?
- Where is this goal to be achieved?
- When do I want to achieve this goal?
- Why do I want to achieve this goal?

Measurable

A SMART goal must have criteria for measuring progress. If there are no criteria, you will not be able to determine your progress and if you are on track to reach your goal. To make a goal measurable, ask yourself:

- How many/much?
- How do I know if I have reached my goal?
- What is my indicator of progress?

Achievable

A SMART goal must be achievable and attainable. This will help you figure out ways you can realize that goal and work towards it. The goal should be stretched to make you feel challenged, but defined well enough that you can actually do it. Ask yourself:

- Do I have the resources and capabilities to achieve the goal?
- If not, what am I missing?
- Have others done it successfully before?

Realistic

A SMART goal must be realistic in that the goal can be realistically achieved given the available resources and time. Ask yourself:

- Is the goal realistic and within reach?
- Is the goal reachable given the time and resources?
- Are you able to commit to achieving the goal?

Timely

A SMART goal must be time-bound in that it has a start and finish date. If the goal is not time constrained, there will be no sense of urgency and motivation to achieve the goal. Ask yourself:

- Does my goal have a deadline?
- By when do you want to achieve your goal?

SECTION 3: WORK INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

TIME MANAGEMENT AND PUNCTUALITY

Showing up when you say you will is the foundational building block of trust when starting out at a new job. You may be wondering, "When am I supposed to show up;" "What should I do if I'll be late;" and "What else is included in time management?"

Steps to Understanding Expectations

1. Communicate with your supervisor and understand the expectations of your position (for example: where do you need to be and when). Also discuss the culture of the organization (is it more of an “early is on time” place or is it okay to walk in the door at your start time).

2. Discuss what you should do if you will be late or need to miss work.
   - Who do you contact?
   - What are the acceptable ways to communicate (call, text, or email)?
   - How much of a heads up do they need?
   - Do you need to include in any additional information (a reason or plans for a substitute)?

3. Use your time effectively. You should be working with your supervisor to plan out your work time. One good idea is to always have a secondary task “in your back pocket” that you can take on when any downtime comes up.

To Be of Use
By Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.
I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.
I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.
The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND PUNCTUALITY

Scenario

- Maria is your coworker and she has a very busy schedule with her three younger siblings and lots of homework.
- 1-2 times a week she comes in 15 to 20 minutes late, meaning she can't help in some of the tasks the staff does to prepare for the day.
- The program director isn't always around to notice, but the extra work is starting to take a toll on your co-workers and everyone is starting to get frustrated.

What Do You Do?

- Do you talk to her directly about it?
- If you talk to her, how would you approach it?
- What advice would you give her?
- Do you talk to your director about it?
- What would you say to them?

Share Your Thoughts:

"How did it get so late so soon?" - Dr. Seuss

PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION

"Professionalism" is a concept that many people have a general idea of what it is and often can recall examples of when it was lacking; like when they had a bad customer experience. If pressed for a definition, many might say, "I know it when I see it." But it's difficult to define and can be subjective.

Appearance and Attire

- Appearance and attire is the first thing that both employers and customers see. Rightly or wrongly, people make snap decisions about you based on the way you present yourself externally, so it's important to make a good first impression.

- Dress codes will vary greatly, so, it's important that you know what is expected of you around how you dress. Have a discussion with your supervisor early on so there are no surprises down the road.

Work Attitude and How You Carry Yourself

- Professionalism is also defined by your attitude or emotional intelligence. Essentially, it's how you "carry yourself."

- Frustrations and other unpleasant feelings are bound to come up in any job. How you deal with them is the key.
  - Will you react (acting impulsively, letting the emotions control what you do)
  - Or will you respond (slowing down, noticing your emotion and taking time to choose what you do next)?

"We choose what attitudes we have right now. And it's a continuing choice."

- John C. Maxwell

PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION

Phone Use

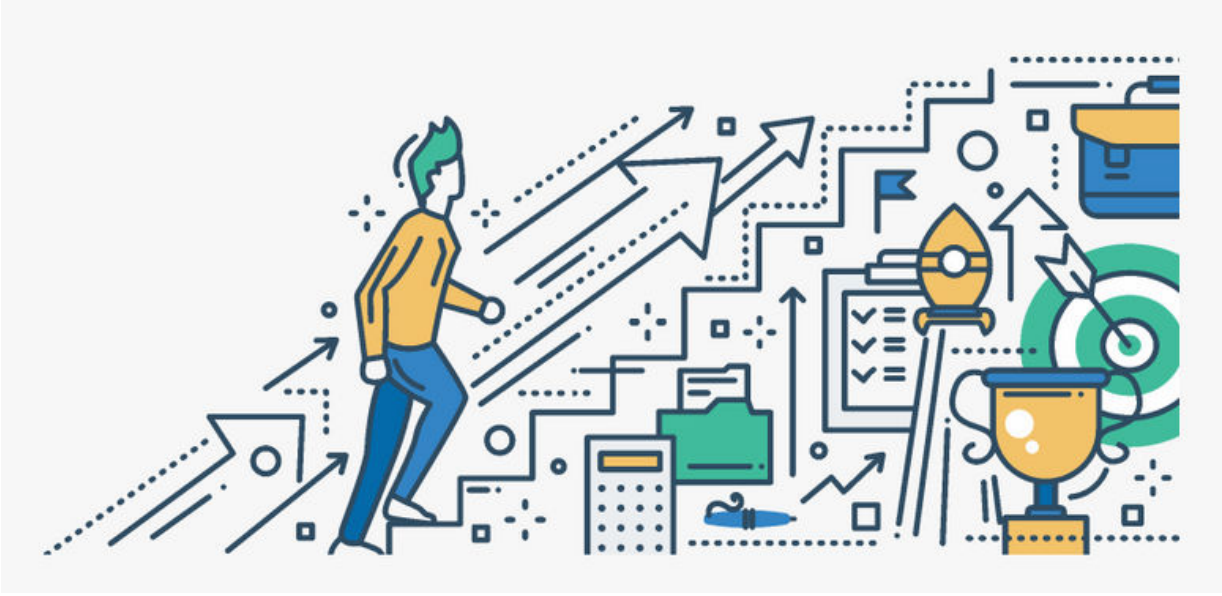
- Expectations may vary from site to site, but generally, phones should be away during work hours.

- Using technology steals your attention from the task or people you have in front of you. This leads to lower quality work because of your divided focus.

Career Building

- Lastly, having a professional orientation isn't just about the day-to-day tasks you do, it includes the plan you have for future work, and seeing how your current job fits into this bigger picture.

- Early jobs are a time for skill-building.
  - Even if the work you're currently doing doesn't directly match what you hope to do in the future, there are many skills you can be developing that will transfer to future work experiences.
  - Use this time to start to notice and categorize the skills you're developing.
  - Ask your supervisor for feedback on where you're doing well and where you're lacking. This self-awareness will be very valuable as you move forward in your career.



PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION

Scenario

- You and your co-worker Natalia are in charge of helping customers fill out a survey.
- You both have gotten the customers ready and they are filling out the survey.
- Natalia is sitting down nearby, and you can see she is sneaking looks at her phone. She then whispers to you, “Come here, you’ve GOT to see this!”

What Do You Do?

- What do you do in that moment?
- What do you do later?
- Do you say anything to your supervisor?
- How do you explain the choice you made to Natalia?

Share Your Thoughts:

“There is a common perception that compassion is, if not actually an impediment, at least irrelevant to professional life. Personally, I would argue that not only is it relevant, but that when compassion is lacking, our activities are in danger of becoming destructive. This is because when we ignore the question of the impact our actions have on others' well-being, inevitably we end up hurting them."

- Dalai Lama

HAVING A WORK TEAM ETHIC

There are a number of levels of teamwork. In its simplest form, it boils down to being helpful. In your interactions with co-workers, you want to be good natured and responsive to what they need.

Steps to Understanding Teamwork

1

Teamwork is complex

- Responding to others' needs and beginning to anticipate and act proactively to meet your team's need is an important part of working together.
- Compromising is sometimes needed for the group to succeed - you should still advocate for what you need, just make sure you're considering your team's needs in addition to your own.
- Regular check-ins with your team and with your supervisor can ensure that you're getting your own needs met while still meeting team needs.

2

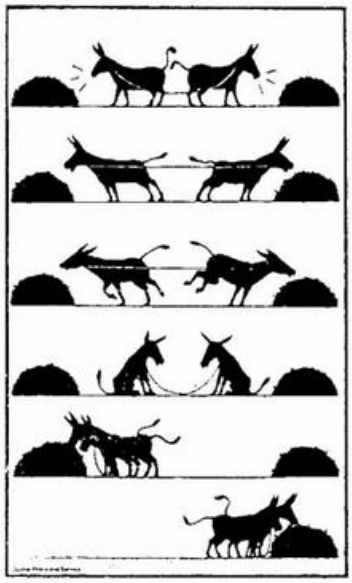
People need recognition

- Recognition feels good and often when it doesn't come, people can feel isolated and not valued.
- If you want to receive some praise for what you add to the team, make sure you're shouting out to who contribute as well.

3

Leadership and Direction

- This is not the outdated vision of someone who directs others through outward strength and decisiveness.
- Leadership requires the empathy and selflessness along with strong communication skills around motivating others.
- You want your team to be taking on tasks willingly because they see how it will serve everyone in the end.



HAVING A TEAMWORK ETHIC

Scenario

- Your supervisor Carol has asked you to lead an activity for a group of adults learning how to sew.
- You'll be co-teaching it with your colleague José, but you're ultimately responsible.
- José hasn't been doing great at work lately because his confidence took a dent when a lesson he taught last week really flopped.
- You want to get the work done, but you know you can't pull off the lesson without his help.

What Do You Do?

- How do you approach getting him on board with planning and teaching the lesson?
- How can you build up his confidence?
- What do you do if he still doesn't contribute?

Share Your Thoughts:

"A leader creates space that: empowers others, inspires others, and makes conscious that which is unconscious in others."

-Unknown

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal communication is the foundation for success in your career and other relationships. When people are new to the workforce, there are many aspects of the job that will have to be learned, and one large aspect is the specific vocabulary and way of speaking appropriate for that position. This is different from job to job, but in general, this is knowledge that can be learned over time.

Communication is a Two-Way Street

To be a successful communicator you need to be able to absorb information as well as share it. Listening is key to communicating, especially active listening. This is where you are listening with:

Your whole body: Make eye contact, lean into the speaker and face them, nod and confirm you're listening with your physical actions.

Your mind: Keep your focus on the speaker's words. Do this even if what they are saying reminds you of other tasks you may need to complete or you don't agree with/think what they're saying is true.

Your mouth: Assure the speaker they have been heard. This needs to be more than just verbal confirmations like "uh-huh." Let them know they've been heard by summarizing, repeating, or asking clarifying questions about what they said.

On a basic level, employees should be able to effectively follow directions. From there, you should be able to answer work-related questions clearly, quickly, and positively. As you build independence in your position, you will be able to raise concerns and share your own perspectives.

"Assumptions are the termites of relationships."

-Henry Winkler

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Scenario

- At the end of a long day, you're working with your last customer.
- You're just thinking about how tired you are from the stress of the day, when the customer argues with you about the price of an item, saying it is supposed to be 50% off but you know it is not.
- The customer seems to be looking past you at your supervisor who's busy closing up.

What Do You Do?

How do you respond to the customer? Be sure you consider all your communication, including non-verbal cues and active listening.

Share Your Thoughts:

"Simply minding one's own business is more offensive than being intrusive. Without ever saying a word one can make a person feel less-than."

-Criss Jami

PROBLEM-SOLVING

When a relatively simple problem is presented to you in a clear way, the choices are easy to see and select. However, on the job problems are rarely this clear cut.

Steps to Problem-Solving

1

First step is to recognize that there is a problem and determine exactly what it is: problem definition.

- This takes close observation as well as empathy (the ability to understand and share the feelings and perspective of another).
- You may need to convince others and get them on board with recognizing there is a problem using your communication and teamwork skills.

2

Once the problem is defined, you need to work on developing potential solutions

- This depends on the problem
- Depending on the problem you can be slow and deliberate in developing solutions that work for everyone, but sometimes the problem needs to be solved quickly and you will need to be quick and efficient.

3

Once a solution is settled on, the group must then decide on how to pull off that solution

- This can happen by defining roles, assigning tasks, and making sure the plans gets followed.
- Then there should be a reflection point at which the group looks back to see how well the chosen solution worked and either choose a new one (if it didn't do well) or reflect on why it did work, (if it was successful).

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Scenario

- Your co-worker Jess works in a different department and has expressed frustration with another coworker, Andre.
- After speaking with Jess a little you learn that Andre is always off task and doesn't do his assigned tasks.
- You talk to Ramon who works with Andre and get his perspective that Andre isn't always the best worker but his behavior is not a problem.
- Clearly there are two different views of what's going on here: Jess sees a problem and Ramon doesn't.

What Do You Do?

How do you help your co-workers get on the same page, communicate effectively, and make a plan that will work for everyone?

Share Your Thoughts:

"If you only have a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."

-Abraham Harold Maslow

The Blind Men and the Elephant

There were once six blind men who stood by the roadside every day and begged from the people who passed. They had often heard of elephants, but they had never seen one; for, being blind, how could they?

It so happened one morning that an elephant was driven down the road where they stood. When they were told that the great beast was before them, they asked the driver to let him stop so that they might see him. Of course, they could not see him with their eyes; but they thought that by touching him they could learn just what kind of animal he was.

The first one happened to put his hand on the elephant's side. "Well, well!" he said, "now I know all about this beast. He is exactly like a wall."

The second felt only of the elephant's tusk. "My brother," he said, "you are mistaken. He is not at all like a wall. He is round and smooth and sharp. He is more like a spear than anything else."

The third happened to take hold of the elephant's trunk. "Both of you are wrong," he said. "Anybody who knows anything can see that this elephant is like a snake."

The fourth reached out his arms and grasped one of the elephant's legs. "Oh, how blind you are!" he said. "It is very plain to me that he is round and tall like a tree."

The fifth was a very tall man, and he chanced to take hold of the elephant's ear. "The blindest man ought to know that this beast is not like any of the things that you name," he said. "He is exactly like a huge fan."

The sixth was very blind indeed, and it was some time before he could find the elephant at all. At last he seized the animal's tail. "O foolish fellows!" he cried. "You surely have lost your senses. This elephant is not like a wall, or a spear, or a snake, or a tree; neither is he like a fan. But any man with a particle of sense can see that he is exactly like a rope."

Then the elephant moved on, and the six blind men sat by the roadside all day and quarreled about him. Each believed that he knew just how the animal looked; and each man called the others names because they did not agree with him.

People who have eyes sometimes act as foolishly.

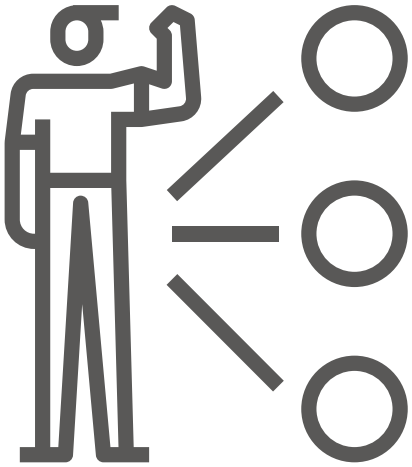
*Adapted from https://americanliterature.com/author/james-baldwin/short-story/the-blind-men-and-the-elephant

SUPERVISOR/SUPERVISEE FRAMES

The following are breakdowns of each of the previous skills that could be used by supervisors and supervisees when assessing where an employee is in terms of their skill development.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND PUNCTUALITY

Strong Skills	Undeveloped Skills	Overly Focused on Skill
• Aware of expectations around when to show up, call out etc. and follows them • Plans out tasks to maximize efficiency • Ready with smaller tasks if main task cannot be done.	• Is late or absent without warning frequently. • Does not look ahead to how much time a task will take. • Works inefficiently: starting and stopping tasks without getting them done in a timely manner.	• Shows inflexibility when schedules must change. • Over-plans and does not account for others' lacking skills around punctuality and time management.



PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION

Strong Skills	Undeveloped Skills	Overly Focused on Skill
• Has awareness of their external appearance, how it will be interpreted by others and its suitability for setting and the tasks to be performed. • Responds to challenging emotions with consideration and intention. • Thinks about their career trajectory and how they can develop skills that will transfer to future jobs.	• Does not consider what their appearance or behavior (such as being on a phone) will mean to their supervisor, coworkers, or others. • Reacts to challenging emotions without considering what the impact could be. • Sees their work as "only a job" that's really only good for a paycheck.	• Has difficulty differentiating between when they need to be "on" and when they can relax a bit. • Can seem cold and uncaring. • Prioritizes their own skill development over the work in front of them.

HAVING A TEAM WORK ETHIC

Strong Skills	Undeveloped Skills	Overly Focused on Skill
• Is empathetic and can read what others need and want. • Is able to prioritize the needs and goals of the group. • Can motivate and build up other group members to push forward the group's agenda.	• Cannot prioritize the needs of the group over their own. • Acts like a dictator and pushes tasks on group members and also does not recognize them for their contributions. • Sits back and lets others take on the difficult work, allowing the group to pull them along.	• Take up too much time checking in the team members making sure work is shared fairly, so work takes too long. • Completely forgets to take care of themselves while looking out for the group's needs and is unable to contribute when they're called upon by others.

SUPERVISOR/SUPERVISEE FRAMES

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Strong Skills	Undeveloped Skills	Overly Focused on Skill
• Practices all aspects of active listening. • Can admit when they do not know something but knows how to get the answer. • Can articulately repeat back to a speaker what was said. • Is able to effectively listen and follow complex directions.	• May have content knowledge, but is not able to share it effectively. • Listens, but does not do so in order to better understand the speaker. • Cannot effectively share their understanding gained through listening.	• Grinds processes to a halt by overly focusing on understanding and not action. • Attempts to communicate perfectly to each individual, but loses efficiency they could have had by communicating well to the group.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Strong Skills	Undeveloped Skills	Overly Focused on Skill
• Is able to fully define a problem before jumping to solving the problem. • Can utilize communications and teamwork skills to get others on board to define and solve the problem. • Has awareness that problems can have multiple solutions. • Reflects back on a solution to analyze why it worked or did not.	• Does not see that there is a problem or does not fully define it. • Does not reflect individually or with a group on potential solutions and their broader effects. • Pushes ahead with a solution without prior planning or consideration of others.	• Can see problems where there are none, or larger problems where they are small. • Can tend to "over-solve" a problem: building a complicated solution for a simple problem. • Slows down processes for the sake of getting others' feedback.

"There are three ways of trying to win the young. There is persuasion, there is compulsion, and there is attraction. You can preach at them: that is a hook without a worm. You can say, You must volunteer, and that is of the devil. You can tell them, 'You are needed.' That appeal hardly ever fails."

-Kurt Hahn, Founder of Outward Bound

RESOURCES

- Youth Employment:
youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-employment

- Youth Employment Rules:
https://labor.vermont.gov/sites/labor/files/doc_library/WH-13-Wage-and-Hour-Laws-2019%20.pdf

- Jobs Readiness Skills:
www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/economicDevelopment/workforce/JRT-Report-and-Continuum-R4-Web.pdf

- Scaffolding Instruction:
www.mshouser.com/teaching-tips/8-strategies-for-scaffolding-instruction

- Smart Goals:
corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/other/smart-goal/

- Navigating Diverse Communication Styles:
https://www.atlassian.com/blog/inside-atlassian/how-to-navigate-diverse-communication-styles-at-work

- Learning Style Preferences:
https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/learning-styles-preferences

- Active Listening Skills:
https://www.edutopia.org/article/value-active-listening

"It takes time to develop a system, so be gentle with yourself if it takes a couple of weeks (or months) to get this program off the ground - especially if you're a single site! It took a lot of learning and additional support for the high schoolers, but once the teens return for another year, word of mouth spreads and they start to take pride and ownership of their work. It's also important to develop CLEAR guidelines and expectations for teens - they are looking at you for guidance! Also, an open line of communication at all times so that they can provide instant feedback and voice concerns as needed."

- STEM Pathways program leader

FINAL THOUGHTS

We strongly believe that young people make a better Vermont. Just by being young people, they enrich our community. As with the youth in your afterschool or summer program, young people have a right to explore interests and build skills, and workforce development is one pathway. By understanding the value young people bring to our programs, all levels of staff supporting them, and being intentional about the skills we help them develop, it can be a powerful experience for all involved. We appreciate your willingness to include and employ young program in your program and are here to support you.

Vermont Afterschool

Strengthening programs. Empowering youth.

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