

# **GE Foundation Workplace Skills Program**

## **Module Four Navigating the Workplace**

### **Participant Booklet**

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## **Introduction to Module Four**

### **Navigating the Workplace**

It is very important for young people entering the workforce to understand the social complexities of the modern day workplace. Obviously workers will need to bring technical skills to the job and prove that they can do good quality work. As important, they will be expected to bring people skills to the workplace so that they can help create a productive and satisfying work environment.

We know that each workplace develops its own personality, but we also know there are predictable behavior patterns that can be found in many or most workplaces. For example, you will typically find yourself engaged with a range of people, many of whom are quite different from one another. There will be individuals and groups who have power and authority, and others who want power and authority. Employees will be expected to understand and adapt to anticipated and unanticipated behaviors of supervisors and teammates. Then, there will be times when expectations are clear and other times when they are vague or in the grey area. Job descriptions will be only part of the story, the written expectations. There will be other tasks and challenges, as well as unwritten expectations, you will need to learn and follow.

There will be groups and individuals who want you to be an ally and give your loyalty to their agenda. There will likely be older and younger workers, who come from different generations, with different wants and needs. There will be positive individuals who appreciate what they have and see the potential in other people. There will also be individuals with challenging behaviors who are difficult to work with and who always point out what is wrong and who is to blame.

Learning to navigate your way in the workplace, with the range of individuals and groups, is very important to one's sense of wellbeing and professional satisfaction. This module will help you understand the differences between healthy and unhealthy workplaces, and why trust is so

important. It will introduce you to two influential groups in the workplace who shape what's expected from employees, and in many ways these two groups establish the very nature of work relationships. We will examine the values and attitudes of four different generations of workers and why their differences may create tensions. Participants will also have an opportunity to discuss and clarify what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior when they come to work.

# Workplace Qualities and Skills Employers Want

## Positive Attitude

Attitude is your mental starting point for how you view people and events in your life. Attitude is a mindset and a choice. It is about how you look forward to the days ahead. A positive attitude and enthusiasm are critical components for workplace success. People who are upbeat and demonstrate eagerness to step-up and take on work tasks have an advantage over others who are viewed as negative or disinterested. Being positive includes recognizing your own strengths and other people's strengths and good efforts. Showing interest, initiative, and effort is highly desired by employers. Individuals with positive attitudes are usually well liked by their co-workers and are seen as easy to get along with. A cheerful attitude is contagious and brings positive energy to the workplace.

## Team Player

Being a good team player means you do your share of the work, you help the team create strong relationships, and you keep the team focused on common goals. Good team members pay attention to both getting the work done and ensuring people have their needs met in the workplace. They follow group norms for acceptable behavior and help people feel safe and valued. They support others, they do what they can to resolve conflicts, and they contribute to good team decision-making and problem solving. Good team players keep others informed and included and they are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure the successful completion of projects. They are trusting, caring, supportive, and respectful. Good team players celebrate individual and collective achievements. They adapt to change and continually look for ways to innovate and improve.

## Able to Prioritize

An employee in today's workplace needs to develop the ability to step back and understand what work needs to be done, then in turn be able to rank work tasks in sequence, from the least important to the most important. With the number of demands and the amount of

information, expectations, and responsibilities coming at employees daily, workers need to be able to make timely and informed decisions about what is a priority and what is not. Everything is not a priority. The ability to consistently and accurately set priorities is a talent that requires a combination of industry knowledge, clear thinking, and effective decision-making. Getting priorities right helps both individuals and teams meet deadlines and achieve performance goals.

### **Problem Solver**

Good problem solvers can gather relevant information about a problem, analyze the data or information, and begin to generate possible solutions. Employees who solve more problems, small or large, are more valuable to employers. Things will go wrong at work and these problems need solutions. Problem solvers can figure out where things have broken down and come to an understanding of the root cause of a problem. This is a very important skill because finding the real problem is critical to solving the problem. Seeking input from others and considering a number of solutions is also important, and good problem solvers typically do this. They help everyone be more productive and effective in the workplace. Employers value employees who are problem solvers because they are able and willing to take on challenges by thinking critically and creatively.

### **Dedicated**

Dedication means you are committed to doing what is necessary to make the company successful. It means you are conscientious, you pay attention, and you want to do a good job. A valuable employee shows dedication by consistently performing work tasks at a high level and exceeding expectations. Having a strong work ethic and sticking with challenges demonstrates dedication. Being willing to take on any task, as well as ensuring teammates are successful, is valued by both colleagues and managers. Knowing the company's goals and working toward achieving them also demonstrates commitment and loyalty. Always working in the best interests of the employer is an important quality. Employees who are dedicated need very little supervision or motivation to do their best and get the job done. Dedicated employees go above and beyond what is expected.

## **Dependable**

Dependable means employers can count on you to be consistent and to get the job done. Setting goals and priorities and organizing their work are things employers expect from employees. Managing time, energy, and resources in an efficient manner leads to success. Being accountable for your actions and the actions of your team demonstrates responsibility and dependability. Dependability also means completing high quality work and meeting deadlines. Understanding that your work affects others on the team and ensuring you are contributing your best is critical to your success. Exercising self-discipline to stay focused on the work is also being responsible and dependable.

## **Adaptable**

Adaptable means you are able to adjust to changes in your circumstances or your environment. During these rapidly changing times in the workplace employees need to be able to step out of their comfort zone and do things they have not done before. Mistakes, problems, challenges, and new priorities require that individuals and teams be flexible and adaptable. Being able to change direction, adapt to different work hours, and work with a wide variety of people is an important characteristic in the modern workplace. Learning from mistakes and accepting feedback, as well as being innovative and resourceful, are part of demonstrating adaptability and flexibility.

## **Integrity**

Integrity is about standing up and having the courage to do what is right, even though you can justify doing something else. It means having standards and principles that you follow in your life and your work. Being trustworthy and truthful is key to having integrity. Doing what you say you are going to do and being consistent is critical. Employers want employees who tell the truth, people they can count on to be honest. Keeping commitments and honoring promises is an important quality that all employers value. Character is the virtue of knowing right from wrong, and acting in the best interest of the company, despite temptations and pressures.

## **Lifelong Learner**

Being a lifelong learner means you are open to new ideas and concepts throughout your career and you take the initiative to seek out learning opportunities. Continuous learning is key to success and wellbeing in the workplace. Employees who are multi-skilled and those who continue to learn and improve themselves increase their value for an employer. You need to be willing to expand your skill set. With the rapid changes in technology, workers need to be constantly upgrading their knowledge and skills to stay current. They need to be able to learn and use the latest processes and procedures to complete work effectively and efficiently. A lifelong learner assesses their strengths and areas for development, they set learning goals, and they execute a plan to achieve those learning goals.

## **Resilience**

When bad things happen to good people, have you ever wondered why certain individuals fall apart, while others manage to carry on through the hardships? This is resilience. People who are resilient are able to face very difficult problems and circumstances in their lives and make the best of bad situations. They have the ability to bounce back and learn important lessons from setbacks in life. A person's ability to be resilient will play a major role in their success in life and work. It will also have a significant impact on a person's wellbeing. Typically, people who are resilient have a good sense of humor and they are able to create a healthy perspective on what is facing them. They accept reality and don't waste time bemoaning, "what should be" and "why me?" Resilient individuals find meaning in hardships and they have strong core values and beliefs that help them survive and thrive in difficult times.



## Workplace Qualities and Skills Assessment

Skill	Rating	Rationale
Positive Attitude	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Team Player	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Ability to Prioritize	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Problem Solver	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Dedicated	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Dependable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Adaptable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Integrity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Lifelong Learner	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
Resilience	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	

# Hiring Employees

**Part A** – If you were interviewing applicants for a position with your construction company, what questions would you ask to determine how they rate on the ten workplace qualities and skills employers want?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Part B** – How would you demonstrate and present yourself in an interview or during the job search process to communicate that you have the workplace qualities and skills that employers want?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

## The Power and Pitfalls of the Four Generations

Working in small groups, identify and discuss the strengths and potential contributions that each generation can bring to the workplace. Also, identify and discuss potential problems different generations could create in the workplace.

Generation	Contributions	Problems
Baby Boomers		
Gen X		
Gen Y		
Gen Z		

## Four Generations of Workers

There are now four generations of workers in the workplace: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. Each generation has distinct values, attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and habits. Understanding the wants, needs, motivational levers, work patterns, work ethics, and communication styles of other generations will help to eliminate misunderstandings and reduce the potential for major tensions.

### **Baby Boomers (born 1945-1964)**

- Boomers are competitive, confident, and self-reliant.
- They are very focused on work and for the most part very dedicated and loyal employees. They have been labeled as workaholics.
- They believe hard work pays off and they are very motivated by perks, titles, prestige, and money.
- They will work overtime and on weekends. They believe you have to pay your dues to move ahead.
- They use technology, but not as often and not as effectively or efficiently, as the Gen X and Y generations. They prefer face-to-face interactions.
- Boomers tend to avoid conflict and may be oversensitive to feedback.
- Boomers are the wealthiest generation in the workplace and are typically in higher-level positions.
- Because of the economy they are continuing to work, but they are starting to pick their successors.

### **Gen X (born 1965-1981)**

- This age group is independent, resourceful, and self-sufficient. They are also adaptable and value informality.
- Personal freedom is highly valued by Gen Xers and flexibility is more important than stability. Although they are not as open to a salary cut in exchange for flexibility.
- They take more risks than Boomers, but are not as entrepreneurial as Gen Zers.
- Family and their personal life is a priority over their job and career.
- They want work/life balance and time to enjoy life.
- Gen Xers work well independently and believe rewards should be based on merit.
- Many in this age group are managing Gen Y employees.
- They feel they have earned their salaries and workplace perks because they have worked hard at planning for succession.

### **Gen Y / Millennials (born 1982-1993)**

- Millennials thrive on connections with friends, family, and others.
- They are extremely tech-savvy and love social media.
- Gen Yers will account for 75% of the workforce by 2025.
- They largely reject the attitudes of Gen X and the Baby Boomers.
- They are impatient and don't think in terms of loyalty. They expect to have several jobs during their working years.
- Meaningful work, where they can make a contribution, is important to them.
- Workplace flexibility is also very important to Gen Yers. They want the freedom to work where and when they want. They are prepared to give up some salary for flexibility.
- They want feedback and constant attention and recognition.
- Having fun is a priority.
- They thrive on teamwork and collaboration.
- They are realistic and confident.

## **Gen Z (born 1994-2010)**

- This generation of workers is just getting started in the workplace.
- Gen Zers tend to be entrepreneurial. Their career goal is to work for themselves. They understand they are entering a highly competitive global world.
- They are tech-savvy, flexible, multi-taskers, tolerant of diversity, and globally connected.
- They don't know the world without the Internet and sometimes they are called "digital natives."
- They are dependent on and very comfortable with technology. They use it for every thing from shopping, to connecting with friends, to banking, to applying for jobs, and for dating.
- Gen Zers are obsessed with social media and are using it to put their whole life out there on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They often share every facet of their lives online.
- Because Gen Zers are constantly plugged into technology, face-to-face communications is becoming more of a challenge.

# The Ideal Workplace

If this group had the best possible workplace, what would it look like?

1. How would people feel?
2. What would people value? What's most important?
3. How are people behaving in an effort to create a positive atmosphere?
4. How are supervisors acting in this workplace?
5. How do people resolve their conflicts and differences?
6. How do you celebrate your successes?
7. What are people most proud of?

## Our View of the Ideal Workplace

Share your characteristics of an ideal workplace, come to agreements in the small group, and list your views.

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____
10.	_____



# The Positive Workplace

When you read about companies and employers that stand out as the best places to work, typically there is a set of common characteristics that describe what makes these workplaces special. Researchers, writers, and the people who work in these exceptional organizations may use different words to describe these positive workplaces, but in the end they will touch on most of the characteristics listed below.

A positive workplace is an environment where:

- workers feel satisfied and motivated
- people are trusted and treated with respect
- employees generally feel optimistic and negativity is discouraged
- there is a sense of teamwork or connectedness among employees
- workers have a voice and they can influence changes
- creativity and innovation are encouraged
- people have common values, yet appreciate diversity and differences
- supervisors provide regular feedback to employees
- workers are recognized for their efforts and accomplishments
- people help one another do good work and meet deadlines
- workers have clear expectations and goals to achieve
- workloads are reasonable
- people are kind and caring towards each other
- workers focus their time and energy on finding solutions to problems
- communication is open, frequent, and clear

## The Unhealthy Workplace

An unhealthy workplace can be a very difficult place to work. When you compare a positive workplace to an unhealthy workplace, they are dramatically different. It is a highly dysfunctional environment where it is difficult for people to cope and manage their time, energy, and responsibilities. In an unhealthy workplaces people seek status, compete, become aggressive, and take advantage of one another. An unhealthy workplace typically has a set of common characteristics including:

- ongoing tensions between people and frequent conflicts
- hidden agendas
- negativity and a sense of heaviness
- a lack of fun and humor
- anxious and stressed workers
- people feeling unsafe
- individuals become inflexible and focus on protecting themselves
- sub-groups develop and undermine co-workers
- competition rules, rather than cooperative
- low morale
- unrealistic expectations and workloads
- a lack of loyalty to one another, the team, and superiors
- pervasive poor communication
- wasted time
- decreased productivity and well-being
- increased confusion and frustration
- a reluctance to take risks

## Challenging Behaviors in the Workplace

- Employees and supervisors with challenging behaviors create unhealthy workplaces. Some challenging behaviors include:
  - high control
  - manipulation
  - bullying
  - self-centeredness
  - meanness
- A person with challenging behaviors demonstrates a pattern of counterproductive work habits that negatively affects individuals, teams, and the overall workplace.
- They move into our space, demoralize us, and pull motivation away from teams. They can make us doubt our own competence and decrease our productivity.
- These employees and supervisors can create tensions in a workplace, influencing others' thoughts and energies, and undermining peoples' sense of wellbeing.
- Other challenging behaviors include using verbal abuse and sabotaging team efforts. This often leads to increased job dissatisfaction, a hostile work setting, and low morale.
- This tension and negativity can spread like an infection, and people in the workplace may not even recognize why the workplace is becoming unhealthy.
- A healthy and positive workplace can become an unhealthy workplace, if these challenging behaviors are allowed to continue.

## Survival Strategies for an Unhealthy Workplace

**Individually** identify three ways to survive and be successful in an unhealthy workplace.

**As a group** share your thoughts and create a group list of strategies for surviving and being successful in an unhealthy workplace.

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____

## Trust in the Workplace

Many experts agree that trust may be the most important element in a work environment. When trust between people is high it leads to quality work, success, and satisfaction. When mistrust is high in the work environment people are not successful at achieving their goals and relationships are very strained.

Trust will grow in the workplace when people:

- believe you care about them and that they can count on you to look out for their interests
- believe you are truthful and that you will keep your promises
- know they can depend on you, that you will deliver on what is expected of you
- know you have the necessary skills and talents, that you can do the work
- know you are transparent, that you don't have secret agendas

There are dangers in both trusting too little and trusting too much.

English Proverb

## Why Do We Trust Certain People and Mistrust Others?

How Do People Earn Our Trust?	How Do People Lose Our Trust?
<b>What do I need to START doing to build trust?</b>	
<b>What do I need to STOP doing to avoid losing trust?</b>	

# Building and Losing Trust in the Workplace

## Six Ways to Build Trust

### 1. **Establish and maintain integrity**

This means keeping promises and always telling the truth. It also means doing what you say you will do.

### 2. **Communicate clearly and often**

Communication is the lifeblood of a workplace. It enables people to understand other team members and to solve problems in a timely manner.

### 3. **Treat all people with respect**

Everyone needs to feel important and a part of the team. Ask people for their opinions and ideas, and ensure you are always respectful in your interactions with others.

### 4. **Focus on team goals**

Be a good team member. Reinforce the message that we are all in this together, focused on achieving shared goals. Work to ensure everyone is successful.

### 5. **Do what's right**

Follow your instincts and do the right thing, regardless of what may seem to be a personal risk.

### 6. **Protect what matters**

Understand what is really important to people and protect their interests, as much as possible.

## **Five Ways to Lose the Trust of Co-Workers**

### **1. Acting and speaking inconsistently**

Nothing confuses people faster than inconsistency, for example, saying one thing and doing another. Engaging in erratic or unpredictable behavior also undermines trust.

### **2. Focusing on personal benefits**

When someone is perceived to be out for himself or herself, rather than focused on team progress, generally co-workers lose their respect and trust for that person.

### **3. Withholding information**

In the absence of information people often think the worst. Then, rumors start, uncertainty enters the picture, and trust falls away.

### **4. Lying and telling half-truths**

The bond of trust is quickly broken when people believe they are only getting part of the story, or they are being deliberately lied to.

### **5. Being close-minded**

This means an individual will not consider other points of view or ideas, and is locked into the mentality “it is my way or the highway.” When this happens communication breaks down, and eventually this dynamic erodes trust.



## Two Influential Workplace Groups

There are two sets of people you are going to meet in any workplace: cultural characters and people who have challenging behaviors. Cultural characters are key individuals who play a major role in shaping the expectations and climate of the workplace. People who are challenging to work with are generally acting in their own self-interest and they are very hard to connect with.

### Cultural Characters


Workplace culture is often defined as the common ways of thinking, behaving, and believing that members of a group share and expect from one another. Every workplace has a set of central characters that contribute to reinforcing the culture or workplace rules and values. These characters define the ways we work together to accomplish our shared goals. These cultural characters also remind people what is okay and not okay to do in the workplace. It is helpful to understand your workplace culture, because it will impact your ability to be connected with others, and your opportunities to be successful.

- **Storytellers** explain what's really going on in the workplace through their stories. They are influential characters who share information about what it takes to get ahead.
- **Guardians** are worriers who protect what people value in the workplace. They listen to problems, give solutions, and support people who are struggling.
- **Whispers** have the boss's ear and they are very loyal. They get things done and they can often read the boss's mind.
- **Gossips** spread news about people quickly, but they don't always get the news right. Their messages are intended to strengthen the way things are done around here and what's expected of you.

- **Brokers** are often assistants to the boss or informers who keep superiors tuned into the truth. They know what's really going on and they usually have excellent judgment.
- **Loyalists** are connected to many people and they know who is behind what story. They usually don't say a bad word about anyone.
- **Partners** are a group of two or more who secretly join together to protect their self-interest. They also work hard to inform the boss and try to influence others to see the world as they do.

# Cultural Characters

**What cultural characters have the most influence or power in the workplace? Why?**



**Which cultural characters would you avoid? Why?**



## Connecting With People Who Have Challenging Behaviors

All workplaces have people who will tax your patience and people skills. These individuals are focused on getting their own needs met, and they can interfere with you getting your work done. Their behaviors can take you on an emotional roller coaster, through frustration and anger, and they can push problems on you that take your energy and time to solve. Left unchecked, these difficult behaviors can hurt relationships in the workplace.

You will need to learn how to connect with people who:

- are confrontational, angry, and pushy
- identify your weaknesses and work behind your back
- are rude, sarcastic, and try to make others look foolish
- have all the answers
- are quick to agree and slow to deliver
- break commitments and promises
- procrastinate and don't meet deadlines
- constantly complain about their lives, the workplace, and other people
- are continually negative and always focused on what is wrong
- are judgmental

## Responding to People with Challenging Behaviors

1. Read the list of challenging behaviors.
2. Decide, as a group, which three of the behaviors listed are the most challenging to deal with. Develop two strategies for coping with each of the challenging behaviors your group has chosen.

Challenging Behaviors	Strategies for Responding
	<p>1. _____ _____</p> <p>2. _____ _____</p>
	<p>1. _____ _____</p> <p>2. _____ _____</p>
	<p>1. _____ _____</p> <p>2. _____ _____</p>

## Summary and Lessons Learned

### Notes on Workplace Culture

## Acceptable and Unacceptable Behaviors in the Workplace

Always	Never