**Career Activity Curriculum Topic: Soft Skills**

**Career Activity: Soft Skills**

**Activity Summary:** This lesson breaks down into 6 mini lessons about different soft skills that are important for the workplace. Each mini lesson has a short video to introduce the soft skill and an activity to practice.

**Estimated Time:** 20-120 minutes (Can be broken in two 60-minute lessons or six 20-minute lessons)

**Learning Plan Activity:** 10th Grade

**Learning Outcomes**: Students will be able to identify and practice important soft skills for the workplace.

**Materials Needed**:  PowerPoint, Handout, Pen [See each Soft Skill for additional materials needed for each activity]

**Academic Vocabulary**

* **Soft Skills:** are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, mindsets which are desirable in all professions.
* **Hard or Technical Skills:** are job-specific abilities or knowledge learned through education, hands-on experience, or training.

**Introduction**: [Use PowerPoint] While employers look for candidates with skills and training needed to perform a specific job (hard skills), they’re also interested in hiring employees who have developed soft skills that are important to getting work completed in a team environment. Hard skills might be things like knowing HTML for coding, taking and recording a patient’s vital signs, or completing a lab test. Soft skills are interpersonal, or people skills. They often include communication and listening abilities, as well as empathy and work ethic. *Play Video:* [*Soft Skills -- Synopsis*](https://youtu.be/OwPArMTI9i8) *(~2 minutes)*

**Soft Skill: Communication**

**Materials Needed**: Paper, Pen

***Introduction:*** Communication skills are important to everyone - they are how we give and receive information and convey our ideas and opinions with those around us.

***Communication:*** *Play Video:* [*Soft Skills -- Communication*](https://youtu.be/X0voPlW2pSs) *(~2 minutes)*

It is important to develop a variety of skills for both communicating TO others and learning how to interpret the information received FROM others. Knowing our audience and understanding how they need to receive information is equally important as knowing ourselves. To an employer, good communication skills are essential. In fact, employers consistently rank good communication skills at the top of the list for potential employees.

***Communication Activity 1:*** The purpose of this activity is to encourage youth to discuss the different types of communication they might use in different situations and environments. It introduces the idea that language/communication varies by context – and that it’s important to understand what might be acceptable and expected in one setting may not be appropriate in another.

***Conclusion:*** Discuss the following ideas with participants, encouraging an honest dialogue: 1. When the group changes, does the message change? Why or why not? 2. What are some examples of communication (both verbal and non-verbal) that you should always try to practice when communicating with an employer? How would your friends react to you if you communicated with them in the same way you would to an employer?

***Communication Activity 2***: This quick activity is designed to get participants to start thinking about the importance of two-way communication.

After giving each participant one sheet of paper, offer the following directions, pausing after each instruction to give the group time to comply (complete the activity yourself using your own sheet of paper).

1. Pick up your sheet of paper and hold it in front of you. Close your eyes and listen carefully to my directions. The rules are: (1) no peeking and (2) no questions.
2. The first thing I want you to do is to fold your sheet of paper in half. (Pause)
3. Now, tear off the upper right-hand corner. (Pause)
4. Fold the paper in half again and tear off the upper left-hand corner of the sheet. (Pause)
5. Fold it in half again. (Pause)
6. Now tear off the lower right-hand corner of the sheet. (Pause)

After all tearing is complete, say: Now, open your eyes and unfold your paper.

If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look exactly the same! Hold your sheet up for everyone to see.

Ask participants to compare their sheets. Ask why no one’s paper matched yours exactly? You will probably get responses such as, “You didn’t let us ask any questions!” or “The way you gave us directions wasn’t clear!”

***Conclusion*:** Part of the communication process (and being a good communicator) is recognizing that people may need to receive information in different ways in order to be successful. If the goal of this activity was really to have everyone’s snowflakes look exactly the same, what changes could have been made to the directions?

Discuss the need for effective two-way communication at home, at work, and in the community with friends.

***EXTENSION:*** Ask the group to work together or in smaller groups to create a definition of “Good Communication” by thinking about what good communication looks like. Be sure the list includes the responsibilities of being a good communicator and a good listener.

**Soft Skill: Enthusiasm & Attitude**

**Materials Needed**: Paper, Pen, Dice for each group

***Introduction:*** Enthusiasm can mean the difference in not just getting a job but succeeding in a job and even advancing in your career. A positive and enthusiastic attitude is a critical component of workplace success.

When employers look at prospective candidates, beyond skills, experience, and training, they look for those who demonstrate enthusiasm – those they believe will complete assigned tasks in an upbeat and cooperative manner. All other things being equal, a candidate who can demonstrate a positive attitude and eagerness to tackle the job will have an advantage over one who displays an attitude viewed by the employer as negative or disinterested. In fact, many employers would rather provide job skills training to an enthusiastic but inexperienced worker than hire someone with perfect qualifications but a less-than-positive attitude. Managers sometimes worry that this type of person will not get along with supervisors and co-workers, treat customers disrespectfully, and not put much effort into his or her work. On the other hand, employees who are viewed as enthusiastic are known to provide good customer service, resolve interpersonal conflict effectively, and work productively with others.

***Enthusiasm & Attitude:*** *Play Video:* [*Soft Skills -- Enthusiasm and Attitude*](https://youtu.be/-vk-99seC_I) *(~3 minutes)*

There are many ways in which an individual might demonstrate enthusiasm in the workplace.

In customer service settings, an enthusiastic employee will approach customers proactively and offer assistance or seek out tasks and projects when there is down time. This positive attitude helps employees go above and beyond to get along with co-workers and managers – even difficult ones – and respond to constructive criticism with maturity and willingness to improve. Overall, an employee with enthusiasm comes across as someone who wants to be at work and who is willing to do what it takes to get the job done.

***Enthusiasm & Attitude Activity:***

Positive Mental Attitude is one’s ability to maintain the belief that he or she can transform or change a tough situation into something better. This activity will help participants take difficult situations and find ways to EMPOWER themselves to turn negative thinking into positive thinking.

Pose the following questions to participants. (This can be accomplished by group discussion or by smaller groups discussing together and then presenting to the larger group.)

* **What is a positive attitude?** If I have a positive attitude, what actions might I display? What does a positive attitude “look” like to others?
* **What is a negative attitude?** If I have a negative attitude, what actions might I display? What does a negative attitude “look” like to others?

Then say: Developing a positive attitude starts from learning to believe in one’s self. In order to believe in ourselves, we must first understand our personal strengths. In this activity, you will be considering and sharing your personal strengths. Break participants into groups of four, each participant will take turns rolling the dice two or three times and complete the following statement upon each roll.

**Conclusion:**

* Ask participants why the statement for Roll #6 was included in this activity?
  + Answers should be directed toward the fact that helping or “doing” for others often helps people feel good about themselves. And, when we feel good about ourselves, we often demonstrate a positive attitude that can be seen by others.
* Discuss with participants how internal feelings have the ability to impact those around us.
* How might a positive attitude help us on a job?

**Soft Skill: Teamwork**

**Materials Needed:** None

***Introduction:*** Teamwork is an essential part of workplace success. Like a basketball team working together to set up the perfect shot, every team member has a specific role to play in accomplishing tasks on the job. Although it may seem as if one player scored the basket, that basket was made possible by many people’s planning, coordination, and cooperation to get that player the ball. Employers look for people who not only know how to work well with others, but who understand that not every player on the team can or will be the one who gets the ball. When everyone in the workplace works together to accomplish goals, everyone achieves more.

***Teamwork:*** *Play Video:* [*Soft Skills -- Teamwork*](https://youtu.be/sMFh9QYFh2I) *(~ 1.5 minutes)*

Teamwork involves building relationships and working with other people using a number of important skills and habits. When employees work together to accomplish a goal, everyone benefits. Employers might expect to “see” this in action in different ways. For example, team members in the workplace plan ahead and work cooperatively to assign tasks, assess progress, and deliver on time.

**Teamwork Activity:**

It takes all types of team members to create a balanced, cohesive team. This activity will give participants the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the roles different people play on a team and the importance of each role.

Discuss the fact that teams are all made up of people who perform different roles. Think about a sports team (football, basketball, soccer, hockey, etc.).

* What might happen if one basketball player hogged the ball all of the time?
* What might happen if the quarterback tried to run the ball all of the time instead of passing?

So, it takes all different types of players to make an efficient and winning team, right? Now, switch gears. Tell participants that not only does it take all different types of players to make a team effective; it takes all kinds of shapes, too.

Say something to the effect of: “I want you all to look at these Five different shapes. The shapes are a square, a rectangle, a triangle, a circle, and a squiggle. What if I told you that knowing whether you, your co-workers and friends are squares, rectangles, triangles, circles, or squiggles could help you build better teams and better careers?” Ask participants to take a few moments to think about the shape they like best or find most appealing and write it down!

Here is what each shape might say about you:

There are some people who believe there are five basic personality types, and each type tends to prefer a different shape. Knowing whether you, your co-workers and friends are squares, rectangles, circles, triangles, or squiggles just might help you build better careers, teams, and friendships.

Offer some of the information below, if appropriate:

- The Square, Rectangle, and Triangle are all convergent. This means they are working TOWARDS something specific and finite, and they do it in a logical and systematic way. But they might be lacking in personal creativity.

- The Circle and Squiggle are divergent. This means they are creative, extroverted, and intuitive. They will reach out around them into new areas and to other people. But they aren’t particularly systematic or dependable.

***Conclusion:***

Discuss the following questions with the group:

* Do you think people have the characteristics of more than one shape?
* Why do you think it is important to have all different shapes working on the same team?

**Soft Skill: Networking**

**Materials Needed:** Paper, Pen

***Introduction:*** “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” This common expression is the basis for understanding the importance of networking as a strategy for career development and exploration. Everyone has a network, even if you don’t realize it, and when it comes to job searching, this network may be just as important as your skills and experience. Networking occurs every time you participate in a school or social event, volunteer in the community, visit with members of your religious group, talk with neighbors, strike up a conversation with someone at the store, or connect with friends online.

***Networking:*** *Play Video:* [*Social Skills -- Networking*](https://youtu.be/ZcOCJbvUY-w) *(~2 minutes)*

When networking for the purpose of career development, this means talking with friends, family members, and acquaintances about your goals, your interests, and your dreams. Most people actually learn about job openings through friends, relatives, or others who are part of their personal network, and because each person in your network has a network of his or her own, your potential contacts can grow exponentially. This is important because more often than not, hiring managers would rather talk to a potential candidate who has been recommended by someone they know or already employ.

***Networking Activity:***

This activity will get participants thinking about different relationships and how those relationships start to “weave a web” of networking. It will help them begin to realize how to use their current networks to broaden their future networks. After all, it’s all about whom you know…who knows someone…who knows someone…and so on.

Ask participants if they have ever heard of the concept “six degrees of separation” (a networking theory that explains that everyone is, on the average, connected to everyone else by six steps (i.e., friend of a friend).

Let participants know you will be spending a bit of time thinking about whom they know – and how to expand this list of whom they know to whom they want to know.

Discuss the concept of “degrees” of relationships and the differences between first, second, and third degree relationships.

Further explain that networking is all about weaving a web of contacts and strengthening relationships (so others can help you and you can help others).

***Conclusion:*** Conclude this activity by discussing ways to strengthen second degree contacts. For example, take some time to get to know the barista’s name at the coffee shop, send your counselor a birthday card, or congratulate your neighbor on the birth of a child. Discuss the fact that it is often the small things we do that help to make a connection with someone else and this is what networking is all about.

**Soft Skill: Problem Solving & Critical Thinking**

**Materials Needed:** None

***Introduction*:** Everyone experiences problems from time to time. Some of our problems are big and complicated, while others may be more easily solved. There is no shortage of challenges and issues that can arise on the job. Whether in an office or on a construction site, experiencing difficulties with the tasks at hand or with coworkers, the workplace presents ongoing challenges on a daily basis. Whether these problems are large or small, they need to be dealt with constructively and fairly. Having the necessary skills to identify solutions to problems is one of the skills that employers look for in employees.

***Problem Solving & Critical Thinking****:* [*Play Video: Soft Skills -- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving*](https://youtu.be/hPiI44XEKgs)

*(~2.25 minutes)*

The ability to develop a well thought out solution within a reasonable time frame, however, is a skill that employers value greatly. Employers want employees who can work through problems on their own or as an effective member of a team. Ideal employees can think critically and creatively, share thoughts and opinions, use good judgment, and make decisions. Another important thing to remember is that when you are tasked with solving a problem, you don’t always need to answer immediately.

***Problem Solving & Critical Thinking Activity*** Working together to solve problems is not always easy. The purpose of this activity is to have participants explore how effective teams might address problems that occur among its members.

There are times when getting a team of people to work together successfully on a job or at school can be a challenge. Occasionally one person might display a bad attitude (for one reason or another) and cause the team to be less than productive. This activity presents different situations where the action of one team member is interfering with the team’s success.

Divide a large group into smaller groups. Have participants act out or create a skit for each situation – providing both positive and negative alternatives for working through and solving each problem. Participants should take turns being the “difficult” team member. Participants can compare skits and responses and, ultimately, decide (as a larger group) on the best way(s) to handle each situation.

***Conclusion:*** Should each person on the team be “dealt” with in the same way? Are there ever any exceptions? Explain.

**Soft Skill: Professionalism**

**Materials Needed:** None

***Introduction:*** Throughout our working lives, most of us will have many different jobs, each requiring a different level or set of skills. No matter the industry – from customer service to an office job to construction and the trades – all of these jobs have one thing in common: in order to succeed and move ahead, you need to demonstrate professionalism.

***Professionalism:*** *Play Video:* [*Soft Skills -- Professionalism*](https://youtu.be/7dPWVjQSad4) *(~2 minutes)*

As today’s labor market becomes more and more competitive, jobseekers will need to continually find ways to stand out from the crowd. There are few things an employer values more than employees who carry out their duties in a professional manner. Professionalism isn’t one thing; it’s a combination of qualities. A professional employee arrives on time for work and manages time effectively. Professional workers take responsibility for their own behavior and work effectively with others. High quality work standards, honesty, and integrity are also part of the package. Professional employees look clean and neat and dress appropriately for the job. Communicating effectively and appropriately for the workplace is also an essential part of professionalism.

***Professionalism Activity:*** As an employee, your attitude at work contributes to your work environment and how you get along with your co-workers and supervisors. A positive attitude can improve morale and increase productivity for all. The purpose of this activity is to generate a discussion about workplace attitudes (of both supervisors and co-workers) and how these attitudes impact those around us.

***Directions***: Imagine it is your first day on a new job. Discuss what you would do to make a good impression on your co-workers and supervisors [make a list for all to see]. Why might it be important to make a good impression on your first day?

Divide the larger group into smaller groups. Each group will work together to offer advice on an issue related to Justin, a stock clerk at the grocery store. As the facilitator, read the story aloud, one section at a time. Pause after each section and ask each group to confer and share their collective answer/solution to the question at hand. Each group should be given the opportunity to offer their advice first, followed by any additional and new advice from any of the other groups. You may choose to continue the discussion around the room.

***Conclusion:*** Ask the group to describe Justin’s work attitude. What do you think would be the most difficult part of being Justin’s supervisor? How can a supervisor or boss affect your job performance? How can co-worker attitudes affect your job performance?

**Adaptations:** Complete each soft skill as a mini lesson or complete in two full sessions.

**Evaluation:** Students will be able to complete the ‘Soft Skills’ Learning Plan Activity.

**Closing**: Now that you have been able to practice and focus on six key soft skill areas: communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism complete the learning plan activity to share new skills you have learned and explain why you think some employers value soft skills over hard and technical skills, or consider them as important.