

WORKING

Assessing Skills, Habits, and Style

User's Guide
for Workplace Applications

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WORKING— USERS GUIDE FOR THE WORKPLACE

Working is a nationally-validated instrument which helps trainees and employees assess their competence in the following nine key areas:

Taking responsibility	Working in teams
Persisting	Showing a sense of quality
Wanting to continue learning	Adapting to change
Solving problems	Knowing how to learn
Thinking in terms of systems	

Since **Working** is quickly taken and easily self-scored, it is useful in a wide variety of business/industry training and information settings. Five possible uses are as follow:

In-plant readiness/improvement programs — intensive but usually short-term in-plant training programs to hone the preparatory skills of new employees or improve/broaden the skills of existing employees (*User's Guide* pp 2-7).

Apprenticeships — extended assignments of students to perform regular duties on a daily or weekly basis in a particular job, mainly as part of their program of education (pp 2-7).

Orientations — short, but often intensive, employer-led introductions of new employees to the processes, culture, regulations, organization, and expectations of a particular company (pp 2-7).

Employability skills development programs — one or two month intensive training programs which provide those without significant prior work experience with the basic skills, the habits and attitudes, and the general technical skills needed to prepare for productive employment in entry-level positions (*User's Guide* pp 8-9)

Pre-employment training programs — several week, periodic programs which provide those *with* significant prior work experience or relevant education with 'brush-up' workplace skills in areas ranging from technical math and reading through safety, SPC, business economics, and the like. Such programs are often prerequisites for employment or for obtaining job interviews with particular employers (pp 8-9).

Working is designed to be useful in all of these settings, and others relating to developing proficient employees. *Please note, however, that as with any self-assessment instrument Working is not designed for direct use in employee promotion and/or selection.* It is designed to provide information about the employee (to the employee, trainers, and employers) which can be used in many ways to better-prepare that employee for successful performance on the job.

The following pages suggest exercises which can be useful in these various settings, plus some suggestions as to useful applications and methods of improvement (pp 10-18).

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES ON A PARTICULAR WORK SITE

The activities on pages 3-8 are designed to be helpful (in different ways) with the three settings dealing with developing people who are or will be working on a particular work-site:

In-plant readiness/improvement programs
Orientations
Apprenticeships

The activities are based on the “guided discovery” method in which trainees or employees are asked to think about and respond to questions dealing with particular workplace competencies. The underlying assumptions are: (a) most people have useful insights into these things, but just “haven’t thought about it” until now; and (b) people learn and retain more of what they discover by themselves, as compared to being told by others.

Within this context, the five activities on the following pages deal with four important questions about the competencies measured by *Working*.

Which of these competencies will be especially important on my job? Making forced choices among these nine competencies will force trainees/employees to think carefully about the job and about what it takes to be successful in that job. They are starting to focus on these key behaviors.

Why are those competencies especially important on my job? Giving specific reasons for the importance of those competencies reinforces their importance, and shifts trainee/employee thinking towards visualizing themselves in that role.

What do people do, or not do, when they are strong in each competency? Most people do not naturally think in detail about particular behaviors like taking responsibility, solving problems, or persisting. But they can only *improve* that behavior if they know what it is. This activity helps them put into words what they think they already know about those skillful behaviors.

How did I rate myself on each behaviors, according to Working? This activity places the trainee/employee firmly back into the center of things: how do they fit with what they’ve defined?

How can I strengthen my behavior in those areas? This is the finale. Given what they’ve said about the job’s requirements and where they stand, what can they do — specifically — to improve their performance with those important competencies where there’s room for improvement? This can lead to an individual performance/development plan for each trainee/employee.

A suggested implementation process is to take the trainees/employees through these questions over a period of 2-3 sessions, to avoid cramming too much into one session. Ask them to complete a particular activity (alone or with a partner). Then share with the group. Then have the trainer add items, raise question, or discuss particularly relevant items before moving on.

ACTIVITY 1 — WHAT'S IMPORTANT ON MY JOB?

1. What is, or will be, your job here?
2. Describe the job in some detail: tasks, activities, relations with others, key elements, decisions made, and the like.
3. Below are listed the nine competencies measured by **Working**. Divide them into *three* groups according to how important they are for success on your job. Put a “1” in front of the three which are most important, a “2” in front of the three which are next most important, and a “3” in front of the three which are less important than the others.
 - _____ Taking responsibility
 - _____ Working in teams
 - _____ Persisting
 - _____ Having a sense of quality
 - _____ Wanting to keep learning
 - _____ Adapting to change
 - _____ Solving problems
 - _____ Knowing how to learn
 - _____ Seeing things in terms of systems

ACTIVITY 2 — WHY ARE THOSE COMPETENCIES IMPORTANT?

Below are listed the nine competencies you just rated. An important question is *why* that competency is important for you, your fellow employees, and the company. What's going to happen or not happen, for example, if an employee is good at taking responsibility? What's going to happen if that employee is careless about taking responsibility?

Think about it. For some or all of these competencies, list some of the reasons why that competency is important in your workplace.

- 1. Taking responsibility is important because:**
- 2. Working in teams is important because:**
- 3. Persisting is important because:**
- 4. Having a sense of quality is important because:**
- 5. Wanting to continue learning is important because:**
- 6. Adapting to change is important because:**
- 7. Solving problems is important because:**
- 8. Knowing how to learn is important because:**
- 9. Thinking in terms of systems is important because**

ACTIVITY 3 — HOW DO PEOPLE BEHAVE WHEN THEY'RE COMPETENT?

On your work site you will need to show that you are competent in most of the nine traits measured by *Working*, and particularly competent in a few of them. What will other people be looking for in your actions and behavior? If you need to be very good at solving problems, for example, what will you do and not do? How will people *know* you are competent in that area?

For each of the nine competencies, *list several specific behaviors* (things to do or not do) that will demonstrate your competence. There's one example under the first competency to start you off.

1. When I take responsibility, I:

Will be on time, all the time.

2. When I work well in teams, I:

3. When I persist at a task, I:

4. When I show a sense of quality, I:

5. When I want to continue learning, I:

6. When I adapt to changes, I:

7. When I solve problems, I:

8. When I know how to learn, I:

9. When I think in terms of systems, I:

ACTIVITY 4 — HOW DID I RATE MYSELF ON *WORKING*?

You rated yourself of all nine *Working* competencies. You then translated that score into a “percentile”. This showed how your rating compared with the scores of other people across the country. Below, for each competency do two things.

First, record your percentile for that competency (copy it from your *Working* score sheet).

Second, decide how you feel about that rating, now that you’ve thought some about that competency. Is your score low? High? About right? Write it down.

Taking responsibility

Working in teams

Persisting

Showing a sense of quality

Wanting to continue learning

Adapting to change

Solving problems

Knowing how to learn

Thinking in terms of systems

ACTIVITY 5 — HOW CAN I STRENGTHEN MY COMPETENCIES?

Like most of us, you're *good*, but you're not perfect. You've already explored how important each of those nine competencies is for your performance in the workplace. You've evaluated how competent you are in those areas. Well, what if you got even better? There's always room for improvement. Below, write in some things that you can *do* to improve on some of those competencies. Who can you watch and learn from? Which of *your* habits and styles can you modify? What can you learn? What can you avoid? Figure some things out, and write them down. A couple of examples are given, to start you off; add more.

1. I can get better at taking responsibility by:

Set out to exceed expectations in some performance area

2. I can get better at working in teams by:

Observe someone who is a good team player, and practice what they do.

3. I can get better at persisting by:

4. I can get better at showing a sense of quality by:

5. I can get better at wanting to continue learning by:

6. I can get better at adapting to change by:

7. I can get better at solving problems by:

8. I can get better at knowing how to learn by:

9. I can get better at thinking in terms of systems by:

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR PREPARING POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES FOR WORK

The preceding pages can readily be adapted for varied use, particularly in programs which can devote significant time and effort to development of broad workplace competencies such as those assessed by *Working*. However, the following page is designed as a quick and focused introduction to these competencies for use with time-tight programs serving people who are seeking employment, either generally or through such programs as the following:

Employability skills development programs
Pre-employment training programs

The following page is designed to deal with a single competency. Trainers might want to:

- 1) have the entire group focus on a particular competency of concern to them all;
- 2) assign individuals to work on a competency of particular interest to them;
- 3) have small groups work on a particular competency; or
- 4) have the entire group work on several, or all nine, competencies one at a time.

As with the preceding activities, this one employs a “guided discovery” method, in which people think about a question, write down what they discover, and then (if feasible) share with others. This method assumes that (a) most people have useful insights into their competencies, but just “haven’t thought about it” yet, and (b) people learn most from what they discover themselves (and, then, polish with the help of others).

This suggests a recommended implementation sequence. Have trainees answer questions themselves or with a partner. You *may* want to give some examples to get them started. Then share with others. Then have the trainer add items, raise questions, and/or lead a discussion.

LEARNING ABOUT A WORKPLACE COMPETENCE

Competence means that you do something very well. Workplace competence, in this activity, means that you do something very well on the job. You have taken the instrument called **Working**. It helps you see how you stand with nine general workplace competencies. This activity helps you focus on one of those competencies.

First, list the competency in answer to question 1. Then answer the other four questions *about* that competency. Put your own thoughts and ideas. There are no completely “right” answers.

- 1. What *Working* competency are you working on here?**
- 2. Why do you think that competency is important on the job? (what happens to the company if workers have that competency? Or don't have it?)**
- 3. How do people *act* when they are using this competency well?**
- 4. How could you get better with that competency? What could you do?**
- 5. How could you *prove* your competence to an interviewer? (remember, employers like to hire people with these competencies).**

**EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT BEHAVIOR
AND IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS FOR EACH *WORKING* COMPETENCY**

Following are examples which may clarify some elements of this User's Guide. For each of the nine competencies there are examples of:

Relevant Behaviors — what people might do and not do if they were particularly strong models of the competency.

Relevant Evidence — what people might do to demonstrate to others that they were particularly strong with that competency. These are designed to help potential employees demonstrate that they possess a particular competency when in a job interview.

Suggested Improvement Actions — what people might do if they set out to deliberately strengthen that competency.

Bear in mind that these are only examples. You and your trainees will undoubtedly come up with far stronger and more varied examples over time. These are just to get you started.

ACTS RESPONSIBLY

Relevant Behavior - People who act responsibly will tend to:

- o Show up on time and stay the entire time.
- o Not make excuses when they mess up, or *should* know something.
- o Acknowledge any errors they make and confusion they create.
- o Learn from their mistakes.
- o See things that need to be done, and do them without being asked or told.
- o Keep track of their commitments.
- o Keep and use a to-do list.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who are responsible might include:

- o Effectively managing a family, job, and school at the same time.
- o Having a high attendance record at school and/or work.
- o Being promoted to positions of responsibility (school, work, or socially).
- o Using a calendar to record appointments, tasks, and commitments.

Improvement Actions - People who wish to become more responsible could:

- o Clarify what others expect of them in work, school, or personal situations.
- o Thoughtfully and deliberately think through and balance priorities.
- o Know what the minimum expectations are — and regularly exceed them.
- o Look for things to do when finished with the task at hand.
- o Arrive a little early, and stay a little late.
- o Start using a to-do list and/or calendar.
- o Check with those who depend on them before changing schedules, tasks, etc.

WORKS WELL IN TEAMS

Relevant Behavior - People who work well in teams will tend to:

- o Listens to others suggestions.
- o Trust the group's decisions much of the time.
- o Learn from other people.
- o Don't believe they have all the answers.
- o Play different roles in teams at various times.
- o Support others when they try out new roles in the group.
- o Encourage others to speak up.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who work well in teams might include:

- o Describing different team roles — and explaining their value.
- o Describing and explaining their favorite roles in a team.
- o Giving examples of situations in which they have worked well with a team.
- o Listing several times when team action and decision-making is, and isn't, effective.
- o Explaining the strengths and weaknesses of team actions and decision-making.
- o Describing a situation in which a team chose them as its leader or representative.

Improvement Actions - People who wished to work better in teams might:

- o Practice suspending judgment and listening to what others have to say.
- o Observe who plays what roles in team or group decisions.
- o Pick a role that's not easy, and stick to it in a group problem-solving situation.
- o Set out to learn important things from others — in an area they know well.
- o Ask other's opinions — and weigh them seriously — before offering their own opinion.

SOLVES PROBLEMS

Relevant Behavior - People skilled at solving problems will tend to:

- o Spot problems and bring them to others' attention.
- o Have suggested solutions when they mention a problem.
- o Consider many alternatives before selecting a solution.
- o Look beneath the surface to try to identify the underlying cause of a problem.
- o Look for permanent solutions rather than treating symptoms.
- o Use one or more specific systems for solving problems.
- o Doublecheck their conclusions and results at every stage.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who solve problems well might include:

- o Have effectively balanced the demands of work, school, and family.
- o Can describe 1-2 good examples (from work, school, or home) of difficult problems they have solved.
- o Can describe their problem solving systems.
- o Can explain how to find permanent, rather than temporary, solutions to problems.
- o Can state 3-4 questions they usually ask when tackling a problem.
- o Can mention recognition, promotions, assignments, or awards received for being a good problem solver.

Improvement Actions - People seeking to be better problem solvers might:

- o Ask others how they solved problems.
- o Ask others how they spotted problems that needed solving.
- o Notice when a problem reoccurs after it has been 'solved.'
- o Notice when a solution to one problem creates other problems.
- o Describe the problem-solving system they use.
- o Ask others how to deal with problems that don't seem to have good solutions.

EXHIBITS A SENSE OF QUALITY

Relevant Behavior - People who have a strong sense of quality will tend to:

- o Do 'a little bit extra' to be sure they have done the job well.
- o Triple-check the instructions or requirements before tackling the job.
- o Proofread everything carefully.
- o Go back and correct 'minor' flaws rather than letting them go.
- o Ask 'what could go wrong with this solution or action' - then check on it.
- o Recall what's gone wrong before, and make sure it's okay this time.
- o Work extra time, if necessary, until the job is done perfectly.
- o Be dissatisfied with anything less than a perfect job.
- o Suggest ways to improve things to other people.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people with a strong sense of quality might include:

- o Describing how they make sure the job has been done with high quality.
- o Describing the steps they take to triple-check a result or product.
- o Citing the number of tasks/assignments (e.g. papers, reports) completed without error.
- o Giving examples of when they caught errors in a task — and *how* they found them.
- o Quoting comments from teachers, supervisors, and co-workers.
- o Giving examples of improvements they have suggested to others.

Improvement Actions - People wanting to improve their sense of quality might:

- o Be clear on the minimum expected, and then set out to exceed it greatly.
- o Focus completely on a given task until certain it's done perfectly.
- o Double- and triple-check selected tasks.
- o Develop - and use - a set of questions to be sure they've done things right.
- o Ask others how they notice errors in a product or result.
- o Identify all of the things that could go wrong, and check on them.
- o Figure out *why* they fell short of perfection and decide how to avoid that next time.

PROCESSES INFORMATION EFFECTIVELY

Relevant Behavior - People who process information (learn) effectively will tend to:

- o Listen carefully to instructions and information.
- o Be aware when they understand and don't understand something.
- o Relate new information to what they already know.
- o See how to apply information to practical tasks and situations.
- o Use methods other than memorization when learning something.
- o Be aware when they have lost concentration.
- o Plan ahead when trying to learn something.
- o Ask questions: of other people and of themselves.
- o Visualize the information and its possibilities.
- o Explore possible interpretations of new information before deciding on its meaning.
- o Extract all possible information from a situation.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who process information well might include:

- o Describing several methods they use when learning something.
- o Giving examples of situations when they learned something quickly and well.
- o Listing questions they ask themselves, to be sure they understand something.
- o Describing their preferred learning style — and how that helps them learn things well.
- o Explaining what they do when having trouble learning something.
- o Mentioning their GPA — and what learning skills contributed to those grades.

Improvement Actions - People seeking to process information more effectively could:

- o Ask others what they do when trying to learn something - then try those techniques.
- o Consciously think about, and write down, what they do when learning something.
- o Consciously try to visualize new information and its implications and uses.
- o Try to figure out how some new information fits with what they already know.
- o Deliberately break new information or ideas into parts.
- o Develop and use a set of questions to ask themselves to check their understanding.
- o Pay attention to when they are concentrating and are losing concentration.
- o Develop methods for recovering their concentration.

THINKS IN TERMS OF SYSTEMS

Relevant Behavior - Those who think in terms of broad systems will tend to:

- o Understand how their actions and responsibilities affect other people.
- o Understand how others' actions and responsibilities affect them.
- o Demonstrate curiosity about other people's jobs and responsibilities.
- o Demonstrate curiosity about other parts of a company or college.
- o Do things now as a way to reach other goals in the future.
- o Suggest ways to improve things, even when not asked to do so.
- o Use mistakes as an opportunity to improve things for the future.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who think in terms of systems might include:

- o Describing how several of their tasks or responsibilities affected other people.
- o Describing how others' tasks and responsibilities affected them.
- o Explaining how something they did or changed improved things for other people or other parts of a process or system.
- o Listing several questions they ask to help see 'the big picture.'
- o Demonstrate that they understand the functions and features of other parts of a system beyond their own area of responsibility.
- o Explaining how they expect that things they are doing now will lead to other desirable things in their future.
- o List and explain some suggestions they've made for improving things.

Improvement Actions - People who want to become stronger systems thinkers could:

- o Ask themselves how each of their tasks or responsibilities affects others.
- o Ask themselves how their performance is affected by specific things that others do or don't do.
- o Ask themselves what would happen, to whom, if they messed up.
- o Identify people or processes that affect them, and then go find out about those things.
- o Avoid finger-pointing when a problem occurs, but rather ask how things could change so that the problem did not occur again.
- o Find a specific problem that keeps coming up in their lives, and set out to change things so it won't occur again (or, at least, as often).

IS INTERESTED IN LEARNING

Relevant Behavior - People who are interested in learning will tend to:

- o Read a lot, and read a variety of publications (newspapers, books, magazines, etc.).
- o Be the first to volunteer to learn something new.
- o Seek to learn things not required of them.
- o Listen carefully and ask questions when others are talking about something new.
- o Do assignments fully, in class and in training rooms.
- o Are curious about people, things, information, and/or ideas.
- o Read anything available when they are waiting.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who are interested in learning might include:

- o The number/variety of magazine and newspapers they subscribe to.
- o The ability to list and discuss several books or other publications they have read recently.
- o Describing how their first instinct, when confronting some new decision, is to try to learn more about it.
- o Describing how they have tried to learn relevant things in a course or training session.
- o Displaying knowledge of a variety of current topics (e.g. computers, politics, community events, hobbies, etc.).
- o Demonstrating that they've gone out of their way to learn things about the company they are applying to.
- o Discussing areas where they are especially knowledgeable, how they gained that knowledge, and that they're interested in learning more.

Improvement Activities - People who want to become more interested in learning could:

- o Volunteer to learn things that go way beyond the minimum requirements of a course.
- o Practice asking "I want to learn more" questions about an unfamiliar topic.
- o Get and read one or more magazines regularly.
- o When waiting, practice picking up any available printed material and reading it.
- o Setting out to deliberately learn *a lot* about some new, useful area of knowledge.
- o If working, ask for the opportunity to learn other jobs.

ADAPTS TO CHANGE

Relevant Behavior - People who are good at adapting to change will tend to:

- o Be among the first to volunteer to try new procedures or tasks.
- o See and explain and positive advantages of a particular change.
- o Suggest significant changes which could or will affect them personally.
- o Respond with confidence and a positive attitude when required to change something.
- o Understand, but don't echo, the fears of other people who are asked to change.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who can adapt to change easily might include:

- o Citing specific changes that happened to them — and how they responded.
- o Giving examples of when they were among the first to try something new.
- o Explaining (and giving examples of) why adapting to change is an important skill for the 21st century.
- o Describing the benefits of changing things.
- o Giving examples of their preference for doing a variety of things, and seeking new assignments, rather than just doing 'the same old thing.'

Improvement Actions - People who want to adapt better to change could:

- o Identify 2-3 significant changes they could make in their life, and carry them out one step at a time.
- o Write down reasons for and benefits of a change which they hear about or which affects them.
- o Think of three changes which would affect them, but which might make things better for other people.
- o Suggest a change to their teacher, supervisor, etc., and volunteer to lead or help with it.
- o Develop an explanation of why many people fear change.
- o Develop a plan for dealing with their own fears when changes occur.

EXHIBITS PERSISTENCE

Relevant Behavior - People who are good at persisting will tend to:

- o Fight boredom and frustration and keep working on a task.
- o Keep returning to a task until it is done.
- o Lose track of time.
- o When at a dead end, step back and find another way to go.
- o Don't say "It can't be done" or "I've done enough" before the task is completed.
- o See a difficulty as a challenge.
- o Don't give up on something just because the people around them give up.

Relevant Evidence - Examples of people who persist might include:

- o Describing situations when they kept at something unexpectedly difficult until it was completed.
- o Talk about why it is important to them to stick with things until they're finished.
- o Quote relevant comments from teachers, employers, friends, and relatives.
- o Cite situations where they kept at some task when everyone else gave up.
- o Explain and give examples of times that they refused to accept "it can't be done" as a legitimate answer to some task.
- o Discuss a situation where they ran into a dead end, and the alternative routes they tried until they found one that worked.

Improvement Actions - People who want to improve their persistence could:

- o Select a specific, relatively-difficult task or problem, and not give up on it until they have solved it.
- o Develop and write down strategies for 'regrouping' and trying other routes when stumped.
- o List all the reasons they can think of to give up on a task — and then develop solid counter arguments to each of them.
- o Make — and live up to — a commitment to fully complete every single task and assignment in a given course.
- o Identify what they most often say to themselves when tempted to give up on something, and refuse to let themselves be swayed by that particular excuse.
- o Ask people to describe how they figure out ways around a difficulty or apparent dead end when trying to solve a problem.