

Guideposts for Success: Lesson Plans and Activities

Developed by the Institute for Educational Leadership

LESSON 27: DO YOU HAVE THE UNIVERSAL SKILLS EMPLOYERS SEEK?

AT-A-GLANCE

When employers search for candidates to fill open positions, they tend to look for two things: technical skills and universal skills. Technical skills are those that relate specifically to the profession, while the universal skills apply to all jobs. This lesson is designed to have young people learn to describe how their skills can be discussed in terms that most employers will recognize as universal.

Icebreaker

There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving... and that's your own self.

-Aldous Huxley

Icebreaker Discussion

Why does Huxley believe that your own self is the only “corner of the universe” you can be **certain** of improving?

Lesson/Activity

Ask students if they can name some of the universal skills that most employers look for. These skills are often referred to as “soft” or “employability” skills. The list should include, but does not need to be limited to:

- Good communication skills
- Leadership qualities
- Positive attitude
- Flexibility and adaptability
- High standard of performance
- Good work ethic
- Acceptance of responsibility
- Productivity
- Honesty and reliability
- Willingness to learn (and keep learning)
- Ability to analyze and evaluate
- Teamwork

In an interview situation, it’s easy for people to say they are a team player, for example, but to be able to give *an example* of being a team player is a little bit more difficult. Plus, employers may not simply ask if you have good leadership qualities, but may ask questions that give you the opportunity to illustrate your leadership skills.

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Below are some sample questions employers may ask to get at some of the universal/soft skills young people possess.

- Have you ever given a speech or a presentation?
- Have you received any awards?
- Do you participate in sports?
- Do you babysit?
- Do you volunteer in a library, hospital or community program?
- Which classes are your favorite?
- Which classes are hard? Which are your easy?
- What activities (hobbies) do you enjoy?
- Do you like to organize things?
- Do you like puzzles? Do you enjoy reading?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Have you ever done a group project?

Now ask students to identify activities they perform regularly that may relate to some of the universal skills employers are looking for.

Employers are looking for...	How would you answer?
Good communication skills	
Leadership qualities	
Positive attitude	
Flexibility and adaptability	
High standard of performance	
Good work ethic	
Acceptance of responsibility	
Productivity	
Honesty and reliability	
Willingness to learn (and keep learning)	
Ability to analyze and evaluate	

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Reflection

Do you think you possess most of the universal skills employers would desire? Why or why not? Of all of the universal skills discussed, which ones are your greatest strengths? Which once do you think you need to improve a bit? Why?

Extension

Have students create a list of activities and games that may help young children develop the soft skills necessary for success. Share these activities with a local elementary school. Use the 60 skills (from <http://in.rediff.com/getahead/2007/jan/08soft.htm>) below to frame the discussion.

- Math
- Safety
- Courtesy
- Honesty
- Grammar
- Reliability
- Flexibility
- Team skills
- Eye contact
- Cooperation
- Adaptability
- Follow rules
- Self-directed
- Good attitude
- Writing skills
- Driver's license
- Dependability
- Advanced math
- Self-supervising
- Good references
- Being drug free
- Good attendance
- Personal energy
- Work experience
- Ability to measure
- Personal integrity
- Good work history
- Positive work ethic
- Interpersonal skills
- Motivational skills
- Valuing education
- Personal chemistry
- Willingness to learn
- Common sense
- Critical thinking skills
- Knowledge of fractions
- Reporting to work on time
- Use of rulers and calculators
- Good personal appearance
- Wanting to do a good job
- Basic spelling and grammar
- Reading and comprehension
- Ability to follow regulations
- Willingness to be accountable
- Ability to fill out a job application
- Ability to make production quotas
- Basic manufacturing skills training
- Awareness of how business works
- Staying on the job until it is finished
- Ability to read and follow instructions
- Willingness to work second and third shifts
- Caring about seeing the company succeed
- Understanding what the world is all about
- Ability to listen and document what you have heard
- Commitment to continued training and learning
- Willingness to take instruction and responsibility

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- Ability to relate to coworkers in a close environment
- Not expecting to become a supervisor in the first six months
- Willingness to be a good worker and go beyond the traditional eight-hour day
- Communication skills with public, fellow employees, supervisors, and customers