

Employability Skills:

#5 Problem Solving and Critical Thinking

Standard: Demonstrate employability skills required by business and industry.

Modified from "Problem Solving and Critical Thinking." Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/problemsolving.pdf

Warm-Up:

- Think of a time when you did not agree with a teacher, parent, or friend. How did you handle the situation?
- When is a time you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem?
- Have you tried to accomplish something and failed? What did you modify to succeed?
- What do problem solving and critical thinking skills look like in the classroom? The workplace? At home?

Opening:

Scan the QR code to watch a video while responding to the following prompts:



1. At 00:45- Explain the problem in the video that Allie is having with her students.
2. At 00:54 -How did the girls use problem solving skills?
3. At 1:40 -What would be another way for small children to be able to find their things?
 - A) Color Code their name labels
 - B) Tie their items together until the end of the day then let them have access to them.
 - C) Not allow children to bring nice things to school
4. At 2:01-It is not only important to spot problems, but to look for solutions as well.

_____ True

_____ False

Problem Solving and Critical Thinking

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 co-workers, 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 and critical thinking refers to the ability to use knowledge, facts, and data to effectively solve problems. This doesn't mean you need to have an immediate answer, it means you have to be able to think on your feet, assess problems and find solutions. The ability to develop a well thought out solution within a reasonable time frame, however, is a skill that employers value greatly.

Employers say they need a workforce fully equipped with skills beyond the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic to grow their businesses. These skills include critical thinking and problem solving, according to a 2010 Critical Skills Survey by the American Management Association and others.

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. As a new employee, you may question why an organization follows certain steps to complete a task. It may seem to you that one of the steps could be eliminated saving time, effort, and money. But you may be hesitant to voice your opinion. Don't be; employers are usually appreciative when new employees are able to offer insight and fresh perspective into better and more efficient ways of doing things. It is important to remember, however, that as someone new to the organization, you may not always have the full picture, and thus there may be factors you are unaware of that dictate that things be done in a particular way. Another important thing to remember is that when you are tasked with solving a problem, you don't always need to answer immediately.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What are the attributes of an ideal employee?
2. Referencing the examples from the above text, what is one situation you would be asked to problem solve and think critical?
3. Why is it important to take into account others' perceptions when assessing actions or statements in the workplace?

Work Session:

Activity 1: Praise, Criticism, or Feedback

"In a work setting, we give and receive many different types of information. The purpose of this activity is to help participants determine the differences between criticism, praise, and feedback - not only how to offer it, but how to receive it as well" (99).

Match the word to the correct definition:

- | | | |
|--------------|-------|---|
| 1. Praise | _____ | A. information about a person's performance of a task |
| 2. Criticism | _____ | B. An expression of approval |
| 3. Feedback | _____ | C. An expression of disapproval based on perceived mistakes or faults |

Read the following statements aloud - one at a time. Be sure to use different voice tones. Label each statement as Praise, Criticism, or Feedback.

- | | |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. Mr. Jones told me how much he appreciated your thank you note after the job interview. He thought it was a great personal touch. |
| _____ | 2. Your desk is such a mess. Are you sure you are not trying to grow your own paper? |
| _____ | 3. I noticed that you've been coming in late the last couple of days. |
| _____ | 4. How many times do I have to tell you how to file these documents? |
| _____ | 5. You look great today. |
| _____ | 6. It would work better for me if I could explain my version of the story out loud before you ask questions. |
| _____ | 7. You've improved a lot this week. |
| _____ | 8. I found it difficult to evaluate this resume because it was messy. |
| _____ | 9. I like it much better when we got to choose the projects instead of being assigned to one. |

Rephrase: Choose 2 statements above and rephrase the way in which any of the above statements were made. Things to ponder as you restate the phrases. How might rephrasing get a different response or reaction? If you had to make a rule for how you would like to receive feedback and criticism, what would that rule be?

1.

2.

Reflection: People react and respond differently to praise, criticism, and feedback. Explain how *you* respond to each. A time when someone gave you....praise...criticism....feedback

Praise:	Criticism:	Feedback:

Work Session:

Activity 2: Workplace Ethics

“We all have our own set of values or standards of behavior that we operate by on a daily basis. However, we may not always feel we can apply these same principles or standards while at work. The purpose of this lesson is to help participants learn some of the steps necessary to make ethical decisions on the job.” (102).

Watch this video



Respond:

1. Define workplace ethics.
2. Create a list of work ethics an employer or company might be looking for:
 - *
 - *
 - *
 - *

Activity 3: Workplace Ethics: Case Studies

“Four-Step process for Making Ethical Decisions at Work: (103)

1. Define the problem (or ethical situation).
2. List the facts that appear to be most significant to the decision (and consider who is affected).
3. List two or three possible solutions (and how these solutions could impact each person).
4. Decide on a plan of action.”

For each of the following case studies, assume you are employed by a large computer company, with approximately 1,000 employees. The company is located in your town. Read each case study and follow the four steps for making ethical decisions. You will be discussing your decision-making process (and your ultimate decision) with the group.

Case 1: LaKeisha is an administrative assistant in the Human Resources Department. Her good friend Michael is applying for a job with the company and has agreed to be a reference for him. Michael asks for advice on preparing for the interview. LaKeisha has the actual interview questions asked of all applicants and considers making him a copy of the list so he can prepare.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:	What are the facts?	What are some possible solutions?	What are you going to do?

Work Session:

Activity 3: Workplace Ethics: Case Studies Continued

Case 2: Emily works in the Quality Control Department. Once a year, her supervisor gives away the company's used computers to the local elementary school. The company does not keep records of these computer donations. Emily really needs a computer. Her supervisor asks her to deliver 12 computers to the school.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:	What are the facts?	What are some possible solutions?	What are you going to do?

Case 3: Jennie was recently hired to work as a receptionist for the front lobby. As receptionist, she is responsible for making copies for the people in her office. Her son, Jason, comes in and needs some copies for a school project. He brought his own paper and needs 300 copies for his class. If he doesn't bring the copies with him, he will fail the project. The company copier does not require a security key, nor do they keep track of copies made by departments.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:	What are the facts?	What are some possible solutions?	What are you going to do?

Case 4: Marvin is an assistant in the Building Services Department. He has just received a new work computer and is excited to try it out. His supervisor has a strict policy about computer usage (for business purposes only), but Marvin wants to learn the email software. He figures one good way to do this is to send emails to his friends and relatives until he gets the hang of it. He has finished all of his work for the day and has 30 minutes left until his shift is over. His supervisor left early.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:	What are the facts?	What are some possible solutions?	What are you going to do?

Case Study Extension:

Create your own case study related to workplace ethics and decision-making skills. You may want to ask an adult you know for a "real life" example of an ethical dilemma they have faced in the workplace.

Work Session:

Activity 4: Problem Solving on a Team

“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. Activity 23 presents 10 different situations where the action of one team member is interfering with the team’s success.” (106)

Directions: Think of both positive and negative alternatives for working through and solving each problem. What would you say to or do about a team member in the following situations? Should each person on the team be “dealt” with in the same way? Are there ever any exceptions? Explain.

1. Is always late.

2. Whispers to others or starts side conversations during discussions.

3. Gets upset when his/her recommendations are not followed.

4. Hogs the conversation/discussion.

5. Leaves before the job/work is done.

6. Constantly tells jokes and gets people off track.

7. Refuses to work with another “certain” team member.

8. Won’t share in the leadership role.

9. Falls asleep.

10. Just sits there.

Work Session:

Activity 5: Perception vs. Reality

“JUST THE FACTS: Perception is one’s ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through our senses. It is a way of understanding or interpreting something. Sometimes the way we perceive the actions or statements of those around us may or may not reflect what is actually intended. This is generally due to our previous life experiences and/or what we believe. The purpose of this activity is to get participants to reflect on and consider different perceptions and how to be proactive in making decisions based on those perceptions.” (108)

Analyze:

Read the following short paragraphs:

1. Bob’s daughter is on the basketball team, but she doesn’t get to play much. His daughter works hard and never complains, but Bob believes this is yet another injustice in his life and his daughter is not getting a fair shake. Bob becomes annoyed and irritated. He angrily confronts the coach, embarrassing his daughter.
2. John’s daughter is on the basketball team, but she doesn’t get to play much. His daughter works hard and never complains. John believes that the coach wants to win and most likely plays the girls that will help him reach that goal. John feels proud of his daughter’s commitment to the team despite not getting to play very much. John offers to help his daughter improve her basketball skills

Respond:

1. Is there any difference in the events as they were described?
2. What is the critical factor in the different ways each person reacted?
3. Why might each person perceive the situation differently?
4. What advice would you offer to Bob or John?

Case Studies: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

1. Your boss is talking to another employee as you walk into work. You have reason to believe they are talking about you. This makes you feel uncomfortable and upset.
2. A close friend gets to go on a senior trip, all expenses paid. You are jealous that this friend does not have to pay a dime – his or her parents are paying for everything. You consider not going because you have to pay for part of your trip and do not think it is fair.
3. At work, you developed a new way to organize the filing system that makes it easier for the office staff to find documents. You think your supervisor is going to take all the credit.
4. You are a nurse. The patient you are working with is ungrateful and rude, is always finding fault in everything you do, and is making your life miserable.

Closing:

Self-Reflection Questions to Answer

1. QUESTION: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO USE GOOD JUDGEMENT AND LOGIC TO SOLVE A PROBLEM?

ANSWER:

2. QUESTION: HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ANOTHER PERSON EVEN WHEN THAT INDIVIDUAL MAY NOT HAVE PERSONALLY LIKED YOU (OR VICE VERSA).

ANSWER:

3. QUESTION: LIST PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THAT EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR.

ANSWER:

4. QUESTION: DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TOO MANY THINGS TO DO AND WERE REQUIRED TO PRIORITIZE YOUR TASKS.

ANSWER:

5. QUESTION: HOW CAN YOU USE PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS TO HELP YOU HANDLE SITUATIONS YOU DO NOT AGREE WITH?

ANSWER: