

A+ IN THE WORKPLACE: Developing Positive Behavior

Overview

During the past 30 years, a major shift occurred in employer/employee relationships. In many ways, employee needs and rights became nearly as significant in the workplace as the job itself; employee welfare as important as company profitability. Now the pendulum is swinging the other way.

Because changes in society and technology are affecting the workplace, new roles, new tools, and new organizational structures will revolutionize the workplace of the future. It is no longer enough to be able to "do the job" in a timely and efficient manner. Employees must demonstrate skill in networking, teamwork and effective communication. Not only must the employee be flexible and able to adapt to changes in the workplace, but recognize that *attitude* in the workplace has become a major issue.

Each of us controls our own attitudes. Positive or negative attitudes generate positive or negative ideas and desires, whether at home or in the workplace. A positive attitude can generate a positive self-image which may be the single greatest factor in determining happiness, success and fulfillment. Employees with good attitudes will find themselves able to adjust more easily in the workplace, maintain employment when jobs are being cut, and advance in the workplace.

"Management does not owe us a living, nor does it owe us a stress-free environment. The best insurance policy for tomorrow is to make the most productive use of today." (A SURVIVAL GUIDE TO THE STRESS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, Price Pritchett and Ron Pound, 1995.)



236 East Front Street
Bloomington, IL 61701
Phone: (800) 727-5507 or (309) 827-5455
Fax: (309) 829-8621
e-mail: meridian@meridianeducation.com

Objectives

The goal of *A+ IN THE WORKPLACE: Developing Positive Behavior* is to inform viewers of how positive behavior at work is connected to achieving success on the job, regardless of the job/occupation.

After viewing this video, viewers will

- learn various aspects of *attitude* and how they influence a person positively or negatively in the workplace.
- see that using effective communication is a positive in the workplace.
- understand how being responsible on the job contributes to overall job success.

How To Use This Program

The concepts for developing positive behavior presented in this program apply to all levels of employees-from managers to entry-level. The authors recommend that this program be used in all applicable situations.

This program is a useful training tool to use with new employees or as a review for current employees. It is also an excellent resource for addressing specific attitude problems in your organization.

A+ IN THE WORKPLACE: Developing Positive Behavior may be used to start a discussion during a staff meeting or to introduce a training session on the topic. We have included several case studies to help facilitate group interaction. The discussion questions can be used to encourage viewers to apply principles to their own situations.

After viewers have discussed the topic, encourage the group to determine a course of action. Often personalizing the concepts and implementing an action plan helps to solidify the main ideas and make a difference in the workplace.

Discussion Questions

There are no right or wrong answers when discussing aspects of this video. Specific information is included in the POINT section after each question which may give the leader additional responses and viewpoints. Viewers may offer additional responses which are not listed in this guide, but which are valid.

1. Attitude is a mental position. How important is a positive attitude in the workplace?

POINT: Unpleasant relationships with co-workers and supervisors can jeopardize employment. A negative attitude may also reinforce an employee's poor self-image. An employee with a negative attitude may also affect the morale of co-workers which may eventually lead to reduced productivity.

2. In the video, Flo acknowledges that she controls her attitude. What are some ways that an individual can maintain a positive attitude on the job?

POINT: (These are a few examples)

Assume responsibility for your own situation.

Create your own definition of job satisfaction.

Develop and follow a plan of action.

Strive for success outside of work.

Learn when to keep quiet.

Don't say anything to anyone that you wouldn't say to the whole office.

Be aware of how your behavior is interpreted by others.

Maintain a high commitment to your job.

Concentrate on positive job factors.

Refuse to dwell on negative aspects of a situation.

3. Do you agree with the following statement? *Career success depends upon an employee's attitude.* Why or why not?

POINT: This question may generate comments on both sides of the issue. On the positive side, the employee who controls his or her attitude will advance in the workplace because they are seen as efficient, capable people. These employees respond positively rather than negatively in any situation and help to keep the office in harmony rather than in conflict. On the other hand, some viewers may point out that skill and expertise in the workplace may outweigh a consistently positive attitude and that everyone is entitled to a bad day. You may want to extend this line of thinking and point out the difference between a bad day and a negative attitude.

4. Many of Flo's problems occurred because she was unaware of her behavior. How might things have been different if she had asked for regular feedback from her supervisor?

POINT: Feedback allows individuals to become aware of positive or negative behavior and to modify it. Habits are key parts of behavior and changing our habits requires concentrated effort.

5. Relate some communication problems Flo experienced and how she might correct them.

POINT: Flo is unable or unwilling to clarify problems to her boss. She does not listen closely and fails to follow directions precisely. She doesn't pay attention to the reactions of others and in many instances, does not read the non-verbal signals she is being given. The scenes in the breakroom are good examples of Flo's inability to pick up on the body language of others.

Case Studies

We've provided the following cases studies to allow the viewers an opportunity to react in real life situations. Please examine the examples from various perspectives, including as a supervisor and as a co-worker. If negative things happen in the workplace, how will you let them affect you?

1. Marilyn is an excellent employee. She is accurate, fast and extremely efficient. However, she gossips about everyone in the office. Her negative comments about others are affecting office morale. You have just discovered that Marilyn spread some rumors about you that are untrue but which could affect your chances for promotion.
2. You and Lyle share customer service responsibilities and must be available to take phone calls during the day. You have noticed that Lyle is away from his desk more and more and that you are constantly on the phone picking up his calls. You've confronted Lyle on several occasions, and each time he has apologized and for a time, the situation improves, but after a while you realize that your phone calls are increasing again.
3. Sandy is on your team and your project is due in 6 weeks. Personal problems have caused Sandy to miss several deadlines and you are concerned that the project may be in jeopardy. Although generally a very responsible individual, Sandy seems unable or unwilling to complete her work on time, and what is finished often has to be re-done.
4. Andy has been working in your department for three months after graduating with high honors from a prestigious college. He seems to have a superior attitude toward the other employees and is constantly making derogatory remarks about the quality of their work. Another problem is his refusal to follow directions as given. Andy is always finding a *better* way to do things, but in the process he creates chaos in the department.
5. You and your supervisor do not get along. You have heard from others that your boss fears you will be promoted over him. He is constantly criticizing your work and making you feel incompetent. You like your job and there is a strong chance for a promotion within the next 6 months, however, you have noticed that your attitude is becoming negative.

Supplementary Information

In February 1995, the results of a national Employer Survey administered by the Bureau of the Census were released. The study revealed that employers rate the applicant's attitude, the applicant's communications skills and previous work experience as the top three reasons to hire an individual. However, the schools are not preparing workers in these areas.

Since employee attitude is so important on the job, another study completed by Ronald Burke, professor of administrative studies at York University in Toronto is of interest.

Dr. Burke says that "...how people relate to others and how they cope under stress in the workplace often reflect how they acted with their family while growing up." (Chatelaine, Nov. '94, v67, p30)

Many of us respond to coworkers and supervisors in the workplace as we would our own family members. Positive responses happen when family relationships are good. However, negative reactions can occur if there are family conflicts. For example, if Sally resents an older sibling and goes to great lengths to keep from being manipulated, she may have conflict with a boss or coworker who reminds her of this family member.

When we are threatened, we may find ourselves reverting to defensive strategies learned as children. If the only way to get attention in the family was to argue louder and longer than everyone else, an employee may use this same technique with coworkers. However, if the child's role was peacemaker of the family, this individual may seek peace no matter what the personal or professional cost.

Birth order may also affect your relationships at work. First born or only children tend to be leaders and take responsibility seriously. Middle children may be negotiators and work well with others. The youngest children may be coddled or favored and expect the same type of response at work. Or they may believe they have to constantly prove themselves because no one takes them seriously.

Awareness of these tendencies is an excellent first step toward resolving conflict in the workplace. Do you notice a pattern of behavior, particularly if it is negative? Can you objectively look at coworkers and determine if you have identified them with family members? Are you constantly seeking approval or in confrontations with others? Try to determine if your behavior at work coincides with any behavior patterns

as you were growing up.

As we learned in the video, understanding the reasons for behavior may be illuminating, but the responsibility for change remains with the individual. Each of us controls our attitudes and only *we* can make a positive change.

Suggested Resources

Empowerment: The Employee Development Series, *Working Effectively with Others*, International Training Consultants, Richmond, VA. (video)

Chapman, Elwood N., **Life Is An Attitude: Staying Positive During Tough Times**, Crisp Publications, Menlo Park, CA 1992.

Pritchett, Price, & Pound, Ron, **A Survival Guide To The Stress Of Organizational Change**, Pritchett & Associates, Inc., Dallas, TX , 1995.

Simons, George F. & Weissman, G. Deborah, **Men And Women: Partners At Work**, Crisp Publications, Inc., Menlo Park, CA 1990.

Petrina, Bernard, **Workforce Renewal**, Crisp Publications, Menlo Park, CA 1994. (Video)

Quality In The Office, Rath & Strong Management Consultants, American Management Association, Watertown, MA, 1992. (Video)

Continuous Self-Improvement: How To Find Balance In What You Do, Workforce Skills, Majec Meiss, 1993.

Change Can Boost Morale And Profit, (How Business Consultant And Diversity Expert Hattie Hill-Storks Works With Companies With Personnel Problems) By Dawn M. Baskerville, II V24, Black Enterprise, March '94. Workplace Communications: How To Communicate Effectively At Work, Workforce Skills, Majec Meiss, 1993.

Office Politics: Getting Along With Your Coworkers, (Excerpt From 'The Smith College Guide') By Elizabeth Tener, II V211, Cosmopolitan, Dec. '91.

Professional Jealousy And Backbiting: Can You Protect Yourself? (Cover Story) By Linn Thome, II V242, Industry Week, July 19, 1993.

Joy In Work, Joy In Learning, (The Philosophy Of Joy In Work), By Isabel O. Lopez, II V19, Colorado Business Magazine, March '92.

Suggested Resources

Is Your Workplace Family Dysfunctional? (Problems In The Workplace) II V67, Chatelaine, Nov. '94.

The Power Of Flexibility, By D. Keith Denton, V37, Business Horizons, July-August '94.

Purpose In Work: A Realizable Ideal, By Lillian Little, V50, The Humanist, March-April '90.

Office Politics: Not Just Monkey Business (America & Co.) (Column) By Laurence Shames, V136, Business Month, July '90.

Is Your Attitude Killing Your Career? By Susan Kleinman, II V216, Cosmopolitan, May '94.

Bored At Work? Take Charge Of Your Lackluster Career! (Excerpts From Secrets Of Executive Success By Mark Golin, Mark Bricklin And David Diamond), II V 211, Cosmopolitan, Oct. '91.

How Well Do You Play Office Politics? (Quiz) By Rebecca Randolph, II V212, Cosmopolitan, June '92.

5 Workplace Trends You Can't Afford To Ignore, By Marilyn Moats Kennedy, V90, Glamour, Jan. '92.

The Number One Cause Of Office Tension - And How To Fix It, By Marilyn Moats Kennedy, V88, Glamour, Dec. '90.

Is Your Office Family Sabotaging Your Success? (Establishing Sibling Relationships With Coworkers) By William E. Hapworth, Mada Hapworth And Joan Rattner Heilman, II V181, Redbook, Sept. '93.

Report Sounds Clarion Call For Employer-Educator Partnership, Workforce Training News, V3, No.2, March 1995.

If You Really Want To Get Ahead, Communication Briefings, JWA, Inc., Pitman, NJ 1989. (Video)