

# **Instructor's Guide**

for

## ***Soft Skills in the Workplace DVD***

### **Overview**

Being a good worker means having the skills to do the job. When most of us think of skills, we think of job-specific skills such as a mechanic's ability to repair engines or a pilot's ability to fly a plane. Yet many of the most important skills needed in today's workplace are used in nearly every job. They are soft skills—those skills that allow us to adapt or get along in most situations at work. They are the skills that dictate how we interact with supervisors, coworkers, customers, and clients, and they include our personality traits, personal qualities, and interpersonal skills.

Most importantly, soft skills are the skills most sought after by employers. Because most job-specific skills can be easily taught, employers would prefer to hire individuals with the required soft skills, such as adaptability, dependability, and responsibility. Moreover, since they are required for nearly every job, these soft skills are easily transferable from one occupation to the next.

This video discusses the importance of soft skills in the workplace and shows employees and job seekers how they can use their soft skills—or improve them—to be more productive and successful at work. The video uses four scenarios depicting workers who need to use key soft skills to do their jobs effectively.

The video provides opportunities and questions for group discussion after each of the four scenarios. Feel free to follow the cues, pausing for activities and discussion as your own schedule dictates.

### **Presentation Suggestions**

Begin by asking students about their own experiences at work. Have they had difficulties with customers or coworkers who were disrespectful, unreliable, or dishonest? Have they had difficulty working on a team or communicating with others? Have they themselves struggled with being on time, making decisions, following instructions, or being friendly?

Odds are students will have experiences with people who lack some of the basic soft skills required in the workplace, and every student can probably identify one or two soft skills that they could improve on themselves.

Point out that like all other skills, soft skills can be learned and improved. Also remind students that they are responsible for *their own* actions, attitudes, and behaviors, and that the point of this video and discussion is not to recognize faults in others, but to think about ways to enhance their own soft skills.

When you feel students have begun thinking about these issues, give them the **Anticipation Quiz** to complete prior to watching the video. If you wish, allow the students to state their answers and discuss them.

Show the video. Encourage students to take notes or to make changes to the answers they put down for the Anticipation Quiz while watching the video.

At the conclusion of the video, ask students to discuss any changes they made to their answers on the Anticipation Quiz as a result of information they learned. Follow up this discussion with the **Activities**.

Use the **Discussion Questions** to request oral or written responses from students or assign the questions as homework essays.

Give the **Quick Quiz** at the conclusion of class and correct the quizzes as a group. Assign the **Homework Option**, if desired.

### **Anticipation Quiz**

**Directions:** Answer these questions as completely as possible. You may revise your answers as you watch the video.

1. Name three of the most important skills that all employers look for in their employees?
2. What are some of the differences between soft skills and job-specific skills?
3. Who uses soft skills at work?
4. True or false: Knowing how to dress appropriately is a soft skill?

### **Answer Key**

1. Dependability, reliability, adaptability (answers may vary)
2. Soft skills are necessary in almost every job and are easily transferable. Job-specific skills are targeted to a particular occupation.
3. Everyone
4. True

## **Activities**

### **Activity #1**

**Title:** Assessing Your Skills

**Format:** Individual/Group

**Time:** 20-30 minutes

**Materials:** Worksheet, pen

**Procedure:**

1. Use the worksheet on the last page of this study guide to get students thinking about their soft skills. Have them circle if each skill is a personal strength or if it needs improvement. For each skill that needs improvement, have students brainstorm one or two strategies for improving that skill.
2. Have students work in groups to discuss their strengths and weaknesses and share positive strategies for improving their soft skills.
3. Come together as a whole class and go down the list of soft skills, compiling a “playbook” of strategies for improving each of them.

### **Activity #2**

**Title:** Story swap

**Format:** Pairs

**Time:** 20-25 minutes

**Materials:** Paper, pen

**Procedure:**

1. Have each student pick one soft skill from the list below and recall a story about a coworker or supervisor who didn't have or didn't use that skill in a specific situation.

Communicating clearly	Listening	Servicing customers
Being on time	Following instructions	Teamwork
Getting along with others	Responsibility	Dependability
Appreciating diversity	Honesty	Enthusiasm
Enthusiasm	Leadership	Friendliness
Solving problems	Taking initiative	Making decisions
Creativity	Negotiating	Managing yourself
Self-Esteem	Adaptability	Learning
Work Ethic	Good grooming	Good manners

2. Give students time to write the story (10 minutes or so). Then have students trade their stories with each other.
3. Have students take the new stories they were given and rewrite them, this time changing the story so that the coworker or supervisor had the required soft skills to handle the situation.
4. When students have finished, come together as a whole class and have volunteers read their stories to the class. Discuss what changed from one version to the next.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Employers stress the need for responsibility, adaptability, and dependability. Why are these three in particular so important?
2. Which are more valuable: job-specific skills or soft skills? Why? Are there some occupations where job-specific skills are more important? Which soft skill is the most important in your particular line of work?
3. Soft skills come in handy when dealing with difficult customers or clients. What are the most important soft skills for workers who deal directly with the public? What are some effective strategies for calming irate customers and making sure they are satisfied?
4. Because employers are looking for them, it is important for job seekers to showcase their soft skills on resumes and in interviews. What are some strategies for persuading potential employers that you have the required soft skills for a job?
5. Many soft skills allow us to deal effectively with others, to appreciate their strengths and respect their differences. How have globalization and the increasing diversity in the workforce changed the need for soft skills? What soft skills are more important now than they were ten years ago?

## **Quick Quiz**

**Note:** You may read these questions out loud, allowing time for students to respond, or copy and hand this out as a written exercise.

**Directions:** Indicate whether each statement is true or false, according to the video.

1. Like talents, soft skills are innate and cannot be learned or improved.
2. Soft skills easily transfer from one job to the next.
3. Employers would rather have workers who are dependable, reliable, and adaptable than workers who had the necessary job-related skills.
4. It is okay to make fun of people at work sometimes, as long as they don't find out.
5. Both supervisors and the employees need to use soft skills to work as an effective team.
6. Patience and professionalism are the keys to dealing with difficult customers.
7. Your actions and behaviors at work affect only you and nobody else.
8. You are expected to like all of your coworkers and agree with them all of the time.
9. Having good manners is important in the business world.
10. Possessing strong soft skills can help you in any career you choose.

**Answer Key**

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. False | 6. True  |
| 2. True  | 7. False |
| 3. True  | 8. False |
| 4. False | 9. True  |
| 5. True  | 10. True |

**Homework Option**

Have students keep a “Soft Skills Journal” in between this and the next class. Have them make note of situations where they use the soft skills discussed in class, both effectively and ineffectively. Tell them to come prepared to share some of their experiences with the rest of the class.

**Additional Materials Available on Job Retention and Job Success**

JIST Publishing offers a wide array of job retention and job success material at every level, including the best-selling *Job Savvy* workbook and the *Job Survival and Success Scale* assessment. For more information, please call 1-800-648-JIST or visit [www.jist.com](http://www.jist.com).

## Soft Skills Self-Assessment

Soft Skill	Your Skill Level	Strategies for Improvement
Communicating clearly	Strength Needs Improvement	
Solving problems	Strength Needs Improvement	
Servicing customers	Strength Needs Improvement	
Being on time	Strength Needs Improvement	
Following instructions	Strength Needs Improvement	
Getting along with others	Strength Needs Improvement	
Appreciating diversity	Strength Needs Improvement	
Honesty	Strength Needs Improvement	
Responsibility	Strength Needs Improvement	
Taking initiative	Strength Needs Improvement	
Listening	Strength Needs Improvement	
Good manners	Strength Needs Improvement	
Good grooming	Strength Needs Improvement	
Adaptability	Strength Needs Improvement	
Work Ethic	Strength Needs Improvement	
Dependability	Strength Needs Improvement	