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Workforce Series #1

What are Your Job Skills and Interests?

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Your Job Skills

We all have our own strengths and weaknesses. There are activities that we can do better and easier than other people. Everyone has some skills and talents to offer the world.

Before you apply for a job, you need to know what your skills are, so you can make smart decisions that put you in a job you like and can learn to do well. Employers want to know about your specific abilities and skills, so you must learn to both identify and communicate them. You should be able to explain to employers what you do well and give examples.

Keep in mind that the skills required for finding a job are not the same as the skills necessary for doing the job. Learning new job skills requires a major investment of time, money, and effort.

What Matters Most About Your Work?

We do not all have the same values and preferences when it comes to work. When you consider what kind of work you should do, ask yourself what matters most. Make a list of job aspects and prioritize items: What is critical to you? What is important, but not necessary? What doesn't really matter? Think about aspects such as:

- A realistic salary or earning tips and commission
- Benefits, including health insurance
- Child care at the workplace or other arrangements
- Commute / distance from work
- Regular or flexible hours at work (days, nights, weekends and holidays)
- Opportunities for promotion
- Additional training
- Scholarships for education
- Working with people or alone
- Belonging to a team
- Helping or taking care of others
- Being creative and using talents
- Doing exactly the same thing every day
- Doing work that is important
- Talking with and serving the public
- Working indoors or outdoors
- Having clear rules and duties
- Amount of physical demands

What do you want in a job, what don't you want, and what can you compromise or be flexible about as you job hunt? Write down the three most important things you want from a job. Next, write down three things that you do not want in your new job.

Your Personality at Work

Your personal characteristics are skills, too. You are stronger in some areas than in others. Identify your strengths and weaknesses. Knowing your strengths will help you decide what you want to do and convince an employer that you are the right person for that type of work. Knowing your weaknesses will enable you to manage them or work on changing them. Remember that most skills, including "people" skills, are learnable.

Thinking about yourself in relation to the following characteristics and preferences can assist you in learning more about the type of work you would like to do. Are you someone who:

- Is easygoing and relaxed
- Loves working with people or prefers to work alone
- Enjoys the unexpected or prefers routine
- Likes to have everything orderly and organized
- Can keep track of details
- Is a good problemsolver
- Is reliable and responsible
- Takes personal pride in the job
- Can calm people
- Likes to work steadily at the same thing each day
- Is full of energy and gets a lot done in a short time
- Is competitive and wants to be the best
- Starts something and doesn't quit until it is done
- Is good at teamwork
- Is a self-starter

Make sure to include some of your strengths on your resume and talk about them during an interview. Write down your three best characteristics. Also think about the two biggest drawbacks you bring to a job and what you might do to change them.

Skills and Interests

Knowing how to do something is not always the same as enjoying it. But if you like your work, then you are

likely to perform well and may have the opportunity to advance.

When you are entering the workforce, your first concern is to establish yourself in a job where you can develop know-how, establish a record of work and responsibility, assume financial responsibility, and lay the groundwork for your long-term career plans. You are most likely to succeed if you make your goals part of a long-range plan. Choose work that meets as many of your needs as possible. It is a good idea to take a job that will give you a start to a better job in the future.

Online Exercises, Tests, and Inventories

There are many books available that will help you determine what kind of work is right for you. Check the library or any bookstore. Many assessment instruments are also available on the World Wide Web. There are paper-and-pencil exercises, computerized self-scoring tests, and counselor-assisted (via telephone) inventories. Many of these are psychological tests and inventories based upon the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Strong Interest Inventory, or the Self-Directed Search. These three most popular assessment devices are used in career counseling and are not available in complete form on the Internet. However, there are two major assessment websites that may be helpful [<http://www.careerhub.org>] and [<http://www.careerlab.com>]. Other online self-assessment resources are [<http://www.assessment.com>] or [<http://www.acareertest.com>]. There is nothing magical about these online tools. In the end, you are well advised to contact a career professional who can administer the tests and interpret the results for you.

Work Skills You Already Have

You already have a number of real work skills. Make a “skills inventory” or a list of skills you learned at home or at school, college, institute, or military.

Many people make a good living using skills learned at home, such as:

- Cooking
- Cleaning
- Laundering and ironing
- Carpentry, plumbing
- Fixing appliances
- Using farm tools
- Repairing cars
- Taking care of children
- Leading children in group activities
- Sewing
- Doing arts and crafts
- Growing flowers and vegetables
- Mowing lawns and doing general yard work
- Exterior and interior painting
- Hairdressing
- Taking care of animals
- Keeping track of money
- Taking care of elderly or people with disabilities

Write down the two strongest skills you learned at home. Next, identify skills you learned or studied in school, college, institute, or the military such as:

- Math
- Science
- English
- Art
- Business and bookkeeping
- Computer and software use
- Typing or word processing
- Woodworking and carpentry
- Metal work
- Electrical work
- Construction
- Small engine and appliance repair
- Auto repair
- Foreign languages
- Nursing skills
- Drafting or mechanical drawing
- Radio or video production
- Cooking and catering skills
- Sewing and tailoring

Are there other skills you can identify? Write down the two strongest skills you learned (or started learning) at school.

Skills That Make You Unique

Take a look at yourself and identify skills that make you marketable and desirable to employers or that would aid you in starting your own business. You probably know some skills that make you different from other people and especially qualified for certain jobs. If you are willing to move, you have an advantage over other people. If you can move to an area where the types of jobs you want are plentiful, you greatly improve your chances of finding employment. Skills you gained through volunteering show that you know how to do something and that you are a person who can get along and work with others. These are highly desirable traits for an employer. Write down at least two skills that make you unique.

Back to School or Additional Training

If you have never had a job or if it has been a long time since you worked, you may need to get some new training and/or education. If you don't have a high school diploma, you will be limited to jobs with lower pay, harder conditions, and not much hope for improvement in the future. However, union construction work may be an exception, as long as you receive a good wage, the economy can support new work, and your health is good.

If you want to get a high school diploma, you either need to go back to high school and finish your courses or get a G.E.D. (General Educational Development) certificate, where you study on your own, pass a test, and receive your diploma. Your local high school can

tell you how to prepare for the test and where and when to take it.

Your training will be both more enjoyable and more effective if it involves something that naturally interests you. As an adult learner, you will learn best if you already have an interest in the subject. There are many ways to receive training: enroll in a college or university for a degree program or take courses at a community college or technical institute for work such as computer programming, cooking, secretarial positions, travel, and accounting. Many educational programs offer courses over the Internet.

Consider a training program for a specific job such as truck driving or nursing assistance. There are correspondence courses available that use mail-order books and videos to do jobs such as insurance sales and electronic technicians. You could do formal on-the-job training in such areas as computer work and banking services. There are apprenticeships, providing on-the-job experience along with classroom training.

Be Able to Speak and Write English

Fluency in the English language is an excellent skill to possess. If you have difficulty speaking or writing English, you need to improve. If others have trouble understanding you, you need to improve. It is not enough to understand the language and know the grammar; you must be able to pronounce the words clearly and easily enough for others to understand you the first time.

Courses in English as a Second Language (ESL) are available for little or no cost at YMCA, community organizations, churches, community colleges, and high school evening classes. Private education companies charge more but produce very good results; find them in the Yellow Pages under "Language Schools."

Summarizing Your Skills

You have identified your skills, interests, and abilities. Now, summarize to see where you are most likely to find satisfying work. You need to consider if you are physically suited for the job. Are you a high-energy person or do you prefer to take things easy? All employers are looking for someone who can work hard and at a brisk pace. There are certain jobs where energy, strength, and endurance are especially important.

Such jobs are, for example, landscaping, construction, nursing assistant, cleaning, cooking, serving food, loading and delivery, roadwork, trash collection and recycling, and building maintenance. For such jobs, you need good energy, but you also need strength and good health.

Other jobs have a slower physical pace. Those include, for example, dietary assistant, hairdressing, retail sales, dental hygienist, auto or appliance repair, and taxi or bus driving. Other jobs that are less physically demanding are, for example, receptionist, computer technician, medical assistant, pet groomer, cashier, travel agent, or sales person.

Do you have a particular skill that is in high demand in some parts of the country or are you limited to unskilled labor? Some physical skills in demand are home health aides, nursing assistants, cleaners or janitors, paving or roofing workers, prison guards, and food servers. Other physical skills that are less in demand are typists, office machine worker, untrained child care, household servants, untrained assembly, and garment workers.

Jobs That Match Your Skills and Interests

Now you know the skills and personality characteristics you have that will help you succeed in a job; you also know the skills and traits you would like to develop further. You know what you need from a job, and how your personality will affect your working style.

The next step is to look at the jobs that will match your skills and interests. Write down three job titles that might be a good match for your talents and your potential and begin to investigate them. Libraries, bookstores, and employment centers have many books and pamphlets that give you information on jobs. You are ready to get the right job and succeed in it.

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