

HOW TO **KEEP A JOB**

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EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS



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So, you've landed that job. Now what? With the Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting that workers will have 11 to 15 jobs after the age of 18, employees must do more than ever to maintain their position within a company.

Keeping your job and getting ahead in today's tough job market takes hard work, the right attitude, and many other qualities that aren't often listed in a basic job description. And not knowing what the real expectations of your job are can be frustrating.

This handbook is designed to provide you with insight into what employers are looking for in a good employee. It will also help you understand not only what it takes to keep your job, but also how to position yourself for growth and promotion within the company.

How to Keep a Job focuses on the major attributes employers have identified in their most promising and promotable employees. While we'd like for you to read the entire handbook, we have provided a brief summary of each section below.

Master the Tasks – It is important to master the core tasks required for your job and find ways to continuously improve. The best employees continue to learn new things every day.

Soft Skills – Eight of the most common soft skills required in the workplace today are:

- Attitude and Customer Service - It's all about how you treat others.
- Commitment and Dependability - Exhibit a willingness to do the best job you can. Loyalty to your organization is a trait that employers value and encourage.
- Flexibility and Multitasking - With constant innovations in technology, our society is changing faster than ever, and good employees adapt.
- Communication - Verbal and written methods of expressing your thoughts and effective listening are important skills.
- Appearance - Because it is so easy to evaluate a person by what they wear and how they wear it, your appearance goes beyond the first impression.
- Initiative - You can set yourself apart by taking responsibilities and actions without being told.
- Teamwork and Leadership - Being able to work well with others and demonstrating the ability to lead a group make you a valuable asset.
- Accountability - The actions you take on a consistent basis show you are responsible for yourself, your job, and your future.

Looking to the Future – Goals give you something to work toward. A clear vision of where you want to be in life can easily determine how to get there. By consistently creating your own goals and achieving them, you show your boss that you are committed for the long run.

We hope this handbook helps you achieve your employment goals with your current employer. However, if you find yourself needing a job change, Express has relationships with many companies in your community. Respecting people and impacting business, Express Employment Professionals is always available to assist you.

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MASTER THE TASKS

You were probably hired because of the skills you gained through previous experiences or education. You may even be the only person in your organization with a particular talent. However, no matter your new position or your future plans, to keep any job you must master the required tasks.

Begin by clarifying what is required of you. If you don't already have a written job description, ask your boss for a copy of one and discuss anything you don't understand. Next, honestly assess your skill level for each of your assigned tasks. Rate yourself or ask your boss and co-workers to rate you on a scale from one to 10 for each of the duties listed in your job description. This exercise will validate which skills you have already mastered and demonstrates to your boss that you're looking to improve your work habits.

Finally, take the opportunity to create a plan for your own improvement. If you are a level five on a task that takes up 50% of your workday, and a four on a task that takes only 10% of your day, focus on the five. Once your skills improve, you'll have more time to improve the other aspects. Select one skill or task to focus on improving each month until all tasks are at least an eight. Review the plan with your boss and ask how you can better develop those skills.

Continuous Improvement

Once you have mastered the tasks your job requires, don't stop there. Continuous improvement is critical because there is always room for improvement. It's important not only in keeping your current position, but also in advancing to the next level. To remain at the top of your game, be sure to stay up to date on new information about your field and strive

to become your department's expert. Start by learning from industry organizations, technology manufacturers, and the internet.

For instance, industry organizations like the American Welding Society (www.aws.org) or the Canadian Professional Sales Association (www.cpsa.com) provide valuable information to members and the general public. Although it can be more helpful to join your local industry association, national sites often offer information to the public about new tools and technology, rules and regulations, and other pertinent information for your trade. Also, many industry associations publish trade journals to help you stay current on industry trends and advances.

If your job focuses on one type of equipment like Microsoft computer products (www.microsoft.com) or Snap-on tools (www.snapon.com), it's useful to check those websites frequently for updates. For example, Microsoft offers software tutorials and Snap-on offers current Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for certain products. By being familiar with what manufacturers have on their websites, you'll be able to get answers quickly and offer solutions to problems like training a new employee on PowerPoint or where to find an MSDS for safety compliance.

In addition to the above organizations, you can find even more information about your job through the internet. If you don't have an internet connection at home, most public libraries now offer free access. One great free tool to consider is subscribing to a news feed in your specific industry. SmartBrief.com offers free weekday news feeds in nearly 30 industries. You can also follow an established blogger in your industry or join an online discussion group for idea generation among your peers. LinkedIn hosts a variety of groups established by geography, profession, and affiliation.

Each day is an opportunity to improve your skills, whether by shaving off a few seconds of a repetitive task or learning a new type of software. No matter what you brought into an organization, you should always strive to be better today than you were yesterday. You can achieve this by mastering your required skills and finding ways to continuously improve.

SOFT SKILLS

You may possess all the necessary tangible skills to do your job, but it is the soft skills that often become the deciding factor in who gets the job, who keeps the job, and who gets promoted. Soft skills are intangible characteristics like the way you conduct yourself, your manners, and how you treat others.

Soft skills are also part of your transferable skills, the attributes that follow you in every position you hold.

As you read through this section of the handbook, think about the verbal cues and body language that you use on a daily basis. Do your actions reflect the positive aspects described within these skills? If so, you're on the right track for success. If not, it's time to make a plan of action to change your behavior to ensure you keep your job and advance to new levels.

We will identify and explain eight types of soft skills: attitude and customer service, commitment and dependability, flexibility and multitasking, communication, appearance, initiative, teamwork and leadership, and accountability.

*In *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills*, among 358 randomly selected Johnson & Johnson managers, the best performing ones possessed significantly higher levels of self-awareness, self-management capability, social skills, and organizational savvy.*

ATTITUDE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

No soft skill has more impact on your future than your attitude. Often, a good attitude is more valuable to employers than actual performance. Attitude is shown through your behavior. An employee who remains calm while handling a broken machine and comes up with a solution is far more

respected than the employee who uses profanity and throws things when the machine failure causes setbacks.

To evaluate your attitude at work, examine your level of enthusiasm about your tasks, whether you tend to make more positive or negative comments, and how you handle problem situations like office politics and gossip. Other factors that reflect attitude are body language, willingness to be flexible when the need arises, reactions to criticism, and delivery

of information. All of these play a role in how people perceive your attitude.

7 out of 10 customers will do business with you again if you resolve the complaint in their favor.

– Customer Service Manager Magazine

A positive attitude is closely tied to customer service. It is important to realize that your co-workers, your bosses, and others you interact with

are also your customers and should be treated accordingly. You should have a pleasant demeanor, be easy to do business with, and always follow through on your promises – that’s the foundation of great customer service and a great employee.

COMMITMENT AND DEPENDABILITY

Many employers are worried that commitment and dependability are diminishing in the workplace as the Baby Boomer generation leaves the workforce. You can rise above the rest by showing commitment and dependability every day.

Commitment to your job doesn’t imply that you have to work there forever. What it does mean is that you will give your best effort to meet and exceed all expectations during the time you are there. When you are truly committed to your job, you work for what is best for the company, even though you may not see the immediate benefit from your efforts. If a co-worker is behind on a project and you’re ahead of schedule, rather than slowing your pace, help your co-worker catch up. This type of commitment and service is what elevates an employee from average to outstanding.

When you accept a job, you are promising the company, your supervisor, and your co-workers that they can expect you to take responsibility for your assigned job tasks, as well as arrive on time and consistently perform at your highest level. And, when emergencies arise and you can't be at work, they can assume that you will call and inform your supervisor immediately. Although these tasks are easy to do, when neglected, employers notice and it can be grounds for dismissal.

FLEXIBILITY AND MULTITASKING

Flexibility and multitasking are some of the least understood soft skills in today's workplace.

Change is a fact of every job and each day's tasks, and just because a job has been one way for two years doesn't mean it will always be that way. Being able to adapt as job duties grow or change is almost always a promotable quality. Not only does flexibility display your willingness to accept new duties, but it also showcases your ability to adapt to a new situation.

Multitasking doesn't just mean that you are adept at holding a conversation with one friend, while text messaging another, while ordering coffee. Multitasking in a business environment sometimes will be interpreted as typing while talking on the phone. But it mostly indicates that you can manage several projects at one time, progressing through each of them simultaneously to meet deadlines.

If you feel you have too much work and not enough time, you may need to brush up on your time management skills. Start by making a list of all the items you need to accomplish each day, and then prioritize them. Include additional time for unexpected phone calls and meetings to get a realistic view of what you can complete in one day's time. If you find a particular task is more difficult than you had expected, put it aside and move on to the next item on the list. But be sure to return to it before the end of the day. Sometimes, stepping away from a problem will give you a fresh perspective the next time you look at it.

If you have trouble determining what your priorities should be, ask your supervisor to help you decide. During this conversation, ask your supervisor for tips on time management to see how you can improve your skills.

COMMUNICATION

Of all the soft skills, communication may be the most difficult to master. The obvious types of communication include writing emails, talking on the telephone, and having face-to-face conversations. But in reality, all good communication begins with listening and asking questions.

When taking on new projects, asking questions is a great way to discover how your role plays a part in reaching a certain goal. Asking questions early in the process can clarify expectations to help your work run smoothly.

To ensure you understand a message, try repeating the information back, allowing the other person to correct the message before any action is taken. If you misunderstood or the instructions were vague, you'll be able to clarify the task immediately. This will help you save time, avoid making mistakes, and learn how to communicate more effectively.

Unfortunately, most of us focus on how we send messages rather than how they are received. Instead of asking someone "Do you have any questions?" or "Do you understand?" try "What step in this project do you expect to take first?" or "Where do you anticipate challenges in this task?"

Effective communication is everyone's responsibility. Your supervisor should provide you with information you need to safely and competently complete your assigned tasks, and it is your role to clarify those instructions. Also, it is your job to inform your supervisor of anything that may affect how you work. If your employer doesn't know how you feel or what your goals are, they'll never have the opportunity to help you.

APPEARANCE

Your appearance is a very personal issue, and everyone deserves to express themselves within their company's dress code. However, when it comes to keeping a job or getting promoted, it is important to think about the impressions you are making through what you wear and how you wear it.

Since no two businesses are the same, what to wear will vary. Most employee handbooks will outline what you should wear, but if you're still not certain, pay attention to how your boss and successful co-workers dress. A popular phrase among aspiring employees is, "Don't dress for the job you have; dress for the job you want."

In addition to the types of clothes you wear, the way you wear them makes a lasting impact. Pants that have holes in them are closely associated to an ambivalent attitude – it looks like you don't care.

A wrinkled shirt or a pair of baggy jeans, although clean, can imply that you are messy and inattentive to details. Because not everyone can afford a revolving wardrobe, use accent pieces to change up your style, take good care of your wardrobe staples, and shop consignment stores for good deals.

Good grooming habits should be a daily part of maintaining your appearance. When you arrive to work each morning, you should be clean with dry, combed hair. If you wear perfume, cologne, or body spray, use it sparingly. A person wearing too much perfume can be as offensive to the nose as someone who has not bathed. Finally, if you have a habit such as smoking or eating foods with strong smells, be aware of your breath and how it affects those around you.

Equally important to personal appearance is the appearance of your work area. In addition to the implication of a disorganized personality, a cluttered area can actually inhibit your performance.

93% of executives across the country admit a person's work attire influences his or her chances of earning a promotion.

– Southwest Florida Business Today



INITIATIVE

Your boss depends on you to notice things in your daily work that may need improvement or clarification. Showing initiative ranges from asking questions about your tasks to creating and offering solutions to potential challenges.

Build a relationship with your boss so that you feel confident asking questions about your responsibilities and daily tasks. Often, your co-workers have the same questions but lack the confidence to speak up. You can stand out from the crowd by simply getting answers to questions everyone else is thinking, and it shows you care about your role.



Towers Watson, a global professional services company, reports highly engaged employees are **26%** more productive, and their companies earned **13%** greater total returns to shareholders over the past five years.

You should always be prepared to offer at least one solution for every question you have for your boss. By doing so, you display that you can creatively solve problems and are interested in the future well-being of the company. This is an easy way to show your commitment to the organization and impress your boss at the same time. When bringing your manager up to speed on your projects, be sure to ask what his or her current project list contains and if you can help with any of those tasks.

TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP

Greater success can be achieved working together than when working alone. Knowing this, employers now rely on teams to complete many of the tasks in today's workplace. However, being a good team player isn't always easy for one simple reason: successful teams are made up of people with different backgrounds, experiences, strengths, and weaknesses.

But you can learn how to work well with others. Some of the best ways to improve teamwork include: acknowledging and respecting others' strengths, tolerating differences, and striving to protect the team.

The concept of teamwork in the workplace has evolved over the years. Successful teams include those who question the process if they see a better way, those who make sure everyone's voice is heard, and those who encourage others to take the wheel when necessary.

Because roles change during the course of a project, you may receive a leadership position, even if for only a small portion of the job. That's why it is important to always stay on top of your leadership skills. You can access several books on the subject in public libraries, subscribe to a podcast feed on leadership, or get teamwork tips by visiting our blog, *Movin' On Up*, at blog.expresspros.com.

A great way to learn firsthand is to find a mentor. Spending time with an individual who demonstrates integrity and has progressed in their career can offer great value. Someday, you will be called to lead, and if you hone these skills before you need them, you will be able to rise to the challenge.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability simply means taking commitment and dependability one step further. It means that you become responsible for your actions, no matter what the consequences may be. If you generally start a project or task with great regard for its outcome or quality, you will likely be considered an employee with accountability.


When you tell someone you will do something for them, it's important to stay on task and complete the project within the agreed upon timeline. If you can't complete the task, communicate your challenges with that person. People are more likely to help if you come to them as soon as the problem occurs rather than if you wait until after the damage is done. By asking for help, you're showing that you want to do the project in the best way possible.

It's okay to make a mistake, but hold yourself accountable by admitting what happened, accepting responsibility, and fixing the mistake. Accountability can make you a true asset to your company, opening doors to other opportunities.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

After New Year's or during annual employee reviews, people create lists of things they'd like to accomplish, but rarely do they sit down and map out exactly what they need to do to

achieve them. This is similar to the way most people approach their careers. Generally, you have an idea of what you'd like to do but no plan for how to get it done. The first step in correcting this behavior, both at work and at home, is to create a list of goals.



The University of Kentucky recently conducted a study which concluded that if people have clear ideas about what they hope to accomplish, their chances of accomplishment are enhanced.

Goals are the road map to your professional and personal destinations. They should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely (SMART). To help you better understand the importance of writing SMART goals, let's look at an example of a person who wants to create a personal network using LinkedIn and walk through the process of writing that goal.

S – Specific: When writing your goals, follow the rules of reporting. Answer the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how. So the desire to create a network becomes the specific statement, “I want to build a personal LinkedIn network within a month to develop my personal brand.”

M – Measurable: Most goals are completed in stages. Be sure to take those stages into account when setting your goals. For our example, the measurable part will be to have 50 contacts, four references, and be a contributing member of one group. A test to determine whether your goal is measurable is to ask yourself, “How will I know when the goal is completed?”

A – Attainable: This aspect of goal writing requires you to take a look at whether you are willing to do what is necessary to accomplish your goal. Do you have the time to consistently log in and manage your profile, contacts, and discussions? If not, how will you attain the goal? A goal becomes attainable when it is something you can realistically accomplish.

R – Realistic: Each goal should support all of your other goals in life and at work. When your overall goal is to advance in your profession as a qualified expert in your field, having a peer network is necessary. Be sure to think about your long-term plans when setting your goals. If they do not complement one another, you should re-evaluate either your goals or your plans.

T – Timely: As we’ve discussed from the beginning, it is important to attach a deadline to every goal you make. Phrases like “someday” or “later” are not specific enough and give you no date to which you can hold yourself accountable. Keep goal dates flexible so that if you have miscalculated the amount of time you need, you can adjust your goals accordingly, but set a time for completion of your goal.

Writing your goals may seem daunting, but it doesn’t have to be. Think about where you want to be in a month, a year, or even a decade, and then work backward. Consider what goals you need to set now to get there, and then use the SMART method to create them.

CONCLUSION

The length of time you keep your job and how far you advance depend primarily on how you manage your career. The job you are doing today can help you get the job you'll be doing tomorrow. But in the end, your job is what you make of it.

It is important to remember that different jobs will demand different skills, and these will vary from business to business. It is your job to find out which skills will help you succeed and get ahead.

While it is true that employers are looking for employees who possess many or all of the skills mentioned in this handbook, employers demand much more than can be covered in a few pages.

For more tips and tricks on advancing your career, check out the Movin' On Up blog at Blog.ExpressPros.com. If you'd ever like assistance in finding the right job, or if you know someone else who needs help, contact Express Employment Professionals today at ExpressPros.com.



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