

LIVING SKILLS

Practical Guidance

LOOKING FOR WORK

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK



Hazelden
Publishing

Hazelden Publishing
Center City, Minnesota 55012
hazelden.org/bookstore

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Interior design and typesetting: Trina Christensen



AN OVERVIEW OF LOOKING FOR WORK

Meaningful work is part of living a healthy life. Work allows us to support ourselves and those we are responsible for, such as our children. It allows us to make a contribution, learn new things, and grow as a person. This workbook will teach you how to find and keep a job and develop a meaningful career.

THIS WORKBOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR SESSIONS

SESSION 1 discusses the importance of work and explores participants' strengths and passions and how those relate to the kind of job they may want.

SESSION 2 focuses on ways to learn about job opportunities, interview skills, and writing cover letters and resumes.

SESSION 3 focuses on some practical advice that participants can follow to keep their jobs and practice good work habits.

SESSION 4 explores how to develop a career, to recognize one's own areas of expertise, and to get the most out of that expertise in the workplace.



SESSION 1.

Identifying the Job You Want

For many people work is more than a necessary evil. It's a good reason to get up in the morning. A job adds meaning to their lives. It makes them feel as if they're part of things or doing something interesting.

Paying for basic needs—such as food, clothing, and shelter—is one reason we work. Another reason we work is to use our talents and energies to contribute to the world. Still another reason is to build relationships with other people. Work offers us many ways to grow. We can find dignity and value in any kind of work, paid or volunteer.

Beginning Your Job Search

Perhaps you're going back to work after a period of unemployment or incarceration. Perhaps you're looking for your first job or a different job.

A job search begins with thinking about what you want to do (your passion), what you can do well (your strengths), and what possible jobs pay well enough to meet your needs. Look at the circles below. You can see that the best combination is when all three come together.



Each of us has strengths or things we are good at. What are you good at? Don't worry if it doesn't seem work related. It could be teaching someone to make a quilt or cook a meal, writing a letter to a friend who is grieving, or taking apart a machine and putting it back together again. Maybe you take pride in your driving skills. Or maybe you're good at juggling several projects at once.

- Write down some of your strengths or the things you are good at.

Did you write down anything that you hadn't really thought of as a strength before?

Our strengths often match our interests or passions. In fact, one of the reasons we may find something interesting is because we are good at it. Go back and look at the strengths you wrote down. Do you use any of these strengths just for the fun of it—simply because you enjoy it? Circle any of these strengths. These are your passions.

- There may be other things you really enjoy doing or learning that didn't match the strengths you listed. List additional things you are interested in here.

■ Write down any aspects of work—whether paid or unpaid—you have done in the past that you have enjoyed. Maybe it was being around a group of people you liked. Maybe it was working with your hands or being outside.

You have identified some of your strengths and passions. Write the strengths and passions that are similar in the area of the diagram on the next page where the Strengths and Passion circles overlap. Now think about jobs that pay well enough to meet your needs and that also use the strengths and passions you identified. Write those in the center of the diagram, where all three circles overlap. These are some jobs that might be good for you.



Usually there are obstacles to get over in any job search. As you think about getting a job, is anything standing in your way? Lack of transportation? Lack of day care? Lack of a computer? A criminal history? No high school diploma? What barriers do you need to overcome before you can take the next step?

- Write down the barriers you think could keep you from getting the job you want.

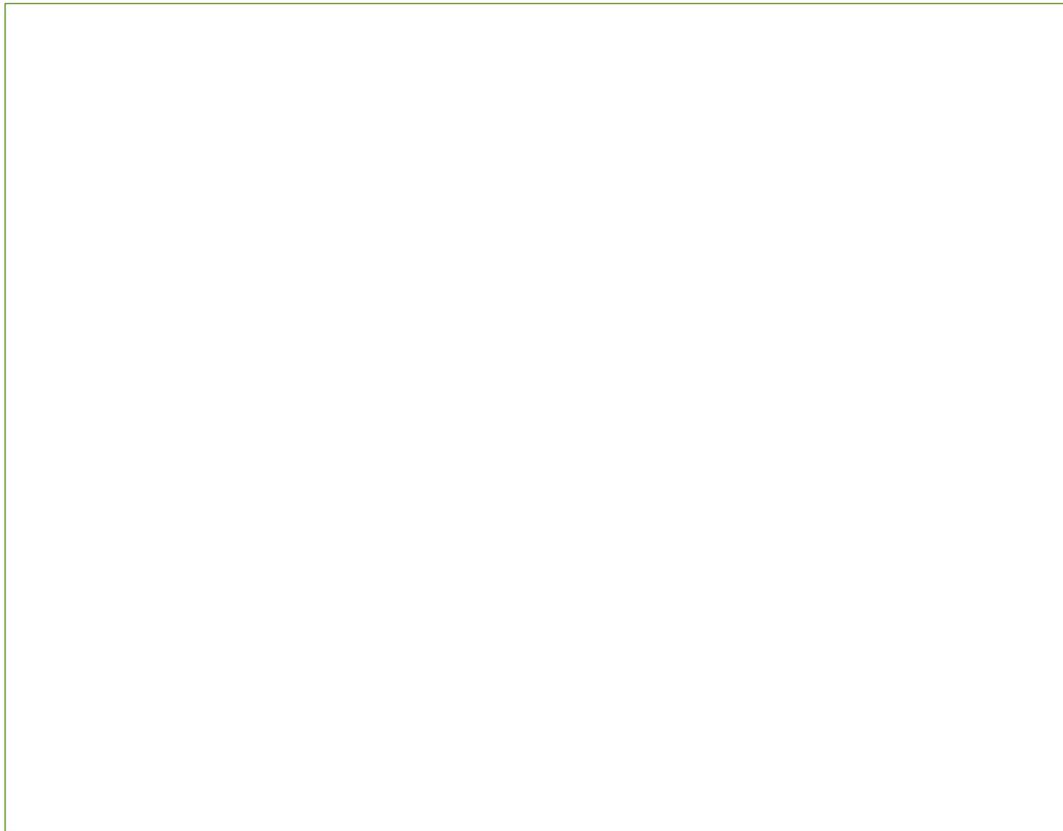
Once you have identified your barriers, you can figure out ways to overcome them. Some barriers you can clear on your own; others you will need help with. Don't be too hard on yourself. Explore all your options. Ask for help if you need it.

- Write down how you will overcome each of your barriers. (Use another sheet of paper if needed.) Also ask a friend for advice if needed.

EXAMPLE: *I don't have a car. But I can look for jobs where I can take a bus or other public transportation, or I could find out about carpools if there's no public transportation.*

- If you live in or near a city, job placement, social service agencies, or supported employment programs often have counselors who can help you clear barriers to work. Look in the yellow pages, look online, or ask people about these services that provide job counseling. Write the names and telephone numbers for these services here.

- Imagine yourself working in a job you love and are good at. Draw a picture below of yourself doing that job.



SUMMARY

- Work is important because it helps people pay for basic needs, allows them to use their talents to contribute to the world, and builds relationships with other people.
- A job search begins with identifying strengths and passions, then identifying jobs that require those strengths and passions.
- It is important to identify barriers to getting a job and find solutions to overcome those barriers.

CHALLENGE

Spend some time thinking about a strength you have—something that you are good at or that comes easy to you. Brainstorm jobs that could use that strength.



SESSION 2. Getting a Job

Carmen hadn't held a job for three years. She'd been homeless, living with friends when she could, or sleeping in shelters when no friends were around. Sometimes she slept on the streets. She'd been in recovery for four months. She knew if she was going to stay off the streets, she needed to find a job.

She remembered what she dreamt of doing when she was in tenth grade. She wanted to be a drummer in a band. She knew that wasn't something she could just step into easily. She loved music and had musical talent. She'd played the drums a bit as a freshman in high school, but to be in a band she'd need to get a lot better at it.

She did a lot of brainstorming, talked with friends, and talked with a job counselor. She figured out her strengths, her passions, and how much she needed to earn. She decided one job option might be a sales clerk job in a musical instrument store.

She looked at the want ads in several newspapers. She looked online at job websites and at job boards in her community.



Reading want ads, going to job websites, and looking on job boards are all good ways to look for job openings. There are many other ways too, such as:

- Talking to friends and acquaintances who work in similar jobs
- Volunteering in a field you would like to work in
- Calling possible places of work to see if they have openings
- Visiting employment offices or supported employment programs
- Interviewing people who have the kind of jobs you want, to learn about their experiences and ideas for getting a similar job

■ Can you think of some other ways you might find out about job openings? List them here.

■ Think about people you know who might have useful information about job openings. List them here.

■ As a volunteer, we can gain valuable work experience and contacts in our field of interest. Many of us donate our time to learn new skills or to help others. Where might you volunteer? List ideas here.

Once you've found a job opening, you need to actually apply for the job. This might mean filling out a job application. Most job applications are done online now, so it's helpful to gather all your work experience information before you try to fill out an application form online. Some jobs require writing a cover letter and resume.

Carmen found an ad for a sales clerk in a musical instrument store that she had always loved. When she called, they told her to send a cover letter and resume. She went back to the ad and studied it before she wrote her cover letter. She looked for what are called key words in the ad. These words tell the traits or experience an employer wants to find in a person he or she hires.



■ Read this ad, then circle the key words:

Looking for a person with some musical knowledge and sales experience to sell instruments in our store. Hiring as soon as possible. Some evening and weekend hours required. Must be motivated, responsible, friendly, and have experience with a cash register.

Did you circle *musical knowledge, sales experience, motivated, responsible, friendly, and experience with a cash register*?

Carmen identified the key words. She made sure to use those words in her cover letter when she talked about why she would be a good employee. She was also careful to use those key words in her resume.



■ Think about a job you would like to hold. What are the key words you might find in an ad for that job? These are the words you want to include in a cover letter and resume. Write those words here.

Some jobs require that you provide a resume. A resume tells people who you are and what your work experience is. It gives your contact information (name, address, phone number, and email address). It tells about your education. It may list the jobs you have held or the skills you have to offer. It's also important to use those key words that an employer will look for in your resume. There are several different ways to write resumes. It's valuable to get some help with this.

■ Are there some job assistance programs or supported employment programs where you live that could help you write a resume? List them and their phone numbers here.

■ You can also search online for “cover letter and resume help” to find examples and advice online. Search online and list some websites you want to check out here.

If an employer reads your application or resume and is interested, the next step in your job hunt will be an interview. Here are some tips for doing well at your interview:

- **Research the company.** Prepare for the interview by learning as much as you can about the job and the company. For example, find out what they do, where they are located, what products they sell, etc.
- **Practice.** A great way to prepare for a job interview is to practice with someone else. Think about questions you may be asked in the interview, and practice answering them. You can find sample interview questions online by searching for “sample interview questions.”
- **Dress to make a good impression.** Employers will notice whether you are neat, clean, and dressed appropriately.
- **Show up five or ten minutes early.**
- **Stay calm.** Look relaxed and make eye contact with the interviewer. Don’t fidget or look at the floor or fold your arms across your chest.
- **Prepare questions to ask the interviewer.** Asking questions shows you are interested in the job. And remember, the interview cuts both ways. You’re also sizing up the employer. Asking questions helps you decide if you want the job.
- **Don’t over share.** There’s a lot you don’t need to say. You don’t have to give your age or talk about your recovery, marital status, kids, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or any topics that are not job related. Employers are only allowed to ask questions that are related to the job; stick with information about yourself that relates to the job.
- **Shake hands with everyone you interview with.**
- **Send a thank-you letter within twenty-four hours.**



The next step for Carmen was going through an interview. She prepared for her interview by making a list of questions she wanted to ask about the job. She even read about the store on its website. She was nervous, so she set her alarm for two hours before the interview so she'd have plenty of time to wake up, get dressed, and feel sharp. However, she hit the snooze button and overslept. As a result, she got to the interview about twenty minutes late and felt really frazzled. She noticed when she arrived that she was wearing one black shoe and one brown shoe. It was too late to do anything about it then, so she got herself calmed down and remembered to make eye contact. At the end of the interview, she apologized and explained what happened. She got caught up in what she was saying and told the interviewer about her addiction and being homeless; she thought it might help him understand why she had been late. She remembered to shake hands with the interviewer before she left.

■ Which interview tips did Carmen miss? Look at the list of tips just discussed and check the ones she missed.



Carmen didn't get the job. First she felt angry. Then she felt really down. She talked with her job counselor and got encouragement, and then she started back on the job hunt. A month later, and after eight more applications, she landed a job that fit her really well.

Everyone gets some rejections during a job hunt. It's normal to get turned down some of the time. But if you are persistent, you will get a job.

Carmen's friend, Miguel, had a much harder time finding a job. He searched for four months without success. He worked hard on a cover letter for the first application; then he used the same cover letter for every job he applied for. After he'd sent the cover letter out ten times, he discovered that he had made several spelling errors and started two sentences without a capital letter.

Miguel was feeling very discouraged. He finally went to a community agency where he got some free job counseling. The job counselor helped him think about the mistakes he had made so he could improve in the future.



■ Look at the paragraph above that described what Miguel did. Can you find two mistakes he made? Circle them.

Here are some common mistakes to watch out for:

- Applying to a very small number of places that have job openings
- Not following the application directions
- Using the same cover letter over and over (create a new one for each particular job)
- Not using key words from the job description in your cover letter or resume
- Having typos and grammatical mistakes in your cover letter or resume
- Sending your letter to an anonymous person, such as "Dear Sir"
- Not following up with a phone call or a second letter
- Overestimating or underestimating your abilities

It may take a while to get a job that you love, but work hard at every job you have and your job-hunting process. When you do this, you may be surprised by the opportunities that will open up for you.

SUMMARY

- Some ways to find job opportunities include reading want ads, going to job websites, looking on job boards, talking to friends, volunteering, and calling potential employers.
- Job seekers need to learn to write a cover letter and resume, using key words that describe the traits and experience the employer is looking for. Help with this is available from job assistance programs or supported employment programs, or at websites online.
- Tips for doing well at an interview include research the company, practice, dress appropriately, arrive early, stay calm, prepare questions for the interviewer, don't over share, shake hands with everyone you interview with, and send a thank-you letter within twenty-four hours.

CHALLENGE

Find a job you're interested in. Ask a good friend to help you practice interviewing for the job.



SESSION 3.

Keeping Your Job

You may feel great relief when you get a job. You may also feel anxious—especially if you haven't held a job for a while. Even if you're just changing to a new job, you probably will feel a bit nervous. Most people do. You want to do well and keep your job, after all.

The way to keep your job is by following this practical advice:

- **Be flexible.** Your employer will need you to do different things at different times.
- **Be reliable.** Show up for work on time and follow through on what is asked of you.
- **Go to work every day.** Obviously you can't go to work if you're sick, but don't make excuses and skip work just because you don't feel like going.
- **Try to work well with others.** You may not like everyone at work, but try to find a way to get along—focus on your work, not others' behavior.
- **Keep a good attitude.** Be positive and friendly, do your work without complaining, and take feedback seriously.
- **Be honest; don't steal.** This applies to time as well as things. Don't steal time from your employer by not putting in the hours you are paid for.
- **Obey work rules.** Follow the rules about hours, safety, dress code, etc.
- **Ask for feedback.** With every job it takes a while to get good at it. While you are learning, ask your supervisor or a coworker for feedback on how you are doing and how you can improve.
- **Identify a person you can go to if you have questions or problems.** This usually can be your supervisor.
- **Don't have romantic relationships with people at work.** It is generally a good idea to keep your friendships and relationships with coworkers focused on work.

What kind of employee are you? Do you follow this advice? Think about a job you hold now or a job you had in the past, whether paid or unpaid. Put check marks in the table below to indicate how often you observed each piece of advice:

	NEVER	SOMETIMES	USUALLY	ALWAYS
Be flexible				
Be reliable				
Go to work every day				
Try to work well with others				
Keep a good attitude				
Be honest				
Obey work rules				
Ask for feedback				
Identify a person you can go to if you have questions or problems				
Don't have romantic relationships with people at work				

■ Look at the results. Were there one or more pieces of advice that you observed usually or always? List those pieces of advice here.

■ What impact did that have on your job or work?

■ Were there one or more pieces of advice that you never observed or only sometimes observed? List those here.

■ Write down an example of a time when you didn't follow this advice.

■ What impact did that have on your job or work?

Good work habits will make a big difference in keeping your job too. They also make a difference in how much you like your job. When you have good work habits, you are more apt to be rewarded on the job with trust, raises, and new opportunities.

Here are some examples of good work habits:

- Be on time.
- Keep your employer informed if you are going to be late, have to leave early, are sick, or have some other work disruption.
- Dress appropriately.
- Treat others with respect.
- Work at work.
- Show initiative.
- Admit mistakes.

The following are examples of people who did—or did not—have good work habits. After each example, write an example from your own life. Describe a time when you did—or did not—exhibit that good work habit. If you haven't held a paid or unpaid job before, describe these habits in other parts of your life, such as in school or in relationships.



Debbie grew up in a household that was very disorganized. Her parents never got anywhere on time. She learned this habit very well. Debbie's friends were always on her about it. When she started a job as a receptionist, she knew she needed to change this habit. She had to be at her desk when the first customer walked in the door. That meant 8 a.m. She missed that deadline four times in the first three weeks. Her boss told her if she couldn't get to work on time, she couldn't keep the job. So she started setting her alarm ten minutes earlier and it wasn't long before being on time for work became a habit.

■ My example of the work habit: **Be on time**

■ If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?

After being reliably on time for five months, Debbie ran into a problem. She woke up on time, but got a call about a family emergency. She needed to take her mother to the doctor immediately. She called her boss and explained what was happening. Her boss appreciated the call and got someone else to cover for her.



■ My example of the work habit: **Keep your employer informed**

■ If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?



Damian was a school bus driver. He figured it didn't matter what he wore to work. The first day of his job, he planned to wear torn, saggy shorts and a T-shirt with stains. His roommate cautioned him to wear different clothes. "Hey man," he said, "you've got to look presentable at work. At least put on a clean shirt and a clean pair of jeans." When Damian got to work and looked around at the other drivers, he was glad he'd changed clothes.

■ My example of the work habit: **Dress appropriately**

■ If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?



Winona worked in the local court's documents office. People would come in for copies of documents like their divorce decree or their birth certificate. Winona was used to showing respect to others. She had good manners and always greeted coworkers with a smile and a friendly "hello." She used words like please and thank you. Sometimes people who came in for copies of their documents were impatient and cranky. Winona had to work hard at staying respectful in those circumstances. But she did it. And she got a terrific performance review.

■ My example of the work habit: **Treat others with respect**

■ If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?

Manuel worked in an office at a computer. He often surfed the Internet when he was supposed to be working. He'd quickly shift the screen when his boss walked by, but he was having trouble getting his work done. He also let his breaks get longer and longer, sometimes a half hour longer than they were supposed to be. He ended up losing his job.



■ My example of the work habit: **Work at work**

■ If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?



Una worked as a teacher's aide. She offered to help with bulletin board displays. She also volunteered to work with the more challenging students. When the school was hit with budget cuts and laid off a number of teacher's aides, Una was the first to be kept on.

■ My example of the work habit: **Show initiative**

■ If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?



Jafar was a plumber's apprentice. A valve he installed in the bathroom leaked and flooded the customer's floor. When Jafar's boss called him on it, Jafar made excuses. Instead of apologizing and saying he would fix it right away, he said one of his coworkers had not shown him the proper way to install it. He implied that the coworker was lazy.

■ My example of the work habit: **Admit mistakes**

■ If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?

Mike was a subcontractor on a house remodel. He had promised to get the sheetrock installed in three days. The next worker's schedule depended on Mike meeting his deadline. But Mike was having trouble staying organized. He had to take his son to a doctor's appointment and had forgotten to write it on his calendar. He also forgot to put an important tool away and couldn't find it when it was time to leave for the job. He missed his deadline by two days.



■ My example of the work habit: **Stay organized**

- If this is a challenge for you, what can you do to change this habit?

Staying organized on the job is really important. There are many things you can do to help you stay organized. Here are a few ideas:

- Write a “to-do” list each day of all the things you need to get done. Cross items off the list as you complete them.
- Have a work calendar where you write important meetings or deadlines when things need to get done. Check the calendar every day to make sure you are staying on track.
- If you work with a lot of papers, set up a filing system. Get in the habit of filing your papers at the end of each day or each week. Don’t let papers stack up.
- If you work with tools, keep your tools all together in one location, so you always know where they are.
- Set your alarm a few minutes early every morning, so you get to work about fifteen minutes before you’re supposed to start. Use that time to plan out your workday.
- Unless you are required to check email frequently, shut off your email for periods of time during the day so you can focus on work.
- The same goes for your cell phone and texts. Shut them off during work hours.

If you aren’t used to following some of this practical advice or these good work habits, don’t be hard on yourself. Instead, figure out how you can start practicing these things. It’s never too late to take charge of your work life.

SUMMARY

- Some practical advice to follow in order to keep a job: be flexible, be reliable, go to work every day, try to work well with others, keep a good attitude, be honest, obey work rules, ask for feedback, identify a person you can go to if you have questions or problems, and don't have romantic relationships with people at work.
- Good work habits include being on time, keeping your employer informed, dressing appropriately, treating others with respect, working at work, showing initiative, admitting mistakes, and staying organized.

CHALLENGE

Talk to some people you know who have had jobs for many years. Ask them what they feel has been the key to their success.



SESSION 4. Building a Career

Do you ever think of not just having a job, but having a career? We often think of careers as something that lawyers or business executives have, but everyone who works can have a career, no matter what kind of job we have or want.

Think of a career as an area of expertise—as something you get really good at by practicing and learning over a period of time. A career can be work you do full-time or part-time. A career doesn't depend on a college degree. When you have a career, people trust what you know and trust that you can do the job.

You get a reputation for being a certain kind of worker. It's the total package of who you are and what you've got to offer when you are selling yourself in the workplace.

You can create the kind of worker reputation you want. The longer you work, the more expertise you can develop and the more valuable you can become to your employer and customers.

There are four things that determine our workplace reputation:



Personal Appearance.

Do you wear clean clothing that is appropriate for your workplace? In some places of work people wear uniforms. In other places people dress up. Do you also use good personal hygiene, such as taking regular showers, getting haircuts, etc.? All of these things can impact your reputation in the workplace.





Personality. This includes your values, goals, identity, and behavior. Do people describe you as smart, witty, kind, thoughtful, or cooperative?



Skills. These are the skills that help you perform a job successfully. These skills might include problem solving or being a quick learner, good writer, or good with your hands.



The Difference Maker. This is the thing that makes you stand out—what you offer an employer that is different from other people.



What kind of workplace reputation do you have? Fill in the chart below.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE	PERSONALITY	SKILLS	THE DIFFERENCE MAKER
<p>Example: <i>neat</i> <i>short hair</i> <i>clean-shaven</i> <i>trimmed fingernails</i></p>	<p>Example: <i>outgoing</i> <i>friendly</i> <i>likes to make people happy</i> <i>good memory</i> <i>lots of energy</i></p>	<p>Example: <i>mechanical skills</i> <i>knows how to fix bicycles</i></p>	<p>Example: <i>raced bicycles for the past three years</i></p>

You may have difficult issues in your past or special challenges to overcome. These don't need to stop you from developing a productive work life. Here are some people who overcame challenges to build productive work lives:

- J. K. Rowling wrote the Harry Potter books. Prior to writing these books, she separated from her husband and lost her job. She was struggling to support herself and her daughter in Scotland and was on welfare.
- Famous television personality and actress Oprah Winfrey was born to a teenage single mother in poverty and had her own son when she was fourteen years old. Her baby died. She was so poor as a child she had to wear dresses made out of potato sacks.
- Comedian Jim Carrey grew up in Canada. When he was twelve years old, his father lost his job and the family lived in their van. He worked eight-hour shifts after school.

These are very successful and famous people, but there are many ordinary people as well who have overcome difficult challenges to live productive and healthy lives. They aren't all rich by any means, but that isn't the only way to measure success. Many people think success is measured by things like raising healthy children, having and being a good friend, or supporting a family.

■ How would you define success for yourself?

Sometimes people give up too much to get ahead. You don't have to give up your core values to stay employed. You shouldn't have to give up your integrity, self-respect, your health and well-being, or your priorities in life. Below are some scenarios of people who faced situations at work where their values were challenged. Circle the situations where the person made a healthy decision that benefited them and their values.

Jay

Jay worked full-time as a nurse's aide, sometimes day shifts, sometimes evenings, sometimes nights. His wife, Chandra, worked long hours too. They had two preschool children. Both parents were exhausted. Chandra earned more money than Jay, and she suggested he cut back on his work hours. He said he just couldn't if he wanted to advance quickly in his job. He was forced to cut back when he got so sick he ended up in the hospital.

**Kathy**

Kathy was a supervisor. The company she was working for insisted she make her employees come to work even when they were sick. She felt she couldn't respect herself when she did that, so she started looking for another job.

**Kee**

When Kee retired, he looked back on a long career as a counselor. He knew he had helped a lot of people turn their lives around. He was happy with what he had stood for and given to the world.



Lucia

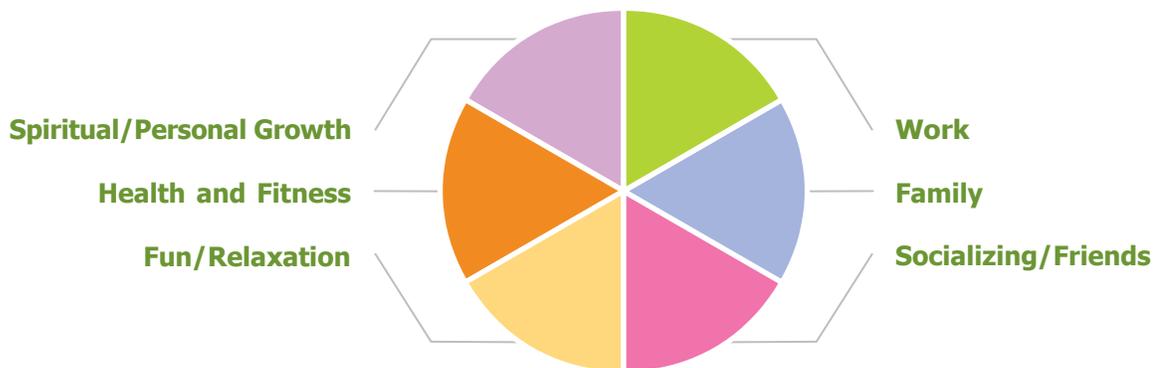


Lucia hated her job, but it paid a lot of money. She had bought a big house and a fancy car. If she changed to a different job she liked, she wouldn't be able to afford the big house and car. She stayed at the job and felt miserable much of the time.

Did you circle Kathy and Kee? In these scenarios, Kathy and Kee made healthy decisions about their jobs. Jay and Lucia did not stick to their values and ended up sick or miserable.

■ Think about your life and your job—or the job you are hoping for. What compromises are you not willing to make, no matter what the job is?

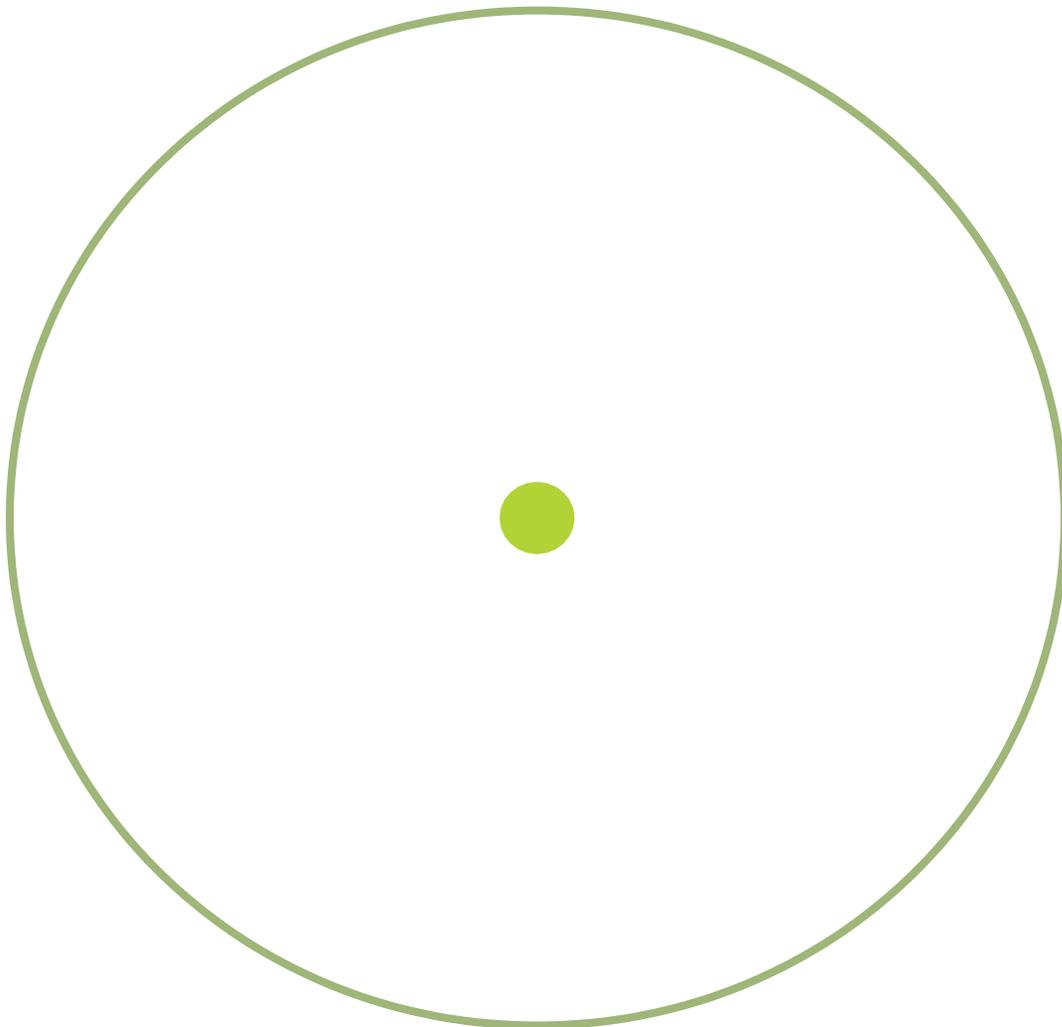
Yes, work will provide you many things, but it's only part of your life. Balance is the key to a healthy life. Look at the balance wheel below.



Think about how much of your life is devoted to each of these categories: **Fun/Relaxation, Health and Fitness, Spiritual/Personal Growth, Work, Family, and Socializing/Friends.** Does taking care of your body, such as making time for exercise, take up ten percent of your time? Two percent of your time? What percentage of your time is given to rest and relaxation?

MY BALANCE WHEEL

Make "slices of pie" in this circle that match the amount of time you give to each category. Label each slice with the name of the category.



Now sit back and look at your balance wheel.

■ Is there anything you want to change?

■ What key skills will you take away from this program?

SUMMARY

- Building a career applies to all types of work.
- Four things that determine our reputation in the workplace are personal appearance, personality, skills, and being a difference maker.

CHALLENGE

Poll three people who have worked with you. Ask them to name three adjectives to describe you as a worker.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Websites

Job Hunting

www.job-hunt.org

This website provides a comprehensive listing of resources to help a person find a job, including information on networking, writing resumes, successful interviewing, and more.

Skills Assessment

www.iseek.org/careers

This website provides a career assessment tool, information on creating a career plan, and information on different careers. (Some of the site is designed specifically for Minnesota residents.)

Keeping Your Job

www.dol.state.ga.us/pdf/forms/dol4436.pdf

This document is from the Georgia Department of Labor and discusses developing good work habits, learning about your new job, and other websites for keeping your job.

