

Transitions: Life Skills for Personal Success

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SELF IMPROVEMENT MODULE

Self Improvement requires life-long learning and life-long learning requires two things: inner drive and goals. Only a few people in life will motivate you to improve yourself, so you have to find your drive and passion from within.

If you can find the passion to sustain you, you will push yourself to “grow” on a daily basis; for learning does not stop when you receive your high school or college diploma. In fact, people who are successful and prosperous are folks who strive to improve themselves in many seemingly “small” ways.

For example, they might take a yoga class to learn how to relax and handle stress or they might watch a TV documentary about nutrition and weight loss. Or perhaps, in their spare time, they might listen to foreign language audio tapes in order to learn about cultures in far away lands. The point is, life-long learning and self improvement can come in the form of many lessons. Ben Franklin believed that the greatest learning and self improvement lessons were found in travel—no matter what the distance, even the shortest journey could provide as much learning and personal growth as did two months in a classroom (Brands, 2000).

So, if you have a college degree or even two, and if you are able to take courses that help you improve your public speaking or technical writing or even managerial skills— that’s wonderful! But if you want to start with short-term self improvement goals, then ask yourself these 3 simple questions:

1. What is the one thing I could change that would make me a better student/employee/person?
2. What is the one thing that I encounter in school/work/life that makes me uncomfortable every time I face it?
3. If I could wave a magic wand and learn one skill—what would it be?

What do those questions mean? How can they help you? Self improvement is usually driven by one of three criteria: 1) a desire to change and grow for the benefit of others or at the request of others; 2) a desire to overcome fears, anxieties and obstacles; and 3) a desire to improve your own “status” or life.

What makes self improvement so critical to success in the workplace? Because it is a strong indicator of future success and a barometer of your desire to achieve growth and success (Weilkiewicz, 2005). In fact, job candidates and employees with strong records of self initiated growth strategies typically perform better on the job and enjoy promotions and career satisfaction (Matthews, 2005).

The Self Improvement Module in the Transitions Program was designed to meet the expectations of employers from ANY industry—as well as arm our learners with the tools they need to get employed, stay employed and enjoy a prosperous career.

Our lessons and activities were painstakingly developed to ensure our learners would experience true to life situations that elicit the self improvement growth and personal development strategies that employers expect and demand.

In addition, we formulated a sequence of high-powered topics that begin with the fundamentals for success and culminate with the acquisition of skills that exceed expectations.

First, we help our learners create a stronger sense of “self” by teaching them how to find direction, develop career objectives and begin to formulate long-term career plans. After all, one has to know oneself and set a course for goal attainment before one can take a journey down the path of self improvement.

Once our learners have had a chance to make a “self assessment” and take stock of their skills and goals, we help them learn how to improve with the “basic element” of self improvement: professional dress and hygiene. In our “Dressing for Success” lesson, we teach our learners that dressing for success means coordinating colors, accessorizing tastefully and making sure their shoes are highly polished. As Shakespeare has written, “The cloths oft make the man (or woman)”—he knew the importance of a professional look. And he was right; dressing for success can mean the difference between a great first impression or a forgettable first meeting.

However, looking good is not enough. Behavioral self improvement is an area in which we can all stand to learn a little more. In our lesson called: “Get Your Feet Off the Table and Stop Slurping Your Soup” we guide our learners through lessons that cover critical dining etiquette skills. After all, in business and in one’s personal life, most important discussions, decisions and deals are conducted over a meal. Whether it’s breakfast, lunch or a gala dinner, our self improvement skill building lessons will apply. So even if you chew with your mouth open, there’s still hope for you!

Even if our learners have mastered the art of looking and acting the part of a successful person, there is another element that will guarantee their success: showing up for work. The actor Woody Allen was quoted as saying that 80% of success is just showing up on time. That is why we spend a lot of time on activities that teach our learners the importance of perfect attendance. We also teach them that good things happen to those who “show up”—because those who are late or not around at all, are the ones who miss the call of opportunity when it knocks.

The Module continues with a two-part series: Developing Your Leadership Style. This group of lessons focuses on helping learners to build upon their self improvement skills so they can one day take the role of a leader who has the capacity to help others develop self improvement techniques of their own. We take time to ensure that all learners understand that true leadership is not only about the development of themselves, but the development of others. The counterpart to leadership is teamwork, and in that same vein, our lessons on Learning How to Contribute to a Team are also a two-part series.

In our lesson, *Working Hard or Hardly Working*, we emphasize the importance of work ethic development. Showing up on time and having perfect attendance is the foundation of a strong work ethic, but we don't stop there! Developing a strong work ethic also involves "working smart" by being efficient and solving problems, and producing outstanding results that exceed expectations.

Finally, we spend time teaching our learners about the importance of making a strong and lasting first impression. No details are left to chance as they learn that delivering a firm, hearty handshake and creating appropriate "small talk" helps a new acquaintance feel comfortable and open with them.

In the end, we come full circle with our training. Self Assessment begins with oneself, but it always benefits those around us, when we first meet them and then later on, when we are leaders of the team!

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