

Series 2: Leadership in Employee-Employer Relationships

ABSTRACT: *In the following Series of articles, you will learn: [1] about useful recruitment tools and methods for training and maintaining quality workers in today's evolving workplace; [2] that worker attributes/traits are just as important to the employee hiring and development processes as technical skills, as well as methods for measuring and encouraging favorable workplace attitudes and behaviors; [3] how learned helplessness, explanatory style, and emotional contagion affect workplace productivity; [4] those traits and skills that individuals in the present economy must develop in order to fashion a rewarding career; [5] that criticism is seldom constructive in a workplace and methods for increasing constructive communications; and [6] why direct interpersonal contact is preferable to telephonic case management, as well as methods to encourage successful workplace communication.*

Hiring and Maintaining Employees for the Rapidly Changing Workplace

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Introduction

From one perspective, we may think about hiring employees who will turn out to be capable, loyal, and long-tenured. In fact, this is the perspective from which most employers view their interest in hiring and keeping employees.

But it need not be the only way employers think about their workers. In many well-managed companies, the emphasis is on achieving a larger goal: workers who are capable, loyal, *and* who rise above merely doing the job.

During the years 1994 and 1995, three college psychologists, Howard Gardner of Harvard University, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi of Claremont Graduate University, and William Damon of Stanford University, spent time at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford, California developing a process that is now called the GoodWork project. Gardner, Director of Harvard's GoodWork project, stated during an interview with the Huffington Post in 2011:

"We need to focus on the kind of human beings we want to have and the kind of society in which we want to live."

A description of what the GoodWork project is about is offered online in what is called the "[GoodWork Toolkit](#):"

"Work occupies much of our lives... Yet, how many of us find our work meaningful? How many of us feel able to do our best work? And how often do we stop to consider the consequences of our work on others, or its impact on society as a whole?"

The description goes on to say:

"...opportunities to consider the meaning of work...are rare, but imperative."

Gardner has been a prolific contributor to the general public's interest in how to be a better individual and how to develop a better society. In 2007, he published a book (Harvard Business School Press) titled *Five Minds for the Future*. Looking at the "Five Minds" serves to clarify what he believes employers might value:

- The Disciplined Mind: the mastery of major schools of thought, including science, math, and history, and at least one professional craft.

- The Synthesizing Mind: the ability to integrate ideas from different disciplines or spheres into a coherent whole and to communicate that integration to others.
- The Creating Mind: the capacity to uncover and clarify new problems, questions, and phenomena.
- The Respectful Mind: awareness of and appreciation for differences among human beings and human groups.
- The Ethical Mind: fulfillment of one's responsibilities as a worker and as a citizen.

The Future

Gardner's observations become a pretty tall order for the average employer. Add to that the "Five Predictions for the Business Environment of Tomorrow" as posited by Steve Tobak, a well-known management consultant, in an article titled "[The Workplace of the Future:](#)"

Democratic management. I may not like it, and I certainly don't think it makes sense, but our increasingly litigious, politically correct, and entitlement-based culture will bring us closer to democratic management where employees have a say in decisions. How will it work? I have no idea, but technology will make it manageable and provide individuals with information to make informed choices. Ayn Rand will turn in her grave.

Flat organizations. Again, I may not like it, but I can see it coming like a freight train. The Internet, social networking, and Gen-Y will together result in flatter organizational structures than any management consultant would have thought possible. How will it work? Again, I have no idea, but it's coming and it's certainly going to be challenging.

No computing. The human-computer interface will all but disappear. No computers, no faxes, no printers, no keyboards, no 2D monitors, no white boards. Everything will be 3D, virtual reality, voice recognition and synthesis. Walls will be combo active-touch displays, media boards, and advertisements. Searches will use intelligent agents, not algorithms like today's searches. Robotics and sensors will be integrated into everything.

No business travel. 3D virtual reality meetings will all but eliminate business travel. There'll be no snail mail. The postal service will be privatized and compete directly with FedEx and UPS, but only for shipping; mailing documents will be unnecessary. Beaming technology could change everything, if and when. People will have cyber-implants for telecommunications and video display.

New look and feel: invisible cloaking. My dad's workplace was drab; many companies wore uniforms. Soon we'll see the peak of mass differentiation – no two people or office environments will look the same. But then, nanotechnology will change the look and feel of everything. Colors and textures will be unrecognizable by today's standards. Invisibility cloaking will enable things to disappear, while virtual reality will make things out of nothing.

Needless to say, Gardner's "Five Minds" are not what most employers consider when they hire new employees. And what should the average employer make of Tobak's predictions regarding the future of the business environment? Are Gardner's five minds for the future and Tobak's five predictions for tomorrow's work environment ideas that are of value to employers?

Doing good work in the future is, and will continue to be, a challenge for both employers and employees. Employers will strive to find employees with disciplined, creative, ethical, respectful, and synthesizing minds and place them in environments that are highly democratic, flat, and transparent – environments in which their talents will not wither but, rather, blossom. Many employees will tend to resist these employer objectives.

The work environment will be enormously different than it is now and essentially unrecognizable compared to those offices which were run by "Mad Men" in the 1960s, when many of today's top executives, i.e., Baby Boomers, left college for work. "Mad Men," as the critically acclaimed television show is called, were narcissistic, racist, sexist – you name it. They were hardly people who could successfully hire, nurture, and maintain today's, and future employees, as portrayed by Gardner. Not incidentally, recent findings show that 69% of the S&P's 500 companies are led by CEOs who are over 50 years of age. The vast majority of these are male.

Employees want, and will continue to seek work environments that are flexible, challenging, validating, and meaningful. After all, doing good work involves meaningful tasks and meaningful outcomes, as well as products and services that enhance the lives of others. New workers no longer belong, or should want to belong, to the mad-men-mills of the past. They are not indentured servants. They desire, by and large, to make real contributions to the global economy. Of course, not all prospective employees have the potential to become capable, loyal, and long-tenured contributors to any one work organization.

Workplaces of today and tomorrow will most likely have little of the authoritarian atmosphere that dominated the organizations in which one's parents labored. The Vince Lombardi style of team achievement may have had merit decades ago, but employees now expect to be led but not told. This change in expectation alone will remain a challenge to even the most gifted business leaders. Good work in the rapidly changing organization begins with sound hiring.

Hiring

How does the workplace go about finding, selecting, and training good workers? Finding the right worker, the one who will stay long enough to successfully navigate the introductory "learning curve" and ultimately become sufficiently proficient to make contributions to the organization, is never easy.

When deciding how to advertise a job opening, choosing the best sources can be a daunting task. The important question, among many, for an employer to consider when choosing where to search is who are you trying to hire? Should a headhunter be employed? Is the position entry level? Would a recent college graduate be a good candidate? Should online advertising be the sole venue? Are there pools of possible candidates in professional membership organizations? Would a college job fair be a good place to look for future candidates? The list of possibilities could be endless, and if the employer selects the wrong resources, it could mean a waste of time and money and result in poor selection.

Remember that as an employer, the first line of defense against choosing the wrong candidate is the prospect's résumé. A prospective employee's résumé is their "marketing tool" to sell themselves to the employer. If the résumé and/or cover letter contain typographical errors, present formatting issues, or are excessively long, the employer may automatically place it in the rejection pile. Good workers will have done their homework, and their preparation for job application would have included how to prepare cover letters and résumés free of typographic errors and formatting problems. Regardless of the medium of the résumé, employers will want to see work well done.

Most job applicants in the selection pool in these volatile times want to be hired (and accepted) immediately. Rejection is, after all, difficult for all of us, and not being offered a job after applying for it is high on that avoidance list.

Selection personnel must generally recognize applicants who are "faking good" worker behaviors during the hiring process and take them into consideration. The fear of being rejected (the converse of the Maslow-identified need to gain acceptance) is a powerful force that is difficult for the interviewer to assess fully during the selection process. Still, those dynamics are real, and professional selectors need to be experienced in recognizing and dealing appropriately with them. Encouraging the applicant to speak openly during the job interview about prior rejections can lead to insights that would otherwise disqualify the applicant on grounds that may not be productive in hiring good employees. Were previous selectors missing qualities that in fact are valuable traits for the present opening?

Pre-Employment Assessment

The Americans with Disabilities Act with the Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA/ADAAA) makes it illegal to give pre-employment medical testing and base hiring decisions on the outcome of those tests. Unlike medical tests, using standardized abilities and aptitude testing for pre-employment screening is not illegal. In fact, to identify

what could be relevant “job-seeking attitudes and behaviors,” employers should consider using pre-employment assessment products.

The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), for example, is a reliable instrument that informs military personnel of a recruit’s learning potentials so that military placement training is conducive to the recruit’s chances of succeeding in that training. Reducing the risk of military placement failure through use of ASVAB results is the primary objective of the Battery. Ignoring the findings of this test is generally costly and harmful to both the recruit and the military.

Similarly, workers in the civilian world can be selected and placed with quality tests and measures, providing that the tools used have a valid relationship to the “essential functions” of the job. Essential functions of the job should be documented with a carefully executed job analysis. While validation of an employment test is required only if its results are used in a way that might adversely affect a protected group, it is sound personnel management to validate any test used. In fact, through the [Code of Professional Ethics](#) for Rehabilitation Counselors established by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), Rehabilitation Counselors are ethically required to determine appropriateness of the test instruments. According to the *Code* (Section G.5.a), they must “carefully consider the validity, reliability, psychometric limitations, and appropriateness of instruments when selecting tests for use in given situations or with particular clients.” Likewise, in selecting a test, employers should ask the test publisher for evidence concerning the validity of the test in relation to the given situation, i.e., the type of job tasks for which the test will be used.

The following can be invaluable for matching the documented essential functions (or most relevant job tasks) of a particular position: work samples and simulations; intelligence and aptitude tests; and measures of temperament and personality. Measuring prospective worker characteristics without having a specific set of criteria (e.g., an “essential functions” job description) to measure against those worker characteristics is probably useless.

Worker optimism and resilience are fundamental to most rapidly changing workplaces. Martin Seligman and others who research and promote Positive Psychology have created numerous questionnaires that could prove helpful to selection personnel in finding those good workers described above by Gardner. For more information on Positive Psychology and various measures reflecting positive psychological concepts, visit the University of Pennsylvania [website about the topic](#).

Other Crucial Pre-Employment Factors

Another critical consideration in the hiring process is the requirements of every employer promulgated by the ADA/ADAAA. Employers are required by law to follow specific guidelines from the ADA/ADAAA on pre-employment testing, essential functions, and reasonable accommodations. It is the responsibility of all employers to understand these requirements and to implement them. Employers are responsible for identifying the essential functions (as opposed to non-essential functions) of a specific job in a job description, and by doing so employers can avoid at least some negative outcomes in any litigation that should arise.

Creating Job Descriptions Based On Essential Functions

The ADA/ADAAA requires that job descriptions be based on the essential functions of a job. That is, the non-essential functions of a given job should not be used to deny employment or to reprimand an employee who is not performing, or cannot perform, those non-essential functions. Many employers overlook the significance of this aspect of the law. However, it may become painfully relevant in litigation, and prudent employers will consider the concept when creating job descriptions.

In addition, and significantly more important in terms of jobs requiring physical labor and/or repetitive motions, job descriptions must be based on structured Job Analyses. Job Analysis is a process that requires rigid adherence to verifiable measures and a taxonomy of defined terms. For example, if the job requires “standing,” the analysis must work from the established definition of that term and delineate the duration involved in the function (i.e., standing), the frequency and duration of rest periods, and the surface on which the standing is done. “Lifting” has to be described in terms of weight, frequency, height of the lifts, the motions other than lifting

required, etc. In short, job descriptions must be based on careful observations and measurements of precise actions. Describing a job in general terms is not productive and does not serve either the employer or the employee.

Jobs that require individuality, intellectuality, creativity, problem solving, etc., also require (in terms of legality) identifying what the specific duties and outcomes are so that the non-essential functions can be identified as needed. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) talks about non-physical jobs in terms of expected outcomes as “results and deliverables.” Are the desired and defined outcomes (per the job description) achieved? Anything not specifically delineated is considered non-essential. Job descriptions need to be reviewed by human resource personnel and the supervisor of the specific job for currency and validity on a regularly scheduled basis.

Selecting the Best Candidate

Conditions for electing the ideal employee should be based minimally on the following:

- Having an adequate number of choices from carefully considered sources.
- Reading/sorting the results of preliminary testing (ability, aptitude, temperament).
- Searching résumés for germane experiences and manifestations of a work product.
- Gathering and evaluating references.
- Consulting with staff on their preferences for the qualifications of the new hire.

Training

Training employees is the essential and non-transferrable function of management. Training is both preliminary (i.e., introductory/early-on work-related needs) and ongoing. While good employees will have the capacity to learn useful skills on their own, and should be urged to do so, the management team will need to visualize impending needs and provide training opportunities to match those needs as an ongoing, continuing responsibility.

Training can be internal or external. Employees should be given opportunities to study in area colleges and the like, and external study need not be confined to specific job-related skills. Course work in the humanities, sociology, or psychology, for example, whether delivered internally or by external sources, can hold value for employers, as well as for the employee.

One concept relating to the hiring process that is gaining currency is that college graduates with degrees in the humanities are preferable to those with job-specific degrees. That is, employers are tending to hire graduates with liberal arts degrees over even those with specific technical skills in a field germane to those needed by the hiring company. The employers are still looking for course work in chemistry for a chemist's job in the company, but the ideal candidate will have at least studied liberal arts. Liberal arts graduates tend to have the prerequisites employers are looking for in terms of abstract thinking abilities and language skills.

Those colleges that recognize this changing dynamic place a higher premium on teaching:

- critical thinking skills,
- strong writing and oral communication skills, and
- quantitative analysis skills.

One American college that has revamped its curriculum to make these skills paramount to all other courses offered is Winston-Salem State University (WSSU). While the implementation of this approach at WSSU was accomplished in one academic year, a significant number of other U.S. colleges are more slowly integrating the same philosophical approach into their degree offerings. There is a radical transformation of the core curriculum in American colleges underway.

In-service training should include both relevant job-skills content as well as non-core content. What may be identified as non-job-skills but still relevant attributes are taught in most MBA programs. These non-core skills include contemporary management concepts/processes such as “Managing Your Boss (Managing Up)” (Harvard Business School), “Growing at the Speed of Change,” “Research Methods and Applications,” etc. Likewise, the employees themselves should be challenged to design and deliver in-house training courses for their colleagues. Training should always be delivered with state-of-the-art technology, such as emerging tablet-computing devices.

Employees have a responsibility to life-long learning, and employers have a responsibility for life-long teaching. Well-managed companies frequently create and maintain “mentoring” processes. Mentoring may be assigned either on a one-on-one basis or by having one specialist conduct regular sessions with groups. The effectiveness of the mentoring should be evaluated on a regular basis.

Maintaining a Productive and Creative Workforce

The most fundamental principle of human relations is the “egocentricity” rule. People tend to think, especially in a work environment, “What’s in it for me?” Self-interest is not always a psychological abnormality; it is a primary human trait. Given the stories many children have heard from their parents about the workplace boss, and in light of the dogmatic methods of many teachers, it is no wonder that new workers approach employment with high levels of egocentricity, mistrust, and questions, such as “Where is this going to take me?” and “What’s in it for me?”

Progressive work organizations must face the reality that egocentricity is primary in all workplaces (including its leaders/bosses), and therefore, they need to create work climates and enrichment programs that allow good workers to have their needs met. At minimum, such programs include promotion and succession plans, as well as cross training on job-related subjects that contribute to the potential for promotion while warding off boredom and stagnation. Supervisors must be good communicators, which includes, first and foremost, being a good listener. Good listening validates workers and their efforts.

The Certification of Disability Management Specialists (CDMS) Commission, for example, asks its certificants to encourage professional growth and development in those they supervise (or in this case, the employees), as well as for themselves (the employer). The CDMS [Code of Professional Conduct](#), (RPC 1.21.b.) notes:

As a certificant, professional development and growth is necessary for maintenance and building of professional skills and competencies. A certificant who employs or supervises other certificants and applicants will encourage and support professional development activities and opportunities as well as conduct timely performance evaluations and consultations as necessary. Certificants will also be aware of their own professional growth and development needs and seek continuing education, training, supervision, and consultations for themselves.

Case managers are also required to complete continuing education to maintain their certification. The CCMC [Code of Professional Ethics](#) (S2) states: *Case Management competence is the professional responsibility of the Board-Certified Case Manager, and is defined by educational preparation, ongoing professional development, and related work experience.*

Resilience and optimism are key elements of success in most rapidly changing work environments. The abilities to bounce back from adversity, to work through challenges, and to overcome perceived obstacles are, without question, behaviors that keep most people creative, happy, and at work. In finding solutions to problems, persistence counts!

The most effective way to ascertain employee needs and interests is to teach and model the basic idea that “work matters.” Employees need to come to realize this and develop a perspective that is larger than the immediate department in which one works. The purpose of work is embedded in the belief that an individual effort counts. Further, this belief encompasses the idea that work is a contribution to the common good. And doing “Good Work,” as Gardner and his colleagues so elegantly developed, matters.

Keeping Abreast of Change – Essential Resources

There are at least five essential services of current information for employers on how to create and maintain quality workers (“Good Workers”). The premise here is that all employers (and their key managers) in any size company should read and be aware of these sources on a regular basis.

The first of these is the [Center for Creative Leadership](#) (CCL). The primary focus of the CCL is to develop better business managers. (But of course, the lessons learned here are in turn transferrable to employees at all levels.) Essentially all of the materials available through the CCL have fees attached, but the quality of the information is worth the nominal cost. Further, regular visitors to their web site will find free articles. The free article in the September 2012 newsletter, “[A Talent Development Quick Win](#),” provides practical steps to aid managers in developing talent in their employees. The first step is to decide which kind of “talent conversation” the manager should have with the employee in a performance evaluation setting, for example, the top talent conversation, the solid performer conversation, the potential performer conversation, or the underperformer conversation. From there, the steps for the conversation include:

- Clarifying the goal.
- Exploring the issues.
- Identifying the options.
- Setting Expectations.
- Motivating.
- Identifying the plan.

The next two resources are made available by the top Business Schools in the U.S. The first of these is the free, online weekly publication of the Wharton School (University of Pennsylvania), [Knowledge@Wharton](#). This publication consists of articles relevant to business management by faculty/professors of the Wharton School. About a third of the articles in any week may be on American companies dealing with foreign countries, since these countries are specialties of some of the professors; however, the majority of articles are on business management. Each week Knowledge@Wharton lists the titles of the new articles (research studies) and gives a short paragraph summary of the article’s content and a link to the full article. This resource is indispensable for management, and it should be of interest for any employee who sees his/her employment as a prelude to a better position.

Another essential resource is the [Harvard Business Review](#) (HBR). MBA graduates of any school are familiar with the HBR and many continue their subscriptions after they graduate. Unlike the Wharton online resource, the HBR is fee-subscription only. The HBR is released monthly, and the web site offers free “Executive Summaries,” which show the articles for the month and gives a paragraph summary of each. The October 2012 issue of the HBR has an article titled “What Makes a Leader,” and it is this sort of article that holds significant value for business managers and administrators.

Of course, SHRM is an indispensable organization that will provide information and support to human resource personnel. SHRM is the largest association in the field of human resources. One can join SHRM through [their website](#). Finally, we recommend that either the University of Pennsylvania [Center for Positive Psychology](#) or the [VIA Institute on Character](#) become tools for employers and human resource selection personnel in your organization.

Generational Factors

Essentially every employer has employees from different generations, and there are significant differences between the generations of which employers and their managers need to be aware. The four generations are:

- Silents: Born between 1925 and 1945
- Baby Boomers: Born between 1946 and 1964
- Generation Xers: Born between 1965 and 1980
- Generation Ys (or Millennials) Born after 1980

Each of these generations is different in terms of their values, and most significantly, the attitudes they bring to work. The challenge for the employer is to recognize these differences and to homogenize them into a workable whole. The academic institutions that develop methods for dealing with the workplace generational gaps suggest that employers develop strategies that accept the differences and create policies and procedures that accommodate a multigenerational workforce.

Brief descriptions of the separate groups:

Silents are generally the most loyal and dedicated employees. They are also the most risk averse, which, in the contemporary workplace, is largely considered a negative attribute.

Baby Boomers generally distrust authority, are sometimes tagged the “Me Generation,” and are thought to be guided by personal gratification. They are more optimistic and amenable to workplace changes than their elders.

Generation Xers are frequently classified as slackers and are among the lead group of employees to question the authority of their bosses. Generally, these employees are well educated especially in respect to technical skills. By and large, they are fiercely independent.

Generation Ys (or Millennials) are considered the most resilient of the generations discussed above, and resilience is an attribute high on the desired list posited by Positive Psychology. They are the products of Baby Boomers, who have instilled strong work ethics in them. They are, as a group, highly educated.

Since Generation Y adults are the most desirable (and luckily the most available) applicants, employers will have to shape their recruitment tactics to assure that they are finding adequate numbers of new hires with the most desirable attributes: people who are educated, skilled, and resilient. Generation Y people realize that they are keenly wanted as employees, and can be more demanding as applicants. The irony is, of course, that those who are most in demand will be those who demand more, with justification.

What employers need to do is recognize that they are not managing only one age group, but several. Consequently, they will have to develop cross-generational plans. Employers, if they hope to build a strong work force, will have to manage to the differences. One-size-fits-all health care plans, for example, are not acceptable to the most desirable applicants. Those employers who reject these basic concepts cannot expect to be among the most profitable companies or to have high rates of survival.

Not Your Father’s Workplace

Like every other aspect of life, the workplace evolves over time. And in fact, its evolution is, of recent, fast paced. The objective of this article has been to name and illuminate some of these evolving concepts and consider how they affect the recruitment and training processes. Of course, there is no requirement to consider a specific concept and immediately install it, but we do believe that all employers should be familiar with contemporary ideas of workplace management and employee development and consider which of the ideas would work well for their employees or hiring personnel. It is likely that most business leaders and organizations will not survive the stressors associated with rapid change unless they recognize and attempt to manage the dynamics and inevitable changes forecasted by Gardner and Tobak. We submit that Garner’s GoodWork Toolkit and the resources made available by Seligman and other positive psychologists can assist employers attempting to meet the challenges brought by rapid change and avail themselves of the opportunities found within it.

New business concepts and methods will continue to evolve as well, but ultimately, workplace dynamics will be strongly influenced by those standards and ethics practiced by both organizational leaders and followers, as well as those values and behaviors that result in management labor conflict. How management actually endeavors to model shared values and resolve conflicts may be the key variables that require ongoing attention and improvement. Shared values and inclusive, democratic conflict resolution could be considered enduring and unchangeable.

Attributes of Employability as the Basis for Hire and the Continuation of Employment: A Brief Tutorial

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Background

Most employers know what they want from employees. Employers want their workers to show up every day and do their jobs. Oh, if it were only so simple!

When one thinks carefully about the expectations of employers and the potentials of employees to meet those often unstated or oversimplified expectations, employment contracts seem amorphous or complex. All employers want workers who have job-related skills or, at the very least, employees who can learn their requisite skills to do the designated jobs. But inevitably, most employers want more from those they employ, more in terms of what might be thought of as "intangibles."

Although most employers have not given great thought to these intangibles, there are, in fact, specific requisite worker characteristics, strengths, and qualities that can be important in terms of their value to any organization over time. Attributes of employability can be especially significant in terms of hiring individuals with disabilities, because most employers tend to focus on disability as opposed to ability. These worker characteristics can be developed in most people independent of age, formal education, gender, or an individual's history of medical impairment.

Attempts to identify the specific characteristics employers look for in new hires vary from researcher to researcher and from article to article. Howard Gardner and his research assistants attempted to determine how young professionals cope with moral dilemmas at work, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has considered, among many other questions of worker development, what are the antecedents to talented teenager success. Of course, there have been hundreds of books written on being successful in the workplace. Harvard Business School professors John Gabarro and John Kotter articulated a powerful new way of conceptualizing the manager–boss relationship: one called *Managing Your Boss*, and of course, the so-called father of modern business management, Peter Drucker, wrote prolifically regarding how human beings operate in the workplace. Drucker coined the term "knowledge worker." In contrast, Rodney Lowman extensively researched his theory that personality characteristics and psychological disorders can produce so-called "work dysfunctions."

What rather consistently emerges from the literature is that personal attributes/traits are as critical to job success as, if not more important than, technical skills. That is, enthusiasm, personal warmth, passion for learning, and honesty are potentially more significant than the presence of specific technical experiences/skills. In fact, having the exact tools needed in a transfer of skills from a pre-application experience to a specific job is often in reality limited and sometimes so much so as to be essentially useless as a criterion for qualification. Employers feel that specialized skills can be taught on the job if the applicant has the more significant, more valuable self-management traits and qualities, the so-called "right stuff."

In this article, we wish to distinguish between technical job "skills" and personnel (personal) "attributes/worker traits," and we argue that in the final analysis, attributes/traits can be more important than technical job skills. And, we submit that this is true for individuals with or without disabilities, regardless of race, age, gender, or technical acumen.

There have been attempts to prioritize the personal qualities most sought in good workers, and while these separately enumerated qualities/traits are the same in many cases, their importance (as given in priority order) varies from study to study. Like beauty, personal (personnel) qualities may be in the eyes of the beholder. Personal qualities should be, and generally are, more important to employers than job-specific skills. Valued personal qualities include but are not limited to:

- Enthusiasm/willingness to learn
- Dependability

- Self-management
- Communications/literacy
- Problem solving skills
- Cooperation and team-working
- Understanding of abstract concepts
- Attention to detail
- Honesty

Workforce Development

Essentially all employers visit and address the issue of product development. That is, employers are constantly looking for ways to upgrade their products (or services) and to add new products (services) to those they offer their consumers. Only by upgrading can an employer maintain the growth needed to survive over time.

On the other hand, workforce development is practiced by far fewer employers, even though ongoing development of employees and prospective employees is as critical as product development. Employers who neglect to provide their employees with skill renewal and skill advancement will fall behind the competitive forces just as if they had failed to upgrade products (services). Human resource development has long been recognized as an essential ingredient of entrepreneurial growth, and human capital strategies are as critically important as product development. The guiding principles are: (1) hunt for talent, (2) build talent to augment what you garner from the available pool, and (3) seed the field of potential talent for future development. Organizations recognizing the value of continuing development in the current and future employee population will agree that workforce enrichment and enhancement is as fundamental to success as product development. Flexible, creative and motivated employees who are able to adapt to a changing environment are necessary to maintain viable product development in an increasingly competitive global environment.

The Main Issue: "Does the work get done?"

Although all jobs involve process or processes, accomplishing the task in a timely fashion (often predetermined by external authority) is the *sine qua non* of labor, of production. Work, after all, should be purposeful activity with a beginning and an end, the latter representing a point in the process where the product or service can be delivered to and appreciated by a consumer. Even art or music, endeavors that in and of themselves can be enjoyed by the creator, take on a different meaning when presented to another. To be productive or ultimately to get the work done is an employee's *raison d'être*.

Completion requires not only skill, but also concentration, pace, and persistence. The motivation found in the task completion, in seeing the product of one's labor, is probably universal, but unless the employee finds reward in the completion equal to if not greater than the satisfaction of doing, he or she may not be as valued as workers who finish the job.

Although employers seek out employees who will "get the job done," they also want to focus on *how* the job gets done. Employers want people who have goals, drive, and motivation. Motivation is an integral component of getting any job done. If an employee is not motivated, work pace and quality will be affected.

Able-bodied or Disabled

When the focus is put on hiring individuals with a disability as opposed to individuals without a disability, the selection process becomes very sensitive. When the criterion for employment is job- and skill-specific, employers tend to think that individuals with disabilities will not have the requisite skills, that they will require more attention, lack social skills, etc. However, there are no readily identifiable studies in which the employability skills of individuals without disabilities are matched against those of individuals with disabilities. In other words, there is no readily available body of research to demonstrate that there is a significant difference between the employability skills of an individual with a disability and one without a disability.

Consequently, it is fair to hypothesize that there are the same proportion of individuals with disabilities in the general population that have highly desirable worker characteristics as there are individuals without disabilities.

Barriers to employing people with disabilities can generally be traced to the attitudes of those responsible for hiring. Employers would be wise to focus on the competencies of the individual in relation to the job description rather than the applicant's disability.

Employers are bound by the law of the land (The Americans with Disabilities Act and Amendments Act of 2008/ADAAA) to look beyond the "disability" and evaluate the applicant strictly on the verifiable skills he/she possesses. The legal test is whether or not the applicant can perform the "essential functions" of a job. The essential functions are the core duties that are the reason the job exists. These essential functions must pre-exist the hiring process. An applicant (or actual employee) "cannot be considered to be unqualified because of his or her inability to perform marginal or incidental job functions."

Inherent in this legal requirement is the careful construction of the job description. Job descriptions that are legally defensible are those that are based on measurable tasks. Job descriptions that are constructed on anecdotal verbiage will not be admissible in legal proceedings. "Measurable tasks" implies that each function has been stated in specific terms; such as the number of pounds that must be lifted in a work shift by the employee, the length of time the employee will be required to stand during a shift, the number of iterations of a specific task the employee will be required to perform in a work shift, etc. The minimum number of words a typist will be required to produce in a shift is another defensible essential task.

Whether these measurable tasks can be satisfied through job accommodation is another issue, and beyond the scope of this paper. More germane to the topic of specific worker traits/attributes is whether an employee or new hire possesses requisite characteristics, notwithstanding the need for reasonable job accommodations, to learn and perform good work on a dependable basis.

Worker Characteristics

Rehabilitation professionals working with employees who are being readied to return to work, or with individuals with disabilities seeking an initial entry into employment, need to understand the importance of employability characteristics, such as dependability, persistence to task, and motivation to complete the job. The rehabilitation professional will endeavor to assist employers and the individual with a disability to identify those individual traits that are truly significant and required to satisfy the employment contract (e.g., a job description), but in the final analysis, the traits necessary to "getting the job done" may be as important as, if not more important than, work attendance, showing up on a regular basis.

The starting point for rehabilitation professionals is to understand what the important skills are so they can be emphasized in employment situations. Over the long haul, what employers are looking for, or should be looking for – in addition to "Is the job getting done?" – is the employee's dependability, his/her capacity to stay with a task, his/her ability to get along with others, and even his/her recognition of the importance of good health. The so-called "adaptive" skills of flexibility and tactfulness are also imperative. It is critical that employees are able to adjust within a changing work environment. In the final analysis, it is critically important to keep in mind that the employer's primary objective is does the work get done? But achieving that specific objective does not then free the employer from urging and training for additional attributes. Highly effective corporate training programs already include additional qualities that make their employees, overall, more cost- and output-effective.

In an address to an audience in Washington, D.C. several years ago, George Will, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist/author, said, "I have no way of knowing that on my commute home tonight, I won't be in an accident that will leave me disabled for life." That message, of course, relates to all of us. In reality, however, vocational disability can be accommodated, and valued worker characteristics can be acquired, while technical skills can be learned.

Identifying Worker Traits and Qualities

All employers, or their designated human resources personnel, should brainstorm with employees a list of worker traits that they believe are essential to their continuing growth and corporate culture. (Identifying a list of traits and conducting ongoing training in these worker characteristics are important to small businesses as well

as medium- and large-sized businesses. Small business leaders should not ignore the responsible practice of worker development on the basis that they have too few employees to make it important.)

A sample list of such worker traits and qualities may include:

- communication skills (speaking, listening, and writing)
- resilience (flexibility and coping skills)
- organizing work assignments and teamwork
- setting work-related goals and objectives
- creating new ideas
- personal (and perhaps community-related) values and practices

The value of identifying worker characteristics that the company may endorse and advocate is in the selection process. That is, when employees participate in identifying worker characteristics and traits that will make them and their employers better, they will be more likely to want to abide by them than imposed job requirements. Further, the worker capabilities should be reviewed for relevance on a periodic basis (once a year). Personal enrichment is a process that runs parallel with, and complements, the need for ongoing on-the-job upgrading and personnel development.

Many well-managed companies offer external skill upgrading through tuition reimbursement incentives and other community-based education/training resources. While these training resources are commendable, employers should not defer to them and neglect essential and regularized, concomitant in-house training. Practices and ways of executing tasks are constantly changing within companies, and employers need to be sure that their employees are shifting and developing in ways that best carry out the completion of the company's product.

Traits

This article makes a distinction between the specific skills an individual has learned from his/her education and work experience and the more intangible "traits" that are useful and valuable in life, including those personality characteristics that mutually benefit the employee and employer in workplace situations. The traits addressed here include:

- resilience
- accountability
- response-ability
- the facility to communicate interpersonally effectively

Resilience

From the perspective of the vocational rehabilitation professional, the single most important abilities employers will want their employees to have are coping skills. Coping skills, having the ability to overcome difficulty or disadvantage, significantly reduce the employer's long-term liability. Employees who are capable of coping with most of the adversities that may befall the employer and/or the employees are highly beneficial for both. Employees who can muster the resilience to overcome adverse events are a valuable asset for employers. Coping skills can be summarized as: having self-esteem; being self-aware; appreciating and using goal-setting strategies; and stopping occasionally to do serious self-evaluations. Employees who possess strong coping skills are less distracted by unexpected or unpleasant outcomes. They are also more likely to accept and adapt to changes within their company.

(In a separate article, CEC Associates has addressed the fact that at least one large American employer consciously seeks to hire employees that already demonstrate resilience traits, and then continues to do in-service training with them to reinforce this highly desirable quality. The same article addresses briefly the remarkable resilience of members of the armed services who have experienced amputations).

In the final analysis, an employer will be looking for employees who take satisfaction in their jobs, perform at optimum levels, and can be relaxed and enjoy their lot in the workplace.

Accountability

This is one of the most misunderstood concepts in modern psychology. If we even hint that maybe people have more to do with creating, allowing, or promoting what happens to them than they ordinarily think, some people immediately take the defensive. "You mean this is my fault? Is that what you're trying to tell me?" Many people have difficulty accepting responsibility for negative outcomes. They focus on how to distribute the blame instead of learning from the experiences and/or mistakes and making sure they are not repeated.

The word "accountability" is a Latin derivative that means "to stand forth and be counted." Here we are merely suggesting that employees should want to stand forth and be counted and be more accountable in what they produce at work. They should be proud of their achievements and accomplishments.

All of us create, promote, and/or allow what happens to us. George Bernard Shaw said, "People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them."

Everyone in the workplace, like everyone else in the world, creates, promotes, or allows what happens to them. The word "create" signifies that you wanted it and you went out and got it. Simple creation. Maybe after you got it, you didn't want it as much, but you got it nonetheless. As mothers like to say, "You make your bed and you lie in it."

The word "promote" signifies sharing a useful and productive idea. Here you are the co-creator. Someone or something else may also have been involved, and together you created it. But it might not have happened if you did not have some outside influence. For example, there is pornography on the Internet. If you're a politically conservative person, you might declare the availability of pornography a bad thing. However, this stance overlooks the fact that someone has to take the time and energy to go to the websites where pornography is found: "It takes two to tango."

The word "allow" proclaims that a person acquiesces to a specific situation. In these situations, one could say, at one point, "stop," or do something earlier to avoid it. You complain about the carpet your spouse purchased for the living room. What you have forgotten, however, is that your spouse invited you to help shop for the carpet. You said you were too busy and that you didn't care what was chosen.

In each of these potentials: creation, promotion, and allowance, some type of communication takes place. Whether it is a clear communication or a subtle, unclear communication, the accountability for it is the result of the interpersonal communication.

Response-ability

Responsibility is the ability to respond, and to do so appropriately and effectively. How could one have responded more effectively to the situation? What appropriate responses can one take now? Realize that in any situation there are response options that either lift one (and others) higher or drag one lower. Why not take the uplifting ones? What is needed is good decision-making, effective communication, and appropriate action.

Responsibility is a big tool. Unfortunately, most of us think of the word as a potential burden. We have been hit over the head by our parents with statements like, "You have to grow up to be responsible!" The problem is that you feel you have been responsible. Why not make personable responsibility a positive aspect of life, rather than a burden.

It almost seems that it is human nature to try and abort personal responsibility by passing it to someone else. As children, we learn to say, "It's not my fault, he made me do it." Or, "If my father had treated me better, I wouldn't be this way," or "If I didn't have so much file material to review, I could get my other work done."

The avoidance of personal responsibility has a long history. After Adam and Eve were told not to eat the forbidden fruit, God became suspicious about the big chunk taken out of the Apple. And God asked Adam if he had tasted of the fruit. What did Adam do? He blamed Eve for enticing him. When God asked Eve about this, she blamed the snake: "The Devil made me do it!"

To be responsible is to be "response-able: able to make a 'response'." Responsibility leads to action. Most of the time, appropriate action in a work setting requires some form of clear communication so that others can cooperate. When one takes responsibility, one is in charge; one becomes accountable in a positive way. Employees must learn to claim and exercise responsibility and be accountable to oneself as well as others. When employees take responsibility for their actions, they are more likely to be in control of their work and have it completed in an acceptable time frame. Also, tasks are more likely to have a good "flow" when a specific person is in charge of making sure that it is completed. Although multiple people may be involved in ensuring that the work gets done, if there is one person ultimately responsible for the specific task, they can keep better track of it.

Ability to Communicate Effectively on an Interpersonal Basis

Effective interpersonal communication requires self-awareness, that is, having an unbiased, objective, and honest view of one's own personality. Self-awareness also involves the ability to relate to others truthfully and with confidence. When we communicate with others, we must decide whether we are feeling accepting or un-accepting of the other person's behavior. Sometimes we feel un-accepting of our own, internal state. We feel unfulfilled, guilty, frightened, perhaps a myriad of things, but none of them good. To be aware of this is critical in terms of what and how we communicate to others. If you recognize this condition when you are feeling un-accepting, you probably need to say something. You may wish to rehearse what you want to say in order for it to be heard correctly by the other party.

Communication also frequently involves a pro-active assumption of taking personal responsibility. This is because you happen to believe that no action could lead to negative consequences. When you are experiencing anxiety or anticipation, you probably want to communicate, preferably to someone who can influence the situation. Remaining silent probably means you are allowing your anxiety to take over. Being accountable and assuming responsibility involves communicating with others.

Communication is another form of response-ability. Imagine the number of lives that could have been saved had our government intelligence systems taken responsibility for letting companies in the World Trade Center know that hijacked aircraft may be used by terrorists to destroy the very same buildings that the terrorists failed to destroy years earlier with car bombs. What would have happened had the NASA administrators listened to engineers who expressed concern that space shuttle materials could dislodge during takeoff and damage the aerodynamics of the shuttle? How many times could we have prevented file management problems in an office had an individual taken responsibility to communicate with another person who could intervene or help solve a problem?

We create communication, promote it, or simply allow it to happen. All too often, simply allowing communication to take place in its own time is dysfunctional and counterproductive. "Well, I meant to tell you yesterday," is a common and too often heard excuse for lack of communication. When you and a friend are riding in an automobile and your friend is operating the vehicle recklessly, do you take the initiative to speak up or wait for the consequences? How can we be accountable, take response-ability, and communicate to prevent problems in our work?

Communication comes from the word "commune," meaning to talk over, to discuss, to converse. Commune is associated with the word "community," a "commonwealth." Effective interpersonal communication creates community, maintains a "commonwealth," and develops bonds among workers as they attempt to fully apply their technical skills to workplace challenges. Too often we assume that others understand what we are trying to say to them; however, everyone has a different way of thinking, so it is best to describe as specifically as possible your viewpoints, ideas, opinions, etc.

Agentic Behavior and Transactional Leadership

The term "agentic" derives from the word "agency," "the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power," according to Merriam-Webster. The agentic style is identified with highly successful businesses in which one person in the organization has taken on, and practices:

- self-assertiveness,
- competitiveness,
- independence, and
- courageousness.

The individual in an agentic role is highly successful at achieving the task at hand. When there is a need within the organization to get a specific thing accomplished, the assignment is given to the person identified as the agentic leader.

Another condition that may be created to achieve effective workforce development is called Transactional Leadership. In this style, the leader works with the premise that people (employees) are motivated by reward and punishment. In this process, the leader sets specific (written) instructions to others of what is expected, and when the expectations are fulfilled there are rewards, and when they are not, there are negative/punitive consequences. Transactional leadership is, in our opinion, less effective in the long run than agentic leadership.

To design and create an effective workforce development program, an individual who has demonstrated effectiveness should be chosen to lead continuing efforts of selection, development, and succession.

Interventions

Employers fortunate and capable enough to find, hire and develop workers with "the right stuff" can augment their human resource strategies with appropriate interventions, tools to use when competent employees begin to falter. The selection process allows an employer to choose the right candidate, but all too often a process of maintenance may involve a specific intervention that provides counseling support, management of lost time secondary to health issues, or leadership to resolve interpersonal conflict. Employee assistance programs (EAPs), disability management, and conflict resolution strategies are but three of the maintenance tools that will allow employers to keep the troubled worker from becoming ineffective.

EAPs are supervisory and counseling interventions that have been developed as a result of troubled workers struggling with various personal problems that interfere with productivity. Historically, those problems were initially substance-abuse issues, but as EAPs have become more refined, they have also become "broader brush" interventions that address any personal problem that interferes with a worker making application of his or her technical skills, including family conflict, personal loss, financial difficulty, career development issues, and/or substance abuse. Most EAPs fall under the health benefit offerings of an organization, but elsewhere, the lead authors of this article have recommended that EAPs become an integral part of comprehensive Disability Management Programs (DMPs).

Comprehensive Disability Management is a group of human resource strategies generally applied by a cross-section of company leaders designed to prevent lost time following the onset of employee injury or illness. Company personnel work together to restore productivity of an employee who acquires occupationally significant impairment. DMPs recognize that there is a critical distinction between medical impairment and vocational disability. DMPs allow the organization to take full responsibility of keeping employees productive and place medical personnel in their appropriate role by delegating and not abdicating responsibility for employment.

In implementing Disability Management, some companies may also elect to seek the assistance of an outside source. A Certified Disability Management Specialist (CDMS) contributes positively to workplace programs aimed at intervention and prevention. A CDMS can not only intervene when an employee becomes ill or injured and is off work, but also will implement prevention programs to avoid incidents that cause absences. According to The CDMS [*Code of Professional Conduct*](#), disability management service is:

The prevention and minimization of the human and economic impact of illness and disability for the employee/employer to optimize the quality of care, productivity, organizational health, and regulatory compliance. The goal of disability management is to provide necessary services, using appropriate resources in order to promote the ill or injured individual's maximum recovery and function. Disability management services include the following activities: case management; disability assessment and evaluation; return-to-work intervention; labor market analysis; career exploration and counseling; and reporting (plan development and report preparation).

The CDMS *Code of Professional Conduct* is written based upon five principles of ethical behavior:

- Autonomy: to honor the right to make individual decisions.
- Beneficence: To do good to others.
- Nonmaleficence: To do no harm to others.
- Justice: To act or treat justly or fairly.
- Fidelity: To adhere to fact or detail.

A case manager must uphold the rules and standards set forth within the [Code of Professional Conduct](#). Within the CCMC [Code of Professional Conduct](#) (S8), *Board-Certified Case Managers (CCMs) will assist in the process of enforcing the Code by cooperating with inquiries, participating in proceedings, and complying with the directives of the Ethics & Professional Conduct Committee.*

Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Strategies, perhaps the best known of which is Dan Dana's Managerial Mediation model, allow organizational leaders to structure and resolve interpersonal employee conflict that when left unresolved can cost companies in terms of human capital, time, and money. Managerial Mediation Training (MMT) grew out of the awareness that human beings working together will inevitably have interpersonal conflict, and the management of conflict can assist individuals in their personal growth as well as organizations in their continuing efforts to remain productive.

Employment Testing

The use of either pre-employment or in-service employment testing as a means of discrimination is addressed specifically by the regulations promulgated by U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In a document titled "Employment Tests and Selection Procedures," the EEOC specifies:

- The use of tests and other selection procedures can be a very effective means of determining which applicants or employees are most qualified for a particular job. However, these tests can violate federal anti-discrimination laws if an employer intentionally uses them to discriminate based on race, color, sex, religion, disability, or age.
- The use of tests or other selection procedures can also violate federal anti-discrimination laws if they disproportionately exclude people in a particular group by race, sex, or another covered basis, unless the employer can justify the test or procedure under the law.
- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 [each] prohibit the use of discriminatory employment tests and selection procedures.

To examine these federal prohibitions further, see www.eeoc.gov/policy.

In addition to federal restrictions on employment testing, the [Code of Professional Ethics](#) for Rehabilitation Counselors established by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), also addresses the testing/assessment issue. Employers in the process of developing policies and procedures for an essential workplace assessment process can use Section G of the *Code* as a guideline to creating ethically viable procedures. Among the issues addressed in Section G of the *Code* are those of test selection, conditions of test administration, test scoring and interpretation, and considerations regarding maintaining the integrity and security of tests.

In selecting the tests to be used, it is important to consider the appropriateness of the instruments. According to the *Code* (Section G.5.a):

Rehabilitation counselors carefully consider the validity, reliability, psychometric limitations, and appropriateness of instruments when selecting tests for use in given situations or with particular clients.

Also of importance are the conditions of test administration. The *Code* (Section G.6.a) states:

When assessments are not administered under standard conditions, as may be necessary to accommodate clients with disabilities, or when unusual behavior or irregularities occur during the administration, those conditions are noted in interpretation, and the results may be designated as invalid or of questionable validity.

If testing circumstances are less than ideal, this should be taken into consideration during test scoring and interpretation. According to Section G.7.a of the *Code*:

In reporting assessment results, rehabilitation counselors indicate any reservations that exist regarding validity or reliability because of the circumstances of the assessments or the inappropriateness of the norms for persons tested.

Finally, the *Code of Professional Ethics* for Rehabilitation Counselors discusses the following assessment considerations (Section G.8.a):

Rehabilitation counselors maintain the integrity and security of tests and other assessment techniques consistent with legal and contractual obligations. Rehabilitation counselors do not appropriate, reproduce, or modify published assessments or parts thereof without acknowledgment and permission from the publisher.

For more information regarding issues in workplace testing as discussed in the CRCC's *Code of Professional Ethics*, please see Attachment 2 of this article.

Still another valuable source for employers in respect to workplace testing is the U.S. Department of Labor's O*Net Resource Center, <http://www.onetcenter.org/guides.html>. This site carries the "essential concepts" of employment testing in easy-to-understand terms so that managers and HR professionals can:

- Evaluate and select assessment tools/procedures that maximize chances for getting the right fit between jobs and employees.
- Administer and score assessment tools that are the most efficient and effective for their particular needs.
- Accurately interpret assessment results.
- Understand the professional and legal standards to be followed when conducting personnel assessments.

The Legal Basis for Employment Testing

In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "broad" aptitude tests used to hire new employees, or internally transfer or promote already in-service employees, were prohibited by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The case in which this decision was made was the Griggs et al v. Duke Power Company (401 U.S. 424). The crux of the case was that if aptitude tests used in hiring practices "disparately impact ethnic minority groups," they have to be "reasonably related to the job." In the Griggs case, the Court said that if the employer required a "high school education" and certain scores on tests given, African-American applicants were "less likely to hold a high school diploma" and that they would have, on average, "lower scores on aptitude tests." In order to comply with the Griggs ruling, employers must assure that the test used is "a reasonable measure of job performance."

There are different types of tests that may be used for employment testing (both pre- and post-employment) that are, for the most part, legal. These include: personality tests, work sample/job knowledge tests, and general intelligence tests. The latter, intelligence tests, are frequently criticized on the basis that they involve substantial

cultural effects for certain ethnic and racial groups. Further, intelligence tests are less able to predict success in a specific job than job knowledge tests.

Work sample or job knowledge tests, sometimes referred to as "Situational Judgment Tests," are commonly used as selection and screening tools, and, in general, pass muster in terms of legality.

One source for employers looking for in-depth information on employment testing is the Employment Testing Manual. This comprehensive manual was originally compiled in 1989 by the Warren, Gorham & Lamont publishing company in Boston and most recently updated, in 1996, by John Boudreau in the Cumulative Supplement to Employment Testing Manual. This text provides an extensive overview of testing issues as well as chapter-length content on individual tests by type. The text is available from Amazon and other book sellers.

Instruments That Can Serve to Inform the Creation of a Workplace Development Curriculum

Employers planning to provide in-service development for their employees should start with some sort of diagnostic test that will provide basic ideas of what is needed. This is not to say that employers now have the responsibility to become proficient in the testing process. It simply suggests that creating materials for employee development could be based on some sort of measure of every individual's start point. Diagnostic testing can also give the employer a better, more in-depth idea of the employee's personality, which would reflect their working style. Therefore, employers are able to come up with better, more effective ways to train/work with their employees.

The test given to each employee for this purpose should be something the employer compiles. A suggestion of how to go about creating the unique testing instrument is to survey some of the best known of such instruments. The following is a list of popular (and highly regarded) tests that might serve as a guideline to creating a unique test. Research the content of these suggested tests on the internet. (Also, the Appendix to this article has further information.)

Instruments to consider using include:

The 16PF: The 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire is an objective measure of temperament used to identify an individual's personality characteristics. It is widely used in business and industry as a selection tool and in vocational evaluation to help discern an individual's occupational compatibility. The 16PF was developed from research on how individuals generally describe others in terms of personality characteristics, such as warmth, emotional stability, intelligence, and spontaneity.

The PPI: The Personal Potential Index was developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS) of Princeton N.J. It was designed specifically as a new (alternative) approach to the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) used by most colleges to decide on entry to a graduate program by a student applicant. However, ETS has said that the PPI also has applicability in the workplace.

The VIA: The Values in Action questionnaire was developed by the originators (Seligman and Peterson) of Positive Psychology. The VIA provides information on an individual's character strengths.

The CPI: The California Psychological Inventory is a self-reporting inventory to assess the everyday "folk concepts" that ordinary people use to describe the behavior of the people around them. The CPI has a substantial foundation for determining occupational match.

Again, the objective in suggesting these measures is not to create an additional and unrealistic requirement for the company's human resources professionals. It is simply an identification of a very few additional resources that will make the creation of a company-unique process to do quality workforce selection and development easier.

The Peter Principle and Other Issues

The Peter Principle holds that in a hierarchical organization (a workplace, for example), members (employees) are promoted on the basis of their competencies. However, sooner or later they are promoted to a position in which they are no longer competent. But what if employers continued to promote and sponsor methods to increase competencies? What if the employment contract contained expectations that employees continue to develop and apply increased competencies? One might find less evidence of the Peter Principle and work dysfunctions as employees take on greater responsibility, including leadership roles.

Also related to this subject of attributes of employability are merit pay, and the basis on which promotions are made. In terms of merit pay, there are mixed results to choose from:

- In 2010, the Ford Motor Company reinstated their practice of merit pay on the basis that it was effective. The company had cancelled all merit pay in late 2008 to be able to sustain the severity of the economic downturn.
- Also in 2010, a research study by the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University concluded that pay for performance is not "the magic bullet that so often the policy world is looking for." The study, conducted from 2006 to 2009 and involving 296 middle school math teachers, found the students in classes where the teachers were given bonuses if their students did well, in fact progressed no faster than those in classes taught by non-bonus teachers.

So while merit pay has advocates and dissenters, what is clear is that a thoughtfully planned and operated workforce development program is the essential platform from which the practice must originate.

The basis for promotion is another issue that derives its over-time effectiveness from the workforce development program. Promotions ought to be related to what the individual has, in fact, brought to the organization. A development program that has been planned with inclusive input, documented, and reviewed with the employees regularly will clearly find some employees who have risen above others. These are the employees who should be considered for promotion with tangible evidence for the promotion.

The Selection Process

Employee selection is an art form, not a science, and of course, as an art form, recruitment and selection are continually being created and re-created by organizations interested in finding an effective process of identifying and hiring competent workers. There may be no established process that is valid and reliable, but one issue remains certain: individual competence and commitment seldom knock at the company door and announce. Employee selection is hard work. Not unlike the prospective employee searching for the right company that will serve as a platform for continuing career development, an organization must endeavor to utilize whatever ethical means necessary to find, secure, inculcate, and maintain competent employees. What should the selection process seek to find?

Summary and Conclusions

There is a growing awareness that technical skills alone are probably inadequate requisites for an individual's initial employability and the continuation of employment. Personality traits and worker characteristics as well as interpersonal skills are likely as important as, if not more important than, job skills that can be learned and enhanced with experience. In this article we argue that personal attributes and characteristics compatible with becoming employed, staying employed, and managing increased responsibilities following promotion are as viable as technical job skills. We speak briefly to the types of "intangibles" that companies often assume in prospective hires and the types of programs that might aid in the selection and maintenance of competent workers, employees that have more than technical skill alone. We also submit that these workplace attitudes and behaviors are both measurable and teachable. We discuss the significance of resilience, response-ability, accountability, and communication within the workplace. We propose that workforce development programs and human resource interventions consider the importance of these worker "intangibles."

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Note: While this is the traditional method of citing references, more information on the authors cited and their seminal work may be available faster and in more depth on the web.

ATTACHMENTS

A: Test Resources

Included here are resources that may be used by employers in the workplace testing process. These specific tests/instruments are used to measure the perceived potential for a claimant to succeed in either a new employment opportunity or a return-to-work situation:

1. The 16PF:

This questionnaire is one of a number of such instruments used to discover and measure personalities. (Search the internet for additional information on this and similar questionnaires).

2. The PPI:

Educational Testing Service (ETS) has revised its Graduate Records Examination (GRE) to a new product they have called the Personal Potential Index (PPI). The goal is to provide Higher Education professors and administrators with results that measure the potential of the test taker to succeed in graduate school. ETS also specifically states that the new index may be used by employers to determine the potential of an individual job applicant to succeed.

The PPI consists of six "personal attributes." The attributes are described as subjective observations as perceived by trained testers. The attributes are decided and recorded by people who know the person being evaluated:

The Job Candidate's/Employee's Intelligence:

____ High

____ Medium

____ Low

Characterization: _____

The Job Candidate's/Employee's Communication Skills:

___ High

___ Medium

___ Low

Characterization: _____

The Job Candidate's/Employee's Congeniality (amiability, friendliness):

___ High

___ Medium

___ Low

Characterization: _____

The Job Candidate's/Employee's Resilience:

___ High

___ Medium

___ Low

Characterization: _____

The Job Candidate's/Employee's Planning and Organization skills:

___ High

___ Medium

___ Low

Characterization: _____

The Job Candidate's/Employee's Ethics and Integrity:

____ High

____ Medium

____ Low

Characterization: _____

3. VIA (Values in Action)

The values of the Values in Action instrument are:

Wisdom and Knowledge:

- Creativity, Originality, Ingenuity
- Curiosity, Openness to Experience
- Open-Mindedness, Judgment, Critical Thinking
- Love of Learning
- Perspective, Wisdom

Courage:

- Bravery, Valor
- Persistence, Perseverance, Industriousness
- Integrity, Authenticity, Honesty
- Vitality, Enthusiasm, Vigor, Energy

Humanity:

- Love
- Kindness, Generosity, Compassion
- Social, Emotional, and Personal Intelligence

Justice:

- Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, Teamwork
- Fairness
- Leadership

Temperance:

- Forgiveness and Mercy
- Humility/Modesty

- Prudence
- Self-Regulation, Self-Control

Transcendence:

- Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence
- Gratitude
- Hope, Optimism, Future-mindedness
- Humor, Playfulness
- Spirituality, Religiousness, Faith

(For further information on the VIA, visit the Positive Psychology website at the University of Pennsylvania).

4. CPI

The CPI is created similar to the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) with which it shares 194 items. Again, research the CPI online.

B. Selected Items from Section G (EVALUATION, ASSESSMENT, AND INTERPRETATION) of the Ethics Code of the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification

Informed Consent; Explanation to Clients: Prior to assessment, rehabilitation counselors explain the nature and purposes of assessment and the specific use of results by potential recipients. The explanation is given in the language and/or developmental level of clients (or other legally authorized persons on behalf of clients), unless an explicit exception has been agreed upon in advance. Rehabilitation counselors consider personal or cultural context of clients, the level of their understanding of the results, and the impact of the results on clients. Regardless of whether scoring and interpretation are completed by rehabilitation counselors, by assistants, or by computer or other outside services, rehabilitation counselors take reasonable steps to ensure that appropriate explanations are given to clients.

Recipients of Results: Rehabilitation counselors consider the welfare of clients, explicit understandings, and prior agreements in determining who receives the assessment results. Rehabilitation counselors include accurate and appropriate interpretations with any release of individual or group assessment results. Issues of cultural diversity, when present, are taken into consideration when providing interpretations and releasing information.

Release of Information to Competent Professionals/ Misuse of Results: Rehabilitation counselors do not misuse assessment results, including test results and interpretations, and take reasonable steps to prevent the misuse of such by others. Rehabilitation counselors release assessment data in which clients are identified only with the consent of clients or their legal representatives, or court order. Such data is released only to professionals recognized as qualified to interpret the data.

Proper Diagnosis of Mental Disorders: If within their professional and individual scope of practice, rehabilitation counselors take special care to provide proper diagnosis of mental disorders. Assessment techniques (including personal interviews) used to determine care of clients (e.g., focus of treatment, types of treatment, or recommended follow-up) are carefully selected and appropriately used.

Rehabilitation counselors recognize that culture affects the manner in which the disorders of clients are defined. The socioeconomic and cultural experiences of clients are considered when diagnosing. Rehabilitation counselors recognize historical and social prejudices in the misdiagnosis and pathologizing of certain individuals and groups. rehabilitation counselors may refrain from making and for reporting a diagnosis if they believe it would cause harm to clients or others.

Competence to Use and Interpret Tests; Limits of Competence: Rehabilitation counselors utilize only those testing and assessment services for which they have been trained and are competent. Rehabilitation counselors take reasonable measures to ensure the proper use of psychological and career assessment techniques by

persons under their supervision. The requirement to develop this competency applies regardless of whether tests are administered through standard or technology-based methods. Rehabilitation counselors are responsible for the appropriate applications, scoring, interpretations, and use of assessment instruments relevant to the needs of clients, whether they score and interpret such assessments themselves or use technology or other services. Generally new instruments are used within one year of publication, unless rehabilitation counselors document a valid reason why the normative data from previous versions are more applicable to clients.

Recommendations Based on Results: Rehabilitation counselors are responsible for recommendations involving individuals that are based on assessment results, and have a thorough understanding of educational, psychological, and career measurements, including validation criteria, assessment research, and guidelines for assessment development and use. In addition to test results, rehabilitation counselors consider other factors present in the client's situation (e.g., disability or cultural factors) before making any recommendations, when relevant.

Accurate Information: Rehabilitation counselors provide accurate information and avoid false claims or misconceptions when making statements about assessment instruments or techniques. Special efforts are made to avoid utilizing test results to make inappropriate diagnoses or inferences.

Test Selection: Rehabilitation counselors carefully consider the validity, reliability, psychometric limitations, and appropriateness of instruments when selecting tests for use in given situations or with particular clients.

Referral Information: If clients are referred to a third party for assessment, rehabilitation counselors provide specific referral questions and sufficient objective data about clients to ensure that appropriate assessment instruments are utilized.

Conditions of Test Administration: Rehabilitation counselors administer assessments under the same conditions that were established in the standardized development of the instrument. When assessments are not administered under standard conditions, as may be necessary to accommodate clients with disabilities, or when unusual behavior or irregularities occur during the administration, those conditions are noted in interpretation, and the results may be designated as invalid or of questionable validity.

Test Scoring and Interpretation: In reporting assessment results, rehabilitation counselors indicate any reservations that exist regarding validity or reliability because of the circumstances of the assessments or the inappropriateness of the norms for persons tested. Rehabilitation counselors use caution with assessment techniques that were normed on populations other than that of the client. Rehabilitation counselors recognize the effects of age, color, race, national origin, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, marital status/partnership, language preference, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law on test administrations and interpretations, and place test results in proper perspective with other relevant factors.

Note: In some larger companies, there will be trained Human Resources professionals on staff with knowledge of the testing process. But not having this resource available does not mean that other professionals cannot employ one test or another to identify basic character traits. For example, The CPI is self-reporting, and the PPI is reported/recorded by some person with knowledge of the target examinee. For companies with no resources on staff to undertake evaluation, it may be the identified topic for an in-service training session. Also, the four instruments identified here are not the only available tests for this purpose. What is essential is to understand and apply the concept of evaluation as the basis for workforce development.

Learned Helplessness and Explanatory Style and Their Significance to Workplace Management

Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., C.C.M.

Background

Although workplace managers are generally not interested in psychology and how an introductory knowledge of it can shape their policies and procedures, they would do well to reconsider the issue.

A case in point is the evolution of "Learned Helplessness" and "Explanatory Style," and how these two concepts can make the effort of workplace managers to achieve a more productive workforce an actuality.

Learned helplessness came into existence with the experiments and theory development of Martin Seligman in 1967. In Seligman's (with Steve Maier) early experiments with dogs, he found that when pain was introduced in three different groups of dogs, the group for which there was no way to mitigate the pain (they found that the pain was "inescapable") ultimately learned to be helpless and not try anything more to lessen the pain. The ultimate outcome for this group was that they exhibited "symptoms similar to chronic depression."

It is important to note that Seligman concluded that learned helplessness sometimes remained "specific to one situation," but at other times the helplessness "generalized across situations."

Another development in psychology picked up the Seligman findings and added an important dimension to it that would help lay people, such as workplace managers, to talk about learned helplessness and work out approaches to the phenomenon by assessing an individual's "attributional style." Attributional style is sometimes referred to as "explanatory style." That is, an individual's attributional or explanatory style is the key to understanding why individuals respond differently to adverse events. Although one group of people, a group of workers perhaps, may experience the same or similar negative conditions, some people/workers will acquire learned helplessness and exhibit unconstructive behavior while others will not.

The researcher credited with thinking out and naming "attributional theory" was Bernard Weiner. Weiner's theory delved into the causes to which individuals attribute an unpleasant event they experienced. An extension of Weiner's line of thinking led to more in-depth definitions of attribution or explanation with the specific adjectives of "pessimistic explanatory style" or, conversely, "optimistic explanatory style."

People exhibiting a pessimistic explanation see negative events as:

- permanent ("It will never change.")
- personal ("It's my fault."), and
- pervasive ("I can't do anything right.")

The Helpless Worker

While the treatment for persistent/prolonged pessimism is the work of qualified psychologists and psychiatrists, there are factors that key individuals working around the affected employee can deal with to mitigate the condition.

Most importantly, since a pessimistic explanatory style is an all too commonplace event in the workplace, it is essential that workplace supervisors recognize its presence and take appropriate actions to contain it, and perhaps reverse it altogether. Recognizing the onset of worker helplessness is important because it not only signals the significantly reduced productivity of the individual worker, but because it also is contagious. One or more employees exhibiting helplessness amongst a group of employees can quickly become a negative factor in terms of morale and productivity.

Seligman's original term for the condition we are talking about was "Learned Helplessness." Workers (and others, of course) can all too readily learn to be helpless. There are many people in the worker's extended life that can, and do, contribute to its onset and further validate and encourage it once it is underway. Contributors to this process include:

- medical care professionals,
- insurance carriers,
- work supervisors,
- fellow workers,
- attorneys, and
- family members.

Medical care personnel can play a significant role in a worker's status becoming a negative rather than positive force in the workplace. The injured worker's status can be confounded by dual relationships as well, e.g., treating physicians acting as independent medical examiners or family members acting as advocates. The CDMS [Code of Professional Conduct](#) acknowledges in that when services are being provided, such relationships must be brought to light (RPC 2.01):

All dual relationships must be disclosed.... Dual relationships, other than payor/client, include but are not limited to familial, social, financial, business, close personal relationships with individual clients, or volunteer or paid work within an office in which the client is actively receiving services.

A case manager also has obligations for reporting any dual relationships. According to the CCMC [Code of Professional Conduct](#) (S19),

Dual relationships can exist between the Board-Certified Case Manager and the client, payor, employer, friend, relative, research study and/or other entities. All dual relationships and the nature of those relationships must be disclosed by describing the role and responsibilities of the Board-Certified Case Manager (CCM).

The most critical point at which medical care professionals can (and do) shape a worker's status is when a physician defines the affliction as a disability. The physician's role is to identify and describe the impairment, and it is the employer's responsibility, given the impairment analysis, to determine whether the worker is disabled from any work position within the company. Other health care professionals can similarly contribute to the injured worker's helplessness.

Insurance carriers, including Workers' Compensation programs, can (and do) also play a contributing role in whether or not a worker becomes (and remains) helpless. Many injured workers become all too eager to hear that they have permanent injuries and may collect Workers' Compensation payments for the rest of their work lives. Employers must assume responsibility for determining whether or not a worker can satisfactorily perform essential functions in the employer's plan in order to be profitable. If an individual worker is found to be capable of performing the required essential functions of a specific job competently, that factor should override all insurance factors.

The CRCC, in its [Code of Professional Ethics](#) for Rehabilitation Counselors, specifically Section C.1.b., recognizes that injured workers must be empowered to advocate for him or herself:

Advocacy. Rehabilitation Counselors provide clients with appropriate information to facilitate their self-advocacy actions whenever possible. They work with clients to help them understand their rights and responsibilities, speak for themselves, make decisions, and contribute to society. When appropriate and with the consent of clients, rehabilitation counselors act as advocates on behalf of clients at the local, regional, and/or national levels.

While learned helplessness can be completely self-induced, it is just as frequently the outcome of the individual worker assimilating the attitudes and encouragement of others around him/her. Work supervisors and co-workers displaying negativity, and actually offering thoughts that encourage the negative thinking of the worker

in the process of learning to be helpless are a significant part of the problem. Similarly, family members and friends outside of the workplace can also nurture the growing sense of entitlement to be helpless.

"Emotional Contagion" in the Workplace

Emotional Contagion is a condition recognized in the world at-large that has recently found application in the workplace. Awareness of the concept of emotional contagion goes back to the early 1900s. Emotional contagion is defined as a tendency to feel and express emotions similar to, and influenced by, those of others. In psychology, the condition is frequently looked at as a cause of dysfunctional dynamics in families, and especially children.

Emotional contagion can also be a critical factor in workplace dynamics. To understand worker behaviors in the workplace, employers need to be aware of the phenomenon and, again, take measures to counteract it. While the most prevalent situation is the interaction between and among employees, the contagion is also cited as a condition present in the employee-customer relationship.

The relevant research and reporting on emotional contagion as it relates to the work environment was done by professor Sigal Barsade, Ph.D., at the Yale School of Management in 2002. In her article, *The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion and Its Influence on Group Behavior*, Barsade wrote:

Emotional contagion has been shown here to play a significant role in work-group dynamics. A better understanding of the conditions and concepts of emotional contagion can lead to greater insight into and understanding of employees' workplace behavior.

Barsade concluded:

The results of this research confirm that people do not live on emotional islands but, rather, that group members experience moods at work, these moods ripple out and, in the process, influence not only other group members' emotions but their group dynamics and individual cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors as well. Thus, emotional contagion, through its direct and indirect influence on employees' and work teams' emotions, judgments, and behaviors, can lead to subtle but important ripple effects in groups and organizations.

Learned Optimism

While the effort to contain and control learned helplessness has been at the forefront of the relevant behavioral development work, another side of the coin is the development of "Learned Optimism." That is, the prevailing explanatory style has focused on preventing helplessness and depression rather than on the development of a counter explanatory style focused on preventing them. Rather than tolerating individuals who insist on attributing events in their lives to negative explanations, the effort should be teaching and encouraging a learned optimism.

Seligman, in a book titled *Learned Optimism* (1998, Pocket Books), states that "more optimistic workers are more successful workers." Something called the "Attributional Style Questionnaire" (ASQ) is used to measure optimism. Seligman says "optimism is imperative for academic achievement," and that happiness and well-being can be cultivated. The workplace is as good a place to start as any.

It is likely that workplace supervisors will not have the time (or, in many cases, the interest) in nurturing either learned helplessness or learned optimism in any formal, regularized way. And that is fine. What we can ask and expect of our workplace managers is that they are familiar with these concepts and understand their significance in achieving the stated goals of an effective work process. Just as the American workplace has evolved, so it will continue to evolve, and ultimately, these ideas will be incorporated into the process.

State-of-the-Art in Worker Learned Helplessness

With an understanding of how to recognize the dynamics of negative workplace behaviors and how they impact the effort to achieve satisfactory production levels and worker harmony, we can now explore what supervisors should do to counteract the negatives.

The state-of-the-art workplace methodology designed to minimize worker learned helplessness lies in the concepts that have emerged from the "Positive Psychology" movement. In 1998, Seligman, as president of the American Psychological Association, urged his fellow psychologists to shift the emphasis of the important work of psychology from addressing dysfunction after it occurs to preventing it before it occurs.

In addition to the impact this dramatic shift has had in how basic psychology should be practiced in every day life, it has had a comparable impact on workplace management. Just as the basic concept of Positive Psychology in life is the application of pro-active, preventive measures, the same principle applies to workplace management. The idea is to instill resilience so that individual workers can avoid permanent learned helplessness, or at least overcome it if it does emerge.

To guide individuals to become healthier physically and mentally, Seligman (and an original Positive Psychology co-developer, Christopher Peterson) created a core set of values that would, if they were assimilated and practiced regularly, serve to make individuals more positive about life, and thereby more resilient in the event of adversity.

This set of values is now known as "Values in Action." The 24 core values identified in the Value in Action (VIA) are:

1. Wisdom and Knowledge

- creativity
- curiosity
- open-mindedness
- love of learning
- perspective

2. Courage

- bravery
- persistence
- integrity
- vitality

3. Humanity

- love
- kindness
- social intelligence

4. Justice

- citizenship
- fairness
- leadership

5. Temperance

- forgiveness and mercy
- humility and modesty

- prudence
- self-regulation

6. Transcendence

- appreciation of beauty and excellence
- gratitude
- hope
- humor
- spirituality

A wealth of materials to assist workplace managers in learning and applying positive psychology methods are available online, and especially on the University of Pennsylvania (Seligman's base) websites. Among other resources related to this issue that will be profitable for workplace supervisors is the "VIA Survey of Character Strengths" which evaluates each individual's strengths in terms of the Values in Action itemized above.

See www.viasurvey.org.

Before Worker Learned Helplessness

A breakthrough in the issue of disability in the workplace is determining whether or not new employees in fact have an ACE score of 1 or higher. ACE stand for Adverse Childhood Experiences. There are three basic ACE categories: Abuse, Neglect, and/or Household Dysfunction. Adults who come to the workplace with an ACE score of 1 or higher are more prone to disability. An article detailing ACE was published by CEC Associates in October 2011.

What Skills Does a Young Person Need for a Rewarding Career?

Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., C.C.M., and Fred Heffner, Ed.D.

Background

In this article, we focus on those traits and skills that individuals in the present economy must develop in order to fashion a rewarding career. We reference the findings of several sources and add information gained from our own experiences in evaluating thousands of individuals who have been both successful and unsuccessful in the world of work. The article starts by identifying behaviors that we believe young people need to manifest to develop a successful career, and we conclude that the assumption made by several human development theorists, especially Lapan (2004), is correct: Young people should develop an approach to the present and future that is “proactive, resilient, and functionally adaptive.”

More recently, Tony Wagner, leader of “Innovative Education” in the Technology & Entrepreneurship Center at Harvard University, has posited “[Seven Survival Skills](#)” for future leaders. Wagner, who describes his “Skills” as being “defined by business leaders in their own words,” submits the following as the key traits business leaders are looking for in their job applicants:

1. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
2. Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence
3. Agility and Adaptability
4. Initiative Entrepreneurship
5. Effective Oral and Written Communication
6. Accessing and Analyzing Information
7. Curiosity and Imagination

We begin by recognizing work dysfunction as the opposite of vocational success. Lowman (1993) defines work dysfunction as “psychological conditions in which there is significant impairment in the capacity to work caused either by characteristics of the person or by interaction between personal characteristics and working conditions.” Lowman is careful to point out that unemployment would not be classified as a work dysfunction because the condition is the result of an outside force. However, the condition of the worker who is terminated because of depression or some other personal difficulty (e.g., unmanaged anxiety and resultant error-proneness) would be considered a work dysfunction.

We believe that future work dysfunction, occupational pathology, and the more ubiquitous job dissatisfaction can be prevented to a large extent by adopting and promoting youth educational experiences that emphasize “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), “positive psychology” (Seligman, 2000), and “emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995). Moreover, we believe that genuine happiness through work is a realistic goal, not simply fantasy. We advocate that career assessment performed during the infant stages of vocational development can be part of the total educational experience necessary for any individual who upon entering adulthood wishes to enjoy true success, optimal experience, and what Kushner (2001) termed “a life that matters.”

From our 25 years of conducting vocational evaluations and career assessments of nearly every kind of worker in the Western economies, two issues have come to our attention. First, many people, even after years of experience in a job or in several different jobs, have surprisingly little understanding of their occupational strengths and weaknesses. Second, most people possess even less appreciation of what employers expect from them as workers in terms of their attitudes and behaviors. These “blind spots” in worker perception nearly always lead to some level of work dysfunction or job dissatisfaction.

But it is not only being dysfunctional at work that leads to employee dissatisfaction. Finding meaning in work, realizing a higher purpose from it, and making a contribution to society through a chosen vocation, as opposed to seeking only financial gain, leads to job satisfaction for both employee and employer. Realizing job satisfaction and occupational success through matching an employee’s strengths with an employer’s expectations is the primary goal of careful career assessment and planned vocational development. Twenty-five

years of experience in vocationally evaluating both satisfied and troubled workers leads us to believe that many individuals have not had the earlier opportunity to properly target a suitable career.

Ultimately, prospective employees who wish to pursue rewarding careers understand themselves and employment requirements generally, and careful career assessment helps create the platform for developing a set of skills essential to living “proactive, resilient, and functionally adaptive” work lives. Although many people “fall into jobs,” we believe from our experiences in evaluating thousands of individuals in and out of work that the road to rewarding careers can be created and need not be left to chance.

Why do career assessments?

To answer this question, we cite the work of two researchers: Dr. Amy Wrzesniewski of New York University and Dr. Edwin Locke of the University of Maryland. Wrzesniewski found that individuals experience work in one of three distinct ways:

1. As a job: the individual is primarily concerned with the financial rewards of work.
2. As a career: the individual is focused on advancing within the occupational structure.
3. As a calling: the individual works not for financial gain or career advancement, but for the sense of fulfillment that work brings.

Locke’s research shows consistently that mental challenge – assuming that one is willing to respond to the challenge – is a critical determinant of job satisfaction.

If one is only interested in work as a “job,” there is no need for a career assessment. Individuals who declare themselves satisfied with this level should be shown the charts of yearly and lifetime incomes by educational level (see Appendices A and B). After examining these charts, the individual must either be satisfied with this classification (i.e., “job”) or must be provided with motivating education. Wrzesniewski provides “paths” to finding positive meaning in work that could be used at this level.

Individuals who identify themselves with either of Wrzesniewski’s two other ways need to be provided an opportunity for a career assessment as the optimum way to achieve the career/calling. The career assessment will generally result in reaching career entry without lost time as the result of inappropriate detours and at the minimum cost to get there.

Locke’s finding that the basis of job satisfaction is a commitment to a mental challenge to achieve it is another lead into career assessment. The commitment to undertake the mental challenge leads again directly to the need to start with a career assessment.

But mental challenge alone is insufficient for the realization of job satisfaction. Most well planned vocational evaluations include aptitude and abilities testing designed to assess what mental tasks individuals can manage and further approach in terms of current and future work. Job satisfaction also involves the match of the worker’s temperament, or personality traits, with those environmental factors present in the job and workplace. Very consistently, for example, we have found that individuals who manifest warmth, compassion, and a sense of humanity prefer to work in settings that offer and/or demand nurturing and altruistic interactions with others. Those who lack warmth often feel more comfortable and successful dealing with inanimate objects. However, most people have little insight into their personality dynamics and work temperament, and if they do, they frequently misinterpret what particular jobs might offer in terms of satisfying personal tendencies or needs.

Rehabilitation counselors conduct comprehensive assessments. They are required by the CRCC [Code of Professional Ethics](#) for Rehabilitation Counselors (G.5.a.) to “carefully consider the validity, reliability, psychometric limitations, and appropriateness of instruments when selecting tests for use in given situations or with particular clients.”

Comprehensive career assessments account for an individual’s mental abilities, interests, and personal traits and attempt to match those variables with work that challenges and/or satisfies the individual on multiple levels. Again, unfortunately, most high school seniors know what they might be “interested” in doing, but few have the

benefit of knowing themselves and the world of work sufficiently to begin with good career decisions. As a result, most graduates find jobs; many stumble into careers, and some find satisfying careers; but few realize their callings.

How do high school seniors usually decide on post-secondary direction?

There are clearly identifiable directions that seniors take in their post-secondary lives. Those directions include:

1. Inertia: Students do nothing about their lives after high school. They simply determine one day after graduation to apply for a job, usually entry level at minimum wage (or enroll in some educational/training program) and thereby set their futures.
2. Peer emulation: Students are influenced to follow selected peers. This might be either entry into education/training or simply into employment. When the chosen direction is into college or technical training, these students are generally in pursuit of an inappropriate career. If they enroll in college, they frequently do not choose majors until they are required to do so after the first year of matriculation. (It should be noted that a deferred choice of major can be a productive strategy since it provides more time and exposure to what may be an appropriate career.)
3. Personal choice: Individual choices made on personal experiences. Students become wedded to some direction for personal reasons, as opposed to peer pressure, and doggedly pursue that direction.
4. Quality career assessment: Students who avail themselves of career assessment opportunities have distinct advantages over those who do not.

Teacher/Counselor recommendations: Students follow the recommendations of a teacher or guidance counselor. These recommendations should be comprehensive assessments that include results of aptitude tests and measures of temperament, but frequently they include only interest inventories (preferences) and an over-reliance on classroom performance records. (The recommendations of parents are less often accepted by a son or daughter as a matter of rebellion against anything suggested by parents.)

In terms of counselor recommendations, a new issue is emerging. With armed services recruiters visiting schools and aggressively recruiting, there is significant concern within the guidance counseling profession that counselors remain neutral in terms of advising students on enlistment.

One of the ironies of this issue is that military recruiters have one of the better career assessment tools available anywhere. The measure is called the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The ASVAB is the most widely used multiple aptitude test battery in the world. It is designed to predict future academic and occupational success. Students who take the battery are not required to enlist in the military. When a student opts to take the battery, the counselor receives a copy of the results. In sum, students who take the ASVAB receive their scores in terms of their occupational and military proclivities. All high school students who choose not to take the ASVAB are disadvantaged in respect to knowledge about their vocational futures, unless they have the opportunity to take part in some other career assessment.

The issue of aggressive recruitment is not specifically germane to the present concern about career assessment, but the idea of advising students to follow any post-secondary career that is not derived from a valid career assessment is risky, if not pernicious. It remains ironic that students who do not take the ASVAB tend to be disadvantaged in comparison to those who do because they do not receive the same comprehensive aptitude battery to help with career assessment.

What are the advantages of Career Assessment?

Research shows that:

- 31% of college entrants drop out before they complete their first semester.
- Over 50% of all college students make at least one change in their college major during the course of their studies.
- 25% of freshmen leave their first college to attend another school by sophomore year, many reporting that their needs are not being met.

- College is recommended to some students for whom a different post-high school experience would be more appropriate, while other students are discouraged from attending college even though it would be an appropriate choice.
- Students who know what they want to pursue occupationally are more successful in college than those who do not have a career direction are.

What can be done to assist high school students to maximize their career direction?

The primary objective of career assessment is to prepare for life after basic education is achieved. CEC Associates' experience with clients in a vocational rehabilitation setting is that workplace injuries equate to low self-esteem and lack of motivation. A too-frequent characteristic present in those who are in vocational rehabilitation is that they are heavily invested in the "money economy" as opposed to the "satisfaction economy," as postulated by Seligman in *Authentic Happiness*. ("Our economy is rapidly changing from a money economy to a satisfaction economy.") The issue as described by, especially, Seligman and Wrzesniewski is moving from a "job" to a more meaningful work-life experience. Wrzesniewski defines the "job" as a reality where:

"The nature of work itself may hold little interest, pleasure, or fulfillment. Since the primary concern is the wage, if there is a decrease in pay or if a higher paying job opens up, they [the job holders] are quick to drop the job and move on."

Career assessment should not be equated with the desire to achieve upward mobility. To establish a basis for the world of work, young adults should be encouraged to take an active role in a developmental process that can lead to a maximized level of satisfaction. Students should be given an opportunity to:

- Invest effort in career exploration to preclude making expensive curriculum or school changes later. Changing a major or trade is extremely costly.
- Examine the potential outcomes of a quality career assessment in terms of opportunities, avoiding frustration, and saving time and money.
- Determine what to major in before examining the range of schools that can provide that major most effectively/efficiently.
- Appreciate one's skills, abilities, interests, and self as a basis for making informed decisions.
- Understand that job/career choices should be based on preference and suitability.
- Realize that job availability after college or trade school may be a primary consideration in the developmental process.

Career Assessment: Lapan's theories of career development across K through 16 years

Richard Lapan of the University of Missouri-Columbus has developed a rationale (sometimes called an *agentic* approach) for the career assessment that evolves like this:

1. Young people should develop an approach to the present and future that is:

- proactive
- resilient
- functionally adaptive

2. This approach requires young people to be able to:

- interact with a clear sense of purpose and direction
- orient themselves to valued opportunities and choices
- act in agentic and empowered ways
- exhibit a mature commitment to a self-defined direction
- be hopeful, motivated, and optimistic about the present and their future
- persevere and overcome obstacles

- be creative and curious
- balance an ability to be entrepreneurial with the need to care for others and the environment

3. Six primary constructs that promote either growth or constriction in choosing a future career include:

- positive expectations, including self-efficacy beliefs and attributions
- identity development through the interrelated processes of career exploration and goal formation
- an enhanced understanding of oneself, the world of work, and how best to fit or match this self-understanding to occupational possibilities
- the pursuit of one's intrinsic interests and preferences
- the ability to achieve academically and become a self-regulated, lifelong learner
- the use in one's everyday interactions with others of a range of complex social skills and work-readiness behaviors

The essential piece in the transition from high school to post-secondary education/ training is the application of positive psychology principles to the process. Seligman's concept of positive psychology has grown from theories that emphasize positive prevention and optimism as opposed to negative thinking and a focus on pathology and dysfunction. The career assessment is predicated on a positive embrace of the future and is a crucial component of it.

Survey of recent college graduates as new employees

CEC employs college graduates as Vocational Evaluation professionals. In a survey of these young professionals, CEC found that:

- The most frequently given reason for what the employees wanted if they were to consider themselves in a "rewarding career" was the opportunity to "learn more and upgrade their skills."
- Next to the "learning" opportunity as a prime contributor to a "rewarding career" was the opportunity to "advance and grow."
- As for desirable "traits" one needs to have a "rewarding career," the respondents cited "hard work/determination" as the most important.
- A "positive attitude" and "motivation/willingness to learn" were tied, after the "hard work/determination" trait, as the next most important traits to have as per survey results.

Differences between young professionals pursuing "careers" and workers in "jobs"

Simply citing the difference between the perceptions and beliefs of workers in "jobs" and those who pursue "careers," and preferably "callings," is not meaningful. What is important to note is that individuals who persist in terms of their preparation for a career identify worker traits and behaviors that are too often anathema to those who enter vocational rehabilitation because they have been occupationally dysfunctional prior to the onset of a job-ending injury or event. Too often, those dysfunctional workers fit into Wrzesniewski's "job" classification. We propose that *a career assessment performed effectively and in a timely manner can increase the number of workers finding "careers" and "callings" and thereby reduce the number of people who fall into the "jobs" classification.*

As with any single or short-term intervention, comprehensive career assessment is not a panacea, but it can serve as a road map, a much-needed guide to increasing the likelihood of optimal life experience through future work. Without such a road map, young people run the risk of becoming lost by simply "falling into something," only to realize later that they are truly unhappy in their work. Occupational inertia, the tendency to be stuck in a job, can be devastating to both the individual and to the economy that thrives on hard work, commitment, dedication, innovation, and creativity. When there is so little time and so much of it is spent at work, job satisfaction and happiness through work need not be left to chance.

It should also be pointed out that the young professionals we surveyed see themselves primarily as pursuing a "career," not a "calling." However, that aspect of Wrzesniewski's research is not relevant to the career

assessment issue. Career assessment is an important step in ultimately gaining a “career” and perhaps discovering a “calling.”

There are times when a case manager may be required to advocate for a client within the discipline of career guidance. The CCMC has defined case management as, “*The practice of case management is a professional and collaborative process that assesses, plans, implements, coordinates, monitors, and evaluates the options and services required to meet an individual’s health needs. It uses communication and available resources to promote health, quality, and cost-effective outcomes in support of the “Triple Aim,” of improving the experience of care, improving the health of populations, and reducing per capita costs of health care,*” according to its [Code of Professional Conduct](#).

In reality, most professional vocational rehabilitation counselors see themselves as having to go back to that time in the reluctant client’s maturation process and now induce the career assessment that was not previously available to the often troubled worker. “Rehabilitation evaluations,” the primary process used by vocational rehabilitation counselors, are in essence “career assessments.” Disability management services, according to The CDMS [Code of Professional Conduct](#), are defined as:

The prevention and minimization of the human and economic impact of illness and disability for the employee/employer to optimize the quality of care, productivity, organizational health, and regulatory compliance. The goal of disability management is to provide necessary services, using appropriate resources in order to promote the ill or injured individual’s maximum recovery and function. Disability management services include the following activities: case management disability assessment and evaluation; return-to-work intervention; labor market analysis; career exploration and counseling; and reporting (plan development and report preparation).

Clearly, disability management services also include “career assessments.” Perhaps it would be wise for parents, teachers, counselors, and educators in general to recognize the power of pro-activity and prevention in the career development process. Habilitation, the process of making one capable, is much less costly than rehabilitation.

Conclusion

Career assessment is an important step to gaining a career. Our experience in vocational evaluation and rehabilitation has led us to believe that productive and satisfied workers have been privy to a developmental process that includes, to a considerable degree, elements of “positive psychology” and “flow” and that they have experienced in an appropriate education, one that includes careful career planning. Timely and competent career assessment is a critical tool in the development and future well-being of the adolescent. In vocational rehabilitation of troubled workers, that tool, the vocational evaluation, is often the corrective for the absence of a timely career assessment.

Give Feedback, Not Criticism

Jasen Walker, Ed.D, C.R.C, C.C.M.

Interpersonal communications are the keystone of all relationships, both at home and at work. Communications are especially critical in small businesses where fewer people are more closely linked.

At work, we may all find ourselves in the position of sending message to others: the boss, managers, and colleagues alike. These messages are frequently negative in that we are trying to convey the unacceptability of a certain behavior. Frequently, we send such messages in the form of criticism, or "put-downs," because most of us have learned to use criticism as a tool to modify (or attempt to modify) another's behavior.

Criticism, however, generally produces resistance to change and, as a result, defeats the very purpose for which it is intended. In other words, criticism is seldom constructive. In fact, "constructive criticism" is truly rare: it might, indeed, be thought of as a contradiction in terms. Let's look first at some thoughts about criticism. I will then suggest some methods for increasing constructive communications –not criticism – in the workplace.

Constructive communication is important to establishing a professional environment. Both rehabilitation counselors and disability management specialists are held to particular professional standards by their respective codes of ethics. Per the CRCC [Code of Professional Ethics](#) for Rehabilitation Counselors (H.3.a.):

Rehabilitation counselor supervisors or educators clearly define and maintain ethical professional, personal, and social relationships with their supervisees or trainees. Rehabilitation counselor supervisors or educators avoid nonprofessional relationships with current supervisees or trainees. If rehabilitation counselor supervisor or educators much assume other professional roles (e.g., clinical and/or administrative supervisors, instructors) with supervisees or trainees, they work to minimize potential conflicts and explain to supervisees or trainees the expectations and responsibilities associated with each role. They do not engage in any form of nonprofessional interactions that may compromise the supervisory role.

The CDMS [Code of Professional Conduct](#) states (RPC 1.21.c), "A certificant who is responsible for the supervision of an applicant or another certificant will conduct themselves in a professional manner." According to the CCMC [Code of Professional Conduct](#) (Principle 4), "Board-Certified Case Managers (CCMs) will act with integrity and fidelity with clients and others."

The "I" Message

Dr. Thomas Gordon, in his books *Leadership Effectiveness Training* and *Teacher Effectiveness Training*, tells us that critical messages are heavily loaded with negative judgments. They chip away at the recipient's self-esteem, damage the relationship, and cause defensive responses in the receiver of fault-finding messages.

The person who is being criticized tends to focus attention on how to make such defensive responses. The result is that the behavioral alternatives we would like that person to consider are quickly lost in this defensiveness. An employee, for example, hearing your critical message, will inevitably think: "There's something wrong with me (or you), otherwise you wouldn't be causing me this problem."

Gordon goes on to suggest that critical messages are also often *dishonest* because of the manner in which we "code" them. We criticize because another person's behavior causes us a problem. However, we do not report that we have a problem. Instead, Gordon points out, we send a "you" message: "You are always the one who is late for meetings. You are so irresponsible."

Gordon advises that we must "own" the fact that we have a problem with this person's tardiness and send an "I" message: "When you are late for meetings, I become annoyed and anxious because I do not want to start the meeting without you, and yet, the others who are on time should not be delayed or inconvenienced. This conflict annoys me and wastes my time."

As you can see, verbal criticism, such as labeling, name-calling, or judging, is generally at the core of "you" messages. This is dishonest communication because the sender of the message is shifting the ownership of the problem to the receiver. In fact, it is the sender who owns the problem that results from the other's behavior. In your position as a boss, it is to your benefit to find ways of sending "I" messages.

Gossamer Threads

Dr. Sidney Simon, a humanistic educator, has said that our relationships are held together with "gossamer threads." Each of us is connected to those who are important to us with a light, delicate, yet resilient fiber. Real gossamer threads, of course, are film-like webs that can support significantly more weight than the spider that weaves them.

In our relationships, criticism moves quickly along the web as a wave of shocks and vibrations. What's more, the shock wave is returned to the sender of critical messages, who often feels guilty and less worthy. Resentment flows along the threads from receivers to senders of put-down messages. Eventually, with enough criticism, the threads that tie us together can be irreparably damaged. With enough criticism, the connecting webs are broken and communications ceases.

In the workplace, you are an important person to your employees. They look to you for appreciation and support. They hope to be recognized for a job well done. When criticism is given, the gossamer threads that hold together work relationships are stressed and damaged. Employees feel mistrust, resentment, and alienation, and there is little reason to wonder why worker motivation and on-the-job morale might suffer.

The Value of Feedback

It is apparent that all of us would benefit from re-thinking and re-conceptualizing the nature and purpose of criticism. First, of course, we must accept that learning, task-orientation, and productivity will inevitably require communication about the quality and/or quantity of work performed. *To keep productivity and worker motivation high, however, you must avoid the traditional pitfalls of criticism that intend to advise, instruct, correct, and provide solutions.* Instead, when employee behavior is unacceptable, you would do well to reconsider criticism in terms of feedback.

Feedback differentiates between put-down messages and those that help employees better understand how their unacceptable behavior is designed to do three things:

- Let the employee know the specific behavior that is unacceptable.
- State how the unacceptable behavior tangibly interferes with getting the job done.
- Express how you feel, both about the unacceptable behavior and the inability to get the work done.

Remember the previous example of an "I" message? Such messages do not have to be perfect; no matter how carefully constructed, they, too, will cause an emotional reaction in the receiver, and you must be prepared to listen carefully to the other's response. Nevertheless, "I" messages are effective because they let the receiver know you are willing to assume your responsibility in the relationship.

When it is necessary to give feedback about another's behavior, try to do it immediately, if at all possible. When you store up negative feedback and your associated feelings, the situation is likely to erupt at a later time, thus risking more damage to the relationship. However, you would also do well to sensitize yourself to the other's readiness to receive feedback. No one needs a feedback session when he is having a bad day.

Some How-Tos

Let me suggest some methods for increasing constructive communications in the workplace.

1. Establish and adhere to criteria for giving negative feedback.

Focus on specific behavior in a non-blameful manner. Do not attach personality traits or use judgmental terms such as "irresponsible," "thoughtless," "stupid," etc.

"Own" the problem by stating how the behavior affects you; avoid sending the other person a "you" message. Instead, begin with "I" and state specifically and descriptively what you observe in the other person's behavior.

Be around to pick up the pieces. That is, be willing to listen actively to the response your message will no doubt elicit from the recipient of your feedback.

Finally, if the other person has heard this feedback several times before, then this should tell you the relationship is either too poor to foster helpful change or the other person derives some gratification in continuing to behave the way you find unacceptable. If the latter is the case, and it likely is, sit down and discuss your individual needs. In other words, problem-solve.

2. Process feedback with a third party before delivering it.

Before delivering negative feedback, check it out by discussing it with a third party. It is not necessary to divulge the name of the person with whom you have a problem. Do not use this review as a chance to gossip. Such discussions with a neutral party will usually help you sort out the problem and deliver a better message.

3. Have a third party present.

With the permission of the receiver, have a third party present. The receiver may wish to choose the third party, but agree that this person should remain neutral. A third person serves to keep the message sender careful in the manner in which he or she communicates feedback.

4. Schedule validation time.

On a weekly basis, roam around your office and find someone doing things correctly. Tell them about it.

5. Utilize validation envelopes.

Have everyone in your business tack an envelope with their name on it to the wall of an accessible spot –the break room, for example. Let all your employees know they are encouraged to slip notes into the envelopes of individuals who have done something they appreciate. Validation envelopes allow everyone to communicate recognition, appreciation, and/or gratitude for the day-to-day acts of productivity and kindness that might otherwise seem taken for granted. Moreover, they allow statements of appreciation to be shared in all directions, not just from the top down.

6. Know the difference between validation and praise.

Validation is sincere statement of appreciation for an act of another. Praise, on the other hand, is given to manipulate others and reinforce behavior. It is designed by the sender to control outcomes. Pure validation has no purpose other than to express gratitude and appreciation.

You may get resistance to these ideas at first, but gently encourage their use. You will be surprised at what happens when you continue to deliver carefully constructed feedback, appreciate and validate rather than praise, and establish mechanisms by which both feedback and validation can be sent and received.

Human Ways to Make the New Technologies Work: Observations of Electronic and Telephonic Communication in Disability Management and the Workplace

Jasen Walker, Ed.D., C.R.C., C.C.M

Preamble

More than a year ago this past February, I began my morning drive to work approximately one hour after the office opened. It is a 15-minute drive over the back mountain, which separates my home and the office in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where my colleagues and I have provided disability evaluation and case management services for more than 30 years. When we launched the company in 1983, private sector rehabilitation was developing rapidly, but desktop computers were in their infancy. Cellular technology had yet to evolve, in part, because of FCC bureaucratic hemming and hawing. Key punch operators entered billing data, and the few car phones that existed had not yet become wireless.

From prior experiences, Esther Weiss, a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Case Manager, and I anticipated that organizations could establish proactive return-to-work programs and, by utilizing effective case management, reduce costs and enhance morale by bringing most injured employees back to legitimate work in a timely fashion. From the advent of our entrepreneurial effort, we were convinced that regardless of technological advancement, human interaction would remain the key to preventing injuries, solving problems related to lost time and absenteeism, and successfully managing disability at an organizational level. We believed and still do believe that disability management requires teamwork and effective interpersonal communication. With these concepts in mind, we created the company slogan, "Human Ways to Make the New Technologies Work."

February in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania is no longer as frigid as it was in 1777 and 1778, the winter the Continental Army camped there. However, that is probably a result of global warming, a significant problem that I bring to the attention of staff members, who average about 35 years old. I often stay home during the morning to execute paperwork. This allows the staff to settle in, have a morning meeting if one is scheduled, and essentially get their workday started. So driving to the office an hour late is a ritual, and occasionally, in transit, I will receive a text message or an e-mail from my administrative assistant regarding last-minute changes in my schedule.

On this particular day, Valley Forge was apparently freezing. I didn't realize it until I reached the crest of the mountain and saw that it had snowed. As I white-knuckled the car toward the office, the reduction in elevation signaled relief as snow on the ground disappeared. I relaxed as the roadway turned into office macadam, and I pulled into my designated parking spot. I was fortunate because that day, my spot was empty. (Nowadays, people tend to ignore signs. Frequently, some visitor to the next-door business occupies my parking spot. With such ignorance of signage, the Continental Army never could have found the right location to cross the Delaware River and surprise the Hessians in Trenton, New Jersey in 1776. Oh my, how things can change.)

Of our 15 staff members, the majority is a combination of millennials (younger than 32) and Gen Xers (33 to 46). It seems to mean that I and only one other staff member are the baby boomers or matures (greater than 60). This observation is noteworthy, in part, because it has become painfully obvious to me that those of us from different generations tend to choose different methods of communication, both intra-office and with customers and clients. I still prefer face-to-face interaction, particularly in urgent matters, and if that is impossible, I can still "dial" a phone. Others primarily send text messages or e-mails, automatically selecting electronic communication even before considering the telephone.

I shifted my 1994 Camaro into park and turned off the ignition. Why shouldn't an executive drive an old car? It has only 32,000 miles on it, and most of the millennials have never seen a 1994 Z28!

I grabbed my neatly stacked paperwork from the passenger seat, made sure my loose materials (I still write on paper, but only recycled stock) were secure under my right arm, and automatically pushed open the door with my left arm. I attempted to exit the car in a normal, more or less instinctive fashion, and as soon as I put my foot down to stand up, my entire body seemed to eject from the car. I landed hard on my left side with my leg bent

underneath me as papers flew in the winter wind. I felt an excruciating jolt of pain in my knee and for the first time in memory, I experienced a most common consequence of attempting to stand on black ice.

Still shocked, I remained on the ground with the blue sky above until I realized that the ice beneath me was quickly melting through my pants. I got up with due caution and ample “executive” embarrassment and limped slowly into the office. I entered through the back door of our chalet-like office building and, one step at a time, climbed the stairs to my office. Yes, I even have an office in the second-story penthouse. How is that for traditional and presumptuous, if not rigid and aloof? I settled myself and turned on my Blackberry, which promptly beeped to tell me that I had received a text message. The message was from a staff member: “Careful coming to work...there is black ice in the parking lot.”

The Issue

Thirty years ago, in 1982, the year after IBM introduced the PC to the business world, John Naisbitt wrote in *Megatrends*, “We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge.” Naisbitt would later declare in *High Tech, High Touch* that we live in a “technologically intoxicated zone,” the symptoms of which include a continual search for quick fixes and lives that are “distanced and distracted.” Naisbitt’s high touch, on the other hand, is the stuff we give up when we are tuned in to the technological world: hope, fear, longing, love, forgiveness, nature, and spirituality. Naisbitt concludes that if progress is to be meaningful, high tech and high touch must be the “conscious integration of technology into our lives.”

I often coach and teach with metaphors. More than once I have challenged a staff member regarding his or her lack of responsiveness to an urgent problem: “There is a rattlesnake in your closet. How would you like to be told—with an e-mail or a text message?” Sometimes the staffer gets it, and sometimes he or she does not.

Another coaching method that I frequently use is directing staff members, particularly new staff members, including interns, to finish “I learned...” statements. Thoughtful completion of “I learned...” sentence stems reinforces new behaviors and sheds light on what an individual perceives as valuable or essential from a new work experience. These statements can be used in further coaching and development. We recently employed a very bright college intern; yes, employed. We actually pay our college interns. The intern wrote, “I learned that speaking on the phone was not as stressful as I thought.”

Sherry Turkle, Ph.D., is a professor of the social studies of science and technology at MIT. In her 2011 book, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Turkle writes:

The idea of sociable robots suggests that we might navigate intimacy by skirting it. People seem comforted by the belief that if we alienate or fail each other, robots will be there, programmed to provide simulations of love. Our population is aging; there will be robots to take care of us. Our children are neglected; robots will tend to them. We are too exhausted to deal with each other in adversity; robots will have the energy. Robots won't be judgmental. We will be accommodated. An older woman says of her robot dog, “It is better than a real dog. . . . It won't do dangerous things, and it won't betray you. . . . Also, it won't die suddenly and abandon you and make you very sad.”

Turkle adds:

But this is not a book about robots. Rather, it is about how we are changed as technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to-face. We are offered robots and a whole world of machine-mediated relationships on networked devices. As we instant-message, e-mail, text, and Twitter, technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude. We talk of getting “rid” of our e-mails, as though these notes are so much excess baggage. Teenagers avoid making telephone calls, fearful that they “reveal too much.” They would rather text than talk.

Of course, this may sound like an extreme consequence of technological change in communication and human interaction, but Turkle is not panicked by her observations of electronic and robotic advancement. She calls on us to put these new technologies into place. She warns us about “technological promiscuity” and reminds us that we should not forget to “work together.”

Thirty years have passed since we fashioned the slogan, “Human Ways to Make the New Technologies Work.” We did not fully realize how prophetic we might be, not only for referencing methods of conducting occupational disability management, but for carrying out any other form of business as well. Today, we stand with Naisbitt and Turkle when they call for the injection of hope into business interactions, recognizing that we dare not eliminate the “high touch” from the high tech approach. Rather, we choose to “invoke the wonders of science,” to borrow a phrase from John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and appreciate that technology is a tool that we choose to use when appropriate. At the same time, we need to maintain our core values of authenticity, respect, and interpersonal connectedness. We are still learning how to employ the gift of communication technology without compromising those values.

Many years ago, as a counseling psychologist in graduate training, I was persuaded by observing videotapes of one-on-one counseling sessions, and through participating directly in relationship-building exercises, that interpersonal empathy could lead to trust and intimacy. By listening to another’s story and verbally and nonverbally expressing understanding with good eye contact and appropriate posturing and gesturing, one could encourage another to share himself or herself more deeply and authentically.

Thomas Gordon, Ph.D., the key innovator and proponent of so-called “Active Listening,” would go on to influence and train millions of business people around the globe in *Leader Effectiveness Training*, a model of interpersonal relationship building that became a hugely successful guide for parents, teachers, and business leaders. Gordon sold more than 6 million copies of his text (now translated into 32 languages), which explains the art of fully listening to another.

Another art, the “Healer’s Art,” is a college-level course based on the work of Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., a nationally recognized medical reformer and educator. Remen created her course to explore the art of medicine with medical students at the University of Minnesota Medical School’s Duluth campus. The course leads students into a dialogue about what, *beyond science and technology*, they as physicians will be able to offer patients. The course is designed to give students a chance to discuss topics that often are not covered in medical school—the importance of listening, how to deal with grief and loss, how to handle situations in which they as physicians may not have an answer, and how to continue to find meaning and fulfillment in their work. Approximately 60 medical schools in the United States and elsewhere have now incorporated their own version of the “Healer’s Art” into their offerings. On the Duluth campus, they have taught the course since 2003, and students have received it enthusiastically, according to Jennifer Pearson, M.D., an assistant clinical professor at the Medical School.

Listening to others in classrooms, medical offices, and business settings is as important as listening in any setting where human relationships matter. Human relationships *do* matter, and they especially matter in the stressful encounters associated with disability case management. One must wonder if our fascination and reliance upon electronic technology will result in our collective loss of listening as an essential skill in human relations. Naisbitt, Turkle, Gordon, Remen, and countless others tell us that high technology is not a substitute for human connection.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, after a decade of computerization, insurance companies and self-insured employers began to realize the cost of private sector rehabilitation and the increasing expenditures of returning injured employees to gainful employment. Numerous regional and national companies offered workers’ compensation carriers the services of healthcare coordination and case management, as well as vocational rehabilitation, particularly in lost-time claims. Initially sold as a sound business policy, private sector rehabilitation in the workers’ compensation system eventually became a target of blame for increasing costs in many jurisdictions throughout the nation. In a 1992 article, Douglas Stevenson, the executive director of the National Council of Self-Insurers, reflected the concerns of employers and their insurance carriers: “Workers’ compensation, as we know it, has provided invaluable benefits to millions of persons in need. But, the system as we have known it is not what is currently evolving. Its soaring cost is breaking the system; once it breaks, legislators will face a severe scramble for whatever can replace it.”

Increasing costs led to radical changes in state workers’ compensation rules and regulations, as Stevenson had predicted. In Pennsylvania workers’ compensation, for example, the proposed changes were offered to lawmakers in writing by a lobbyist representing a group of businessmen who had decided to start their own cost

containment company. In order to survive, existing private sector rehabilitation and cost containment providers began marketing the value (and supposed merit) of “telephonic case management.”

However, telephonic case management has probably never been as effective as face-to-face case management in catastrophic injury cases or in complex disability claims in which psychosocial dynamics complicate the prognosis for recovery and a return to work. Direct interpersonal contact among the case management professional, injured worker, employer, and healthcare provider almost always requires a team approach in creating the collaboration necessary to both contain costs and move a case along to a fair and appropriate resolution. Attempting to coordinate the healthcare of an injured worker who may have motives other than a return to work requires person-to-person contact. According to one case management company’s website, ensuring “appropriate treatment and return-to-work plans” is the goal, and to attempt to do so through telephonic and electronic means may be a misuse of technology and perhaps a compromise of good case management and healthcare standards.

Telephonic and Electronic Case Management

From the beginning of the rehabilitation and healthcare coordination processes, providers of case management services have looked for methods to expedite the recovery processes while controlling costs. One method has become the coordination and management by rehabilitation and healthcare personnel employing the telephone to contact and “move” the patient from a medical event to recovery. Obviously this process seems, at first blush, more cost effective than conducting one-on-one case management sessions with the patient and other concerned parties through travel and in-person meetings.

What is important in assessing the telephonic case management process is to determine the purpose for which it is best utilized. Example objectives include:

- set appointments
- follow-up on whether medical and other appointments were kept
- follow-up on whether essential insurance forms were completed
- check on patient non-medical needs
- coordinate admission and discharge

Telephonic case management may be the appropriate and preferred method when the task is to set appointments, for example. However, if the telephone is used to go beyond such administrative-like functions to assess medical and/or occupational rehabilitation needs and to identify barriers to treatment that will expedite recovery, telephonic and electronic case management likely far exceeds its appropriateness.

A recent (March 2012) employment advertisement for case management positions posted on the Internet by one of the country’s largest insurance carriers reads in part:

As a Case Manager you will provide telephonic guidance and support to members, families, caregivers, physicians and other health care providers to facilitate the best options to meet an individual’s health care needs.

In the first part of the job description, the insurance carrier is careful to suggest “guidance and support.” These uses are, at face value, *potentially* acceptable as case management functions via the telephone.

However, when the advertisement continues with “to facilitate the best options to meet an individual’s health care needs,” the duties of the case manager probably go beyond what can be accomplished on the telephone. In my opinion, this is what is happening in the real world of case management, and in particular situations, it represents an inadequate way to conduct those services effectively.

The Case Management Society of America (CMSA) updates the use of telephone technology as a means of communicating with patients and other relevant constituents by using “laptops, tablets, and smartphones.” It is appropriate to point out that each of these methods/devices plays an increasing role in the professional conduction of case management and will continue to do so in the future. Nevertheless, these technologies

should not and will not, in the final analysis, adequately or ethically replace certified and skilled case management practitioners actually meeting and interpersonally communicating with injured or ill people, family members, physicians, employers, and other stakeholders in the disability claim and rehabilitation processes.

Would anyone reading this article be satisfied if a visiting nurse assessed their elderly mother's or grandmother's needs over the telephone and then e-mailed the assessment results to you? My geriatric mother can hardly hear over the telephone. Obviously, an elderly individual's hearing capabilities are not the only critical issue that might be considered when discovering and assessing the recovery facilitators and barriers in a case management encounter. How does one properly determine an injured worker's willingness or ability to follow a physician's orders for medication intake, to carry out home exercise, or to function independently, free of the potential influences of family members and others who may wish to consciously or unconsciously undermine the rehabilitation and return-to-work objectives?

Although telephonic case management in occupational injury claims generates revenue for the organizations that sell it, telephonic case management, in some cases, does little to reduce overall costs when the desired outcomes are reduced medical expenditures and a timely return to work. Telephonic and electronic communications may serve administrative purposes, but facilitating healthy decisions and behavior changes inevitably requires face-to-face, open interpersonal communication among stakeholders who often have different agendas in recovery from injury or illness. In multiple papers and presentations, I have described injured worker helplessness and the potent effects of others' agendas on an injured or ill employee's motivation to return to work.

Recognizing its implications, codes of conduct for rehabilitation counselors and disability management specialists address the weaknesses of electronic communication as it relates to providing care and services. The Certification of Disability Management Specialists (CDMS) Commission, for example, in its [Code of Professional Conduct](#), defines the goal of disability management: "to provide necessary services, using *appropriate resources* [emphasis added] in order to promote the ill or injured individual's maximum recovery and function." The CDMS Code goes on to define "electronic technology," noting the "growing concern" regarding various electronic devices and tools "because of their vulnerability."

More explicitly, the [Code of Professional Ethics](#) for Rehabilitation Counselors references "Problematic Use of the Internet." The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification states that rehabilitation counselors are aware of behavioral differences with the use of the Internet and/or methods of electronic communication and the impact these may have on the counseling process. That statement alone reveals that there is a difference between direct, interpersonal face-to-face communication and the type of distant contact that takes place either electronically or telephonically.

With the multiple changes within the healthcare industry, most providers are now using electronic modes of communication instead of paper. It is important for the integrity of information that certain standards be upheld, including being HIPAA compliant. The Commission for Case Manager Certification [Code of Professional Conduct](#) provides standards for electronic media (S16). The Code states:

Board-Certified Case Managers (CCMs) will be knowledgeable about, and comply with, the legal requirements for privacy, confidentiality and security of the transmission and use of electronic health information. Board-Certified Case Managers (CCMs) will be accurate, honest, and unbiased in reporting the results of their professional activities to appropriate third parties.

Doing Good Work

In a case management training curriculum, it should be mandatory for healthcare coordination and rehabilitation professionals to read the 2001 book, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet*. In attempting to reduce the import of the book to a kernel, the authors Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon state: "Doing good work feels good." This particular sentence is followed with:

Few things in life are as enjoyable as when we concentrate on a difficult task, using all our skills, knowing what has to be done. And, contrary to popular opinion, these highly enjoyable moments ... occur more often on the job than in leisure time.

Since professionals in occupational rehabilitation are dedicated to improving the well being of employees, one of the integral components of the position is to assist employees who have been absent due to temporarily disabling illness or injury to return to work as soon as possible. To accomplish the return to work, rehabilitation professionals are taught to conduct “case management” functions. Too frequently, case management as a method of disability management in the workplace has come to mean looking for expedient ways to return the displaced employee to work or simply terminating their claims while limiting the expenses of doing so.

One way many insurance carriers and some employers have attempted to achieve these goals is to use watered-down methods of case management. Ethical standards are sometimes misinterpreted to accomplish fast-track and cost-saving approaches, and technological innovations may be invoked to save costs, but at the risk of jeopardizing quality service. What is more, electronic and telephonic case management may have become the first choice, perhaps the only choice, of inexperienced case managers and newer case management companies assigned with the responsibility of facilitating optimal recovery and timely return to work.

Over the years, I have learned that one of the threats to both effective interpersonal relationships, whether in business or healthcare, is the overreliance upon and misuse of technology in communication. Turkle writes in *Alone Together*, “Technology promises to let us do anything from anywhere with anyone but it also drains us as we try to do everything everywhere.”

My hope is that our core business and human values, along with our continuing good intentions, will remind us to judiciously delegate specific tasks to technology, but not to abdicate the responsibility for directly and interpersonally carrying out other critical tasks that require interpersonal contact. It is imperative that we appropriately maintain our relationships with others through authentic, congruent face-to-face communications so as to produce greater trust and precision in our good work together. As practitioners, particularly in healthcare and the allied helping professions, we will likely always need human ways to make the new technologies work.

At the end of a long day, I get back into my 1994 Camaro and start the engine. As I let it warm up, I turn on the radio. The speaker crackles (broken years ago when I overpowered it with the Rolling Stones’ “Satisfaction”). The announcer on KYW News AM radio talks of the “Arab Spring” that is sweeping through Tunisia, into Libya, and across Egypt. The man on the radio declares how handheld technology has been critical in establishing contact among those youthful rebels who yearn for freedom: “Without cellular technology, insurgents could not contact each other and inform the world media of their....” I then think to myself—the only way people in North Africa and the Middle East will ever realize a peaceful resolution to their conflicts is if they get to the point where they sit down, face-to-face, and communicate.