SOFT SKILLS

SOME SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Curriculum and Instructional Materials Center
Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education
www.okcimc.com

Soft skills include skills in communication, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving, leadership, interpersonal relationships, and professionalism, among others. Developing these skills in students and employees is important; surveys of employers indicate that soft skills are often vital in securing entry-level employment and in being successful in the workplace. As a manager, I am always looking for resources that may be useful in my work. This is a list of some that you may find useful, too.

— Craig Maile, Manager, Curriculum and Instructional Materials Center

The Importance of Soft Skills in Entry-Level Employment and Postsecondary Success: Perspectives from Employers and Community Colleges

This 2013 report from the Seattle Jobs Initiative summarizes the results of a national study of more than 400 employers. In addition to defining the soft skills of interest to employers, the report presents these conclusions:

- Soft skills are at least as critical as technical skills to entry-level employment.
- For employers, not all soft skills are equal.
- Employers report many key soft skills lacking in job applicants.
- Value of soft skills varies by industry sector.
- Community colleges and employers vary in soft skills deemed most critical and most lacking.
- Employers see only limited role for themselves in soft skills development.

"I really like this report. The results data is well organized and is summarized according to specific conclusions. Also, there are multiple tables that sort the results into a useful framework for educators to use in structuring course content and in refocusing on new priorities. For example, there is a table of soft skills organized into priority tiers according to employer response averages."—Craig

Government of Alberta (Canada) Human Services
http://alis.alberta.ca

This website offers a number of full-color publications free to download, including some that are fillable-PDF workbooks. Titles include the following:

- *Job Smart: Tips for staying employed*
- *Let's Talk: a guide for resolving workplace conflicts*
- *Creating a New Future: The Job-Loss Workbook*
- *Positive Works II* (a workbook to help individuals enhance their positive beliefs, attitudes, and skills)
- *Workability: What You Need to Get & Keep a Job*
- *Work Search Basics*

"These publications from different provinces and agencies in Canada are usually very well designed. They use color and graphic design to capture the user's attention."—Craig
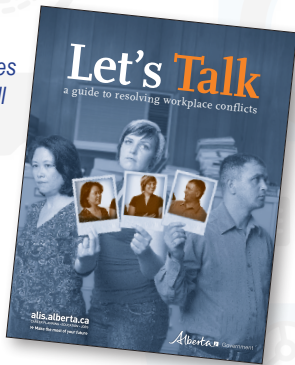
Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor

www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/

The ODEP office provides a free, 142-page set of activities to download titled, *Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success*. Activities are categorized as Communication, Teamwork, Enthusiasm & Attitude, Networking, Problem Solving & Critical Thinking, and Professionalism.
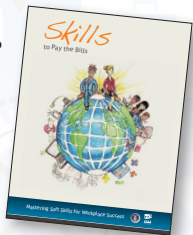
Center for Creative Leadership

www.ccl.org

The CCL website includes a number of articles and knowledge resources that are free to download, including brief white papers on topics such as the following:

- *Using Political Skill to Maximize and Leverage Work Relationships*
- *Developing Network Perspective: Understanding the Basics of Social Networks and their Role in Leadership*
- *The Irony of Integrity: A Study of the Character Strengths of Leaders*
- *Women and Political Savvy: How to build and embrace a fundamental leadership skill*

> *"These white papers are not so much research summaries as blueprints for taking action. That's why I like them. A student or employee can spend a few minutes reading one of these and, at the same time, build a skill that employers will value."—Craig*

Tools for Leadership and Learning: Building a Learning Organization

http://managers-gestionnaires.gc.ca/documents/toolkit_e.pdf

A free, 109-page publication of the National Managers' Community of Canada, that provides tools and practices used by managers (and others) to "build our capacity to understand and master the changing roles that come with a knowledge-based economy and society." Tools and practices address shared vision and values, personal mastery, systems thinking, mental models, team learning, the art of conversation, and more.
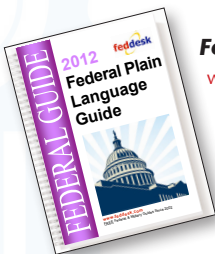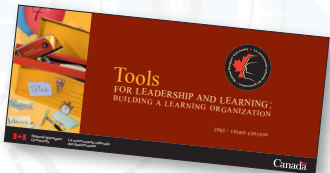
Federal Plain Language Guide

www.feddesk.com/freehandbooks/060712-1.pdf

This free guide to writing clearly is organized into the following topics: thinking about your audience, organizing, writing, writing for the web, and testing (testing your writing, such as for usability).

"This guide is a great job aid for writing clearly and concisely, whether in documents or email. I like the many 'bad' and 'better' examples, too."—Craig

Sharpening Your Writing Skills

www.techcommunicators.com/publications/
sharp.html

Duncan Kent & Associates Ltd.,
Technical Communicators, offers this
guide free to download. Chapters
include good business writing style,
planning to write, writing strategies,
words and sentences, 20 rules of plain
English, punctuation matters, and
designing effective pages.

The Write Stuff for Quality

http://qpc.co.la.ca.us/cms1_035856.pdf

This short article discusses basic
language techniques for more
effective writing in the workplace.

### *Building Bridges: A Peace Corps Classroom Guide To Cross-Cultural Understanding*

http://wws.peacecorps.gov/wws/publications/bridges/

This free set of 13 lessons is organized according to "culture in the United States" and "culture beyond the United States." Lessons and worksheets include topics such as features of culture, defining culture, generalizations, interpreting behavior, seeing both sides of an issue, and more.

Disability Etiquette

www.unitedspinal.org/disability-publications-resources/disability-publications/
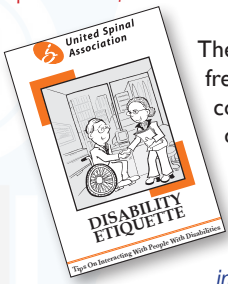
The United Spinal Association offers this free booklet, showing the incorrect and correct ways of interacting with people with disabilities. The tips are presented in the form of illustrations.

"I really like the cartoon approach this guide uses to make the right and wrong ways of interacting obvious. The artwork keeps the focus on the situations and manages to make a point without requiring explanation."—Craig

Teams—Making Them Work for You: A Handbook
www.nursingleadership.org.uk/resources_free.php

This handbook is a practical tool for learning about teams. It features the following sections and topics:

Section 1—The Basics

- What is a team?
- What does teamwork mean?
- What are the benefits of teams?
- Are teams needed all the time?
- Types of teams
- Characteristics of an effective team
- Summary

Section 2—Understanding Team Dynamics/Process

- Stages of team development
- Guidelines for team discussion
- Problem solving model
- Learning from conflict
- Effective team meetings
- Summary

Section 3—Checklists

- Setting up an effective team
- Leading a team meeting
- Adjourning a team

Section 4—Tools

- Brainstorming
- Nominal Group Technique
- Mind Map
- Force Field Analysis
- Consensus
- Team Performance Index
- Summary

NOAA Coastal Services Center—Publications

www.csc.noaa.gov/publications/

Handy guides to help improve workplace effectiveness:

- *Introduction to Conducting Focus Groups*
- *Introduction to Planning and Facilitating Effective Meetings*

Conflict Education Modules

http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Understanding-Conflict-color-P1384.aspx

The University of Wisconsin-Extension produced a set of conflict education modules to help others develop comfort with conflict and skill in managing it. The modules include:

- Non-verbal Communication
- Communication—Using "I" Statements
- Listening Skills and Conflict
- Conflict Styles
- A Model for Improvement: Assumptions and Beliefs
- The Ladder of Inference
- How Perceptions Affect a Conflict Situation
- Telling the Third Story
- Position versus Interests
- A Framework for Negotiation
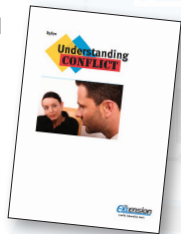
AARP *Leading a Multigenerational Workforce*

http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org_/cs/misc/
leading_a_multigenerational_workforce.pdf

This guide presents the benefits of
the multigeneration work team, an
overview of the generations and their
workplace characteristics, challenges
for managers, myths and reality, and
best practices.
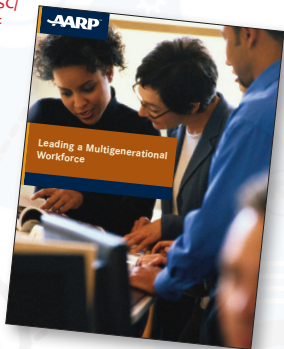
Mind Tools

www.mindtools.com/index.html

Mind Tools offers a toolkit of articles about management, career
and thinking skills. The toolkit covers skills such as leadership,
team management, problem solving, decision making, stress
management, communication, and more. (Many articles in the
toolkit are free, others require membership.)

Knowledge Solutions Compendium

www.adb.org/sites/default/files/knowledge-solutions-1-90.pdf

The Asian Development Bank provides a free, 425-page resource to download titled *Knowledge Solutions: Tools, Methods, and Approaches to Drive Development Forward and Enhance Its Effects.* The tools, methods, and approaches presented address strategy development, management techniques, collaboration, knowledge sharing and learning, and knowledge capture and storage.
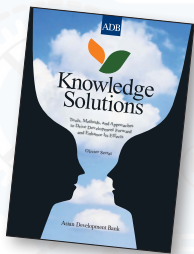
> *"Anything called a 'compendium' is worth checking out. In this case, my effort was rewarded. Each of the topics is presented in a handy fact sheet format, which makes it easy to look up what you want, when you want."—Craig*

Catalyst.org *Unwritten Rules: What You Don't Know Can Hurt Your Career*

www.catalyst.org/knowledge/unwritten-rules-what-you-dont-know-can-hurt-your-career

This report identifies and discusses the unspoken norms and behaviors in the workplace that are necessary to succeed, but that are not communicated the way formalized work competencies are.
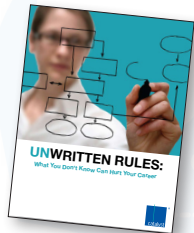
Catalyst.org *Unwritten Rules: Why Doing a Good Job Might Not be Enough*

www.catalyst.org/knowledge/unwritten-rules-why-doing-good-job-might-not-be-enough

This report reveals the behaviors and individual skills that are helpful to advance or valued when it comes to promotional opportunities.

"The Catalyst.org reports provide insights that can grow the opportunity for workplace success."—Craig
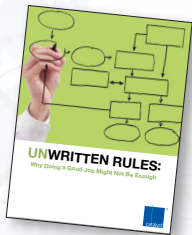
### Helpguide.org **Tips to Reduce and Manage Workplace Stress**

www.helpguide.org/mental/work_stress_management.htm

This non-profit organization offers tips and strategies for individuals to better manage the stress that arises from the workplace.

From Soft Skills to Hard Data
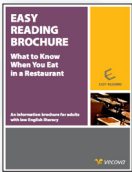
http://forumfyi.org/content/soft-skills-hard-data-

This document profiles eight instruments for measuring youth progress in four soft skills areas: communication, relationships and collaboration, critical thinking and decision-making, and initiative and self-direction.
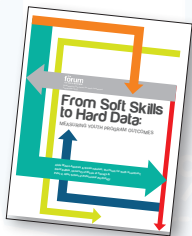
Idea Book: Integrating Work Skills and Basic Skills
http://resources.clee.utk.edu/print/ideabook00.pdf

This 207-page resource, from the Center for Literacy, Education & Employment at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, is a collection of lesson plans from adult education instructors who wanted to create learning activities that integrate work preparation and basic skills. A total of 59 lessons are grouped by skill area: communication skills, decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, and lifelong learning skills.

What To Know When You Eat in a Restaurant
http://vecova.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/What-to-Know-When-You-Eat-in-a-Restaurant.pdf

This is a concise, easy-to-read booklet about restaurant etiquette.

OPM Leadership Competency Levels
www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/competencies/proficiency-levels-for-leadership-competencies.pdf

The federal Office of Personnel Management compiled this set of leadership competencies, each competency being described in terms of five levels from "awareness" to "expert" and with examples of each level. Core qualifications for employment, with the competencies within each qualification, are as follows:

Leading Change

- Creativity and Innovation
- External Awareness
- Flexibility
- Resilience
- Strategic Thinking
- Vision

Leading People

- Conflict Management
- Leveraging Diversity
- Developing Others
- Team Building

Results Driven

- Accountability
- Customer Service
- Decisiveness
- Entrepreneurship
- Problem Solving
- Technical Credibility

Business Acumen

- Financial Management
- Human Capital Management
- Technology Management

Building Coalitions

- Partnering
- Political Savvy
- Influencing/Negotiating

Fundamental Competencies

- Interpersonal Skills
- Oral Communication
- Integrity/Honesty
- Written Communication
- Continual Learning
- Public Service Motivation

"I've wanted to recommend this resource to anyone with an interest in leadership development. It's such a unique document, both for the set of competencies listed, as well as for the multiple levels that each competency can be demonstrated in the workplace. These competencies can provide the framework for leadership development activities."—Craig

GroupWorks Series

http://extensionpubs.umext.maine.edu/ "Click on the Business & Community category."

These 4-page bulletins from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension cover all aspects of working in/with groups. Individual bulletin titles include the following:

- *Getting Things Done in Groups*
- *Facilitation: What Is It?*
- *The Art of Great Meetings*
- *Effective Communication*
- *Appreciating Differences*
- *Thinking Together: Making Better Decisions in Groups*
- *Working With Group Conflict*

Presentation Skills Tutorial

http://wiki.ubc.ca/Presentation_Skills

This is a helpful tutorial about how to make more effective presentations, including an entertaining introductory video.

Key Skills Support Programme Publications Archive

These resources are from Britain and they are now archived (since 2008), but they are still available to download. Each provides great soft skills content plus tips for teaching the content! Scroll down the list of archived titles and look for these publications:

- *Teaching speaking and listening: a toolkit for practitioners* [activity categories below]
  - Sensitivity to others
  - Speaking with individuals
  - Listening
  - Speaking in a group
  - Talking to a group

- *Effective practice in teaching and learning Problem Solving*
  - The problem-solving process
  - Problem-solving skills and techniques—brainstorming, spider diagrams, force-field analysis, six thinking hats, risk analysis, SWOT analysis, cost-benefit analysis, timelines, and flow charts

- *Effective practice in teaching and learning Working With* Others
  - How teams work
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Planning work
  - Carrying out work
  - Reviewing and reflecting

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