

Unit 4: Attitudes and Behaviors

Learning Objective

At completion of this unit, you will be able to explain the relationship between job productivity, employee welfare, and attitudes and behaviors on the job.

In the construction trade, breakdowns in time management and communication cost hundreds of millions of dollars each year. This money could be better spent on salaries, benefits, and more economically efficient projects. When studying the material in this section, you should also connect it to the material covered in the modules on diversity and harassment which cover many of the same issues covered here, but with particular emphasis on the importance of diversity in the workforce, how to get along with people with different backgrounds from yourself, and how to deal with problems of harassment on the job, whether you are male or female.

Time Management

We procrastinate when we put off doing something that we know has to be done. Procrastination can cause tension, guilt, and – if it becomes a habit – a loss of self-respect. When we plan how we use our time, we usually notice that good things begin to happen. Our stress level goes down. We begin to feel better about ourselves. We notice that we're not racing from one unnecessary crisis to another, because they just don't seem to happen anymore.

The better we plan, the more tasks we can get done. The quality of our work is better, too, because we can focus on the task and work steadily, without having to rush. Planning leads to success on the job, which translates to a solid reputation, pay increases, and promotions.

Procrastination

We know that procrastination doesn't work, and, in fact, usually makes our resistance to a situation even worse. Yet many people have the procrastination habit. Why? And how hard is it to root out?

Motivation. We are more likely to put work off when we don't really feel it's our job to begin with. Somebody else wants us to do the task – our boss, our spouse, the government.

Sometimes, we may do competent work just to avoid bad consequences – like a poor job evaluation or the raised eyebrows of our co-workers.

But most of us have much more energy and commitment when we are moving toward a result we care about. On the job, for example, we can decide to make the work our own, as if we're signing our name to it. A change of attitude can transform the work from being just a burden to being a craft that we find really interesting. Once we become interested, we often find that we want to know more. We begin to practice it with real dedication. Procrastination is no longer a problem.

Fear. Procrastination is the way many people handle their fears of being judged. Some of us, for example, are afraid of failure: "If I try and fail, people will know that I can't do it. Maybe I shouldn't try."

Surprisingly, some of us fear success: "If I try and succeed, people will start to expect more

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from me. I might be setting myself up for a bigger - and more public - failure in the future. Maybe I shouldn't try."

Fear of judgement is a deep and very common feeling. It can affect every part of our lives. For many people, it is crippling. We can avoid facing our fear - which makes it worse - or we can do specific things to deal with it. For example:

- We can decide to change our minds, and become genuinely interested in the task we are resisting.
- Changing our standard from "perfect" to "excellent" refocuses us. Instead of always failing and (by using "less than perfect"), we can now move from one success to another as our expertise grows.
- We can seek guidance from people we respect.
- We can do our part to lower the blame "thermostat" by treating our coworkers with respect, when they make mistakes or we disagree with them.
- We can remind ourselves that "dealing with fear" means taking care of our responsibilities even when we fear failure.

Inadequacy. Many apprentices think that they must have mastered every skill they'll ever need before they can handle a task by themselves. They might be reluctant to try a math calculation that they've never seen before. One skill - like layout - might be difficult for them, so they'll let a co-worker do it. A task that involves technical reading might reveal a learning disability that they'd rather keep private. They guess where the ductwork goes because the architect's drawing looks too complex to figure it out. These negative attitudes may be understandable, but they lead nowhere.

Our jobs offer us continual opportunities to learn better skills. Because of their jobs, people have learned to operate dangerous machinery, to speak English, to do heart surgery through a small tube, to calculate percentages, to send a human being to the moon.

In the construction trade, the most capable and respected journeymen never lose their curiosity and willingness to learn. Some may even have lacked the most basic skills when they began, but because they wanted to learn, they paid attention. They sought out the information and mentors they needed. They volunteered to teach others. And now we know them as some of the most respected workers in their respective trades.

Other Priorities. Some of us have so many other demands on our time that we can't face taking on yet another task.

If we are overwhelmed with other demands on our time, we may need to make some important decisions. What are our priorities? Are some of these demands optional? Can we reschedule or even drop the less important ones? Can we find appropriate help?

If other people are involved in these decisions, talk with them. Maybe they can make some changes that will help make the load you carry more manageable.

Everyday Time Management

Being on Time. Alarms on our cell phones are designed to help us, not bully us. Those of us who are always running late can set our clocks and watches several minutes ahead of "real time" to create a buffer for ourselves. We can use cell phone alarms to get our days started on time. We can listen to traffic reports

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and think ahead about adjustments we might make in our daily commutes. If we operate dangerous shop equipment and can't wear a wristwatch, most cell phone alarms can be heard even when they're in a pocket.

Scheduling. Cell phone calendars - small enough to carry everywhere, but with enough room to enter all of our commitments - can keep us on track. At home, we can enter all recurring commitments for the foreseeable future. On the job, we can enter a new appointment or deadline. By referring to our cell phone calendar every evening, we can schedule our next day sensibly.

Creating Routines. Once we find the most productive routine for our day, we can then put some of our tasks on autopilot. For example, when we know we're driving the commuter route that works best for us, we can use the drive time to think about our day. We know we'll have that tool handy because we always set up our work space and our tool belt the same way. Routine makes our lives easier, more predictable, and in some ways

more secure. It frees our energy for other concerns and pastimes.

Working Smarter

Planning job tasks can eliminate wasted time and effort. When we are organized and careful, other workers in the shop are encouraged to be that way, too. Organized, careful workers get first calls for jobs and are more likely to be candidates for promotion. And what's not to like about that? Here are some of the things to think about when planning:

- *Sequence of Tasks.* Make a plan before you start a new task. Include every step of the process. If one task in the sequence requires certain side preparations, take them into consideration so you can plan your sequence accordingly and accurately.
- *The Big Picture.* How does your task fit into the larger scheme of the job? Do you have to wait for other trades to do work before you can proceed with one part of the task sequence? How can you sequence your



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tasks so that you don't waste time while you wait for the side task to be finished? Be sure to note all such interactions on your plan.

- *Materials.* Identify every raw material, tool, and piece of equipment you'll need. Assemble them before you begin your job.
- *Measures.* Be sure to record all the amounts, measures, and settings you will need to use in your plan, and at what point in the sequence you will need this information.
- *Personnel.* Will you need help during this job? Note any specialized help you will need at specific points in the sequence, as well as general help.
- *Safety.* Know what safety issues could be involved in the job. Take general safety precautions before you begin, and note special precautions that must be taken at specific points in the sequence.
- *Problems.* What possible complications could you face during this job? Consider every possibility, and plan alternatives so that the job can adhere as closely as possible to the schedule. Note such buffer points or alternatives on your plan.

Summary

Nothing is wasted. As we learn to plan our workdays and manage our time at the shop, we will find ourselves applying those same lessons to the rest of our lives. We can't control everything that happens to us, but most of us can have more control over our own decisions than we currently do. Having some control over our lives is an energizing feeling. When we actually start to reach our goals, we feel as if our horizons are wider, our futures filled with more opportunities. When you manage your time, you increase your opportunities.

