

## **Ten Qualities of Workplace (and Life) Superstars**

*Character is higher than intellect.*

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

In my experience, one of the greatest myths that young people believe is that success is all about smarts. While intelligence certainly helps, it is by no means a lock. In fact, many smart people will argue that character and relational skills are just as important. To that end, I'd like to share a fitting personal story with you.

A few years ago during my book launch tour through Indonesia, I gave a talk, "Developing the Great Leaders of Tomorrow," at a high school in Bali. Afterwards, the audience exited for lunch in the courtyard while I remained up on stage to sign certificates. Some ten minutes later, I was finished and prepared to join the group. As I stood up, however, I saw a student approaching me from the center aisle. Once he reached me, I looked down with a smile and said, "Hi. What's on your mind?" He looked up with a shy countenance and confided, "Mr. Dennis. I'm not that smart in academics. *But, can I still become a great leader?*" It was straight from the heart.

We chatted about academics for a bit, and I encouraged him that a certain chapter in *What I Wish I Knew at 18* might help him greatly. We talked about other things, too, and he listened intently. Then, when it was time to leave, I closed our conversation with this: "Ten minutes ago, you asked me a question, and now I'm going to answer it. With the courage, humility, and desire to learn that you just displayed, *yes you can* become a great leader." He looked up at me, brimming with pride, and said, "Thanks Mr. Dennis!" And then with a spring in his step, he walked away.

This was one of the most touching moments I've ever experienced, and although I'll probably never see him again, I'm confident he's on his way.

This story illustrates why it's so important to instill belief in our young people and to bust this myth every opportunity we can. You don't need to be an Einstein to be successful in your career or in life. No way.

So, what *is* important, besides intellect, to succeed in one's career? What are some of the qualities most highly prized by employers? Qualities that we parents, educators, and mentors can and should be instilling *now*?

Simply stated, employers are looking for three basic things... someone who: 1) does good (preferably great!) work, 2) works well with others, and 3) advances the mission and success of the organization.

But, let's get more specific. Here are our top ten *qualities* of workplace superstars, excluding the intellectual and technical skills needed for specific jobs and careers. We will go in-depth with each quality, giving real-world examples, inspiring quotes, and application for all of them. Without further ado', here they are:

## 1. INTEGRITY

*Integrity is choosing your thoughts and actions based on values rather than personal gain.*  
~Chris Karcher

In any list of most desirable workplace qualities, you'd be hard pressed *not* to find the word "integrity." In fact, I would argue it's probably number one. During my three-decade career at Russell Investments, our CEO, George Russell, would often say, "We operate on non-negotiable integrity. And, if you're wondering whether to say or do something, imagine it being the headline in tomorrow's newspaper." Simple as that. Zero tolerance.

So, what is integrity and why is it so important? Dictionary.com defines "integrity" as "adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty." While integrity is essential to strong personal character, it is even more important in a workplace context. That's because employers must adhere to policies, laws, regulations, and governing authorities. A simple misrepresentation can literally lead to a company going out of business. Or, more commonly, for an employee to be fired. It's always important to remember that in a workplace context, you're representing yourself and your employer.

Here are some descriptors of integrity in action: trustworthiness, honesty, authenticity, respectfulness, compliance (to policies, procedures, regulations, etc.), courage (to do what's right), taking responsibility for mistakes or shortfalls, and accurate representations. In the workplace, values can be challenged, career shortcuts tempting, and ethical standards gray. In these and all situations, integrity should be our guiding force.

Just as important is knowing what integrity does *not* look like. Here are some common examples in a workplace context: falsifying records, misrepresenting product qualities/performance, abusing power or position, cheating, stealing, spreading falsehoods/rumors/gossip, and blaming others for one's underperformance. More often than not, self interest is the catalyst.

Of course, integrity is just as relevant in our personal lives too, as the above descriptors clearly show. Healthy relationships demand it. At LifeSmart, we

encourage people, organizations, and schools to take the “Integrity Challenge:” not communicating anything negative about someone else who is not present. Imagine how this could change our culture! And, reduce bullying and social drama!

Whether we’re parents, educators, or mentors, here are some tips to help the young people in our lives practice integrity as a *way of life*:

- Model it ourselves every time, every day.
- Commend them when they model it. (Especially when they own up to mistakes or poor choices.)
- Apply a zero tolerance approach when they don’t. Children need to know the importance of trust and that repercussions of violating a trust will be stronger as a result. It is very difficult to recover a broken reputation.
- Review the above evidences of integrity and the opposite. Which areas are easier to model than others? Where is there room for growth?
- Look for examples in society (including movies and television) where integrity is either modeled or not and have conversations about them. How might *they* have handled situations differently? There are great opportunities for real life cases to reinforce lessons.

## 2. COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

*Every job is a self portrait of the person who does it.  
Autograph your work with excellence.  
~Ted Key*

*I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty  
to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.  
~Helen Keller*

“A job well done.” Few words are more gratifying to hear from our supervisors or clients than these. We should all feel proud when we deliver excellence, even when it isn’t always recognized!

But, let’s face it. Doing great work isn’t always easy. We might have the skills, but are lacking in attitude, energy, or health. We might have the right attitude, but are still on the learning curve. Or, quite commonly, we’re distracted by some issues in our personal lives that we struggle to “compartmentalize.” We bring our problems from home to work. And, sometimes we procrastinate and run out of time.

Perhaps after integrity, having high standards and a commitment to excellence might be our second most valuable workplace quality. Here’s why:

1. The surest way to build customer loyalty is to consistently deliver top quality products and services that meet or exceed expectations. This results in consistently higher revenues than otherwise. It can *only* happen when employees are motivated to do their best.
2. One of the most important aspects of successful companies is their brand and reputation. Tremendous damage can result when companies lower their standards or deliver inconsistent quality. We're all familiar with companies and industries that skimmed on quality and suffered.
3. We live in an extremely competitive world. Businesses are constantly challenged by others entering their market or by existing competitors who offer new products. A consistent commitment to excellence helps companies preserve, if not expand, their market share. Otherwise, it *will* shrink.
4. Depending on the career, it can even be a matter of life and death! Think neurosurgeons and aircraft repair personnel!
5. It builds our dependability and reputation where we work. That's huge!
6. Employers are paying us to do our best. It's up to us to give them a return on their investment. Our commitment to excellence will affect our performance, and ultimately our pay, promotability, and job security.

It's important to note that a commitment to excellence extends beyond the quality of our work. Other affected areas include our attitude, professionalism, relationships, and teamwork. Having high standards is especially important when we work in teams, because others are depending on us to do our part. We've all worked in group projects where one member slacks. It's no fun. Don't be "that guy."

### **Our Best Tip**

Every job has different specifications, and every supervisor varies in management approach. Also, some positions have detailed performance metrics (sales) while others are more vague (management). Therefore, it pays to "get inside your manager's head" in order to set yourself up for success. It sounds crazy, but it's so true! And, it's really quite simple.

On your first day on the job, ask your supervisor to show you the performance review form. (Most have subjective rankings, say, from one to five, on a number of factors, as well as goals.) Then, (and this is key!) ask him/her how they "define excellence" in this position. The more you can understand their preferences, the better positioned you are to deliver the goods. Next, ask what would be the top two or three most important accomplishments you can deliver in the next six months. Finally, ask about the ways you can help them, the team/department, or the company achieve its goals. (Obviously, achieving your goals is primary, but your value will increase if you can also support your supervisor and the broader organization). You're looking for impact.

Now you know what they're looking for, and you're positioned to deliver a home run! I did this all the time in my career and it never failed! In addition, be sure to

finish your work *on time, every time*. That'll make you easy to manage... a supervisor's dream!

**Finally, a special message to parents.** When your children are little, they simply will not have the skills to do chores with the same quality as you. So, it pays to praise on effort. However, as they improve, praise that. It will build a growth mindset. Then, when they become teenagers, it'll be a habit, and you might even consider giving "incentive pay" depending on the quality of their chores. If they underperform, give them tips on how to get a bonus the next time around. This will actually help prepare them for their coming reality in the workplace!

If you want to be an MVP in the eyes of your employer, a commitment to excellence is a must!

### 3. DEPENDABILITY

*If your actions don't live up to your words, you have nothing to say.*  
~Da Shanne Stokes

"You can count on me." Hearing these words is every supervisor's dream! Just as every parent loathes having to give reminders to their kids to do their chores or homework, bosses are in the same boat with their employees when they fail to deliver. And, in my conversations with employers who hire young people, unreliability is easily one of their most common complaints. To wit...

A teen working as a server for an area restaurant was to show up for her 5:00 p.m. shift. Rightfully, the owner could count on that. However, imagine his surprise when he received a call at 4:55 that she was sick and unable to come to work. Apparently unaware of the inconvenience this would cause, she obviously felt that five minutes notice would suffice. As if that wasn't enough, at 5:10 she would be posting pictures on Facebook of the beach party she was attending a mere ten miles away. To add insult to injury, she was surprised when she showed up the next day and was promptly fired. Sadly, variations of this story are more common than you'd think.

She made the mistake of thinking that the employer existed to serve her rather than the other way around. For her sake, I hope it was a lesson learned.

In the workplace, and in life, dependability is one of our most valued character qualities. It means that we do what we say. That we can be trusted. That we are confidently willing to be held accountable for our actions and actions. And, that we will be easy to manage!

Here's what dependability looks like in the workplace:

- You deliver excellent work on time, every time. No reminders necessary. A good practice is to complete your work one to two days ahead of the deadline. That way, if something comes up, you have some cushion.
- You comply with company policies, ethics, laws, and regulations without failing.
- You represent the company and its values both internally and externally with customers, prospects, suppliers, and the community.
- You not only do your work well, but you also seek opportunities to advance the overall organization.
- You don't make promises you can't keep. If anything, you "underpromise and overdeliver!"
- You are punctual and bring a positive attitude to work every day.
- If something comes up that threatens your ability to meet a deadline, you inform your supervisor as soon as possible. No last minute warnings and excuses! Remember, bosses hate negative surprises!

Dependability serves us well beyond the workplace, too. Whether it's in marriages, friendships, community service, etc., we all admire this quality in people.

**Parents**, sometimes it seems like dependability is a quality you're either born with or need to learn! Our more compliant children do their chores or homework without our reminders, while it's a struggle with others. Why not make dependability a family value and help our children understand why it's so important. In this day and age, many young people seem to view it as optional, only to experience a rude awakening when they enter the workforce. One day they'll thank you for it.

#### 4. WORK ETHIC/MOTIVATION

*Some people dream of success while others wake up and work hard at it.*  
~Winston Churchill

*The harder I work, the luckier I get.*  
~Samuel Goldwyn

It's supposed to go like this: We convince the employer we're the best person for the job. The employer agrees and offers it to us, complete with a compensation package. We accept the offer and celebrate, recognizing they could have easily offered the position to someone else. In return for the paycheck, we work our tails off, do our best, and... WAIT, STOP THE TAPE! Not so fast!

In my conversations with employers of young people, I hear more complaints about work ethic and dependability than any other traits. Among the issues they cite: absenteeism, late arrivals, distractions, failure to meet deadlines, deficient work, whining (especially toward more "menial" tasks), and entitlement attitudes. Some

employers have given up and are now recruiting retirees to avoid the “baggage.” (Their word.)

And, they’ll tell you it wasn’t always this way.

To be honest, I think the responsibility for this generational shift lies primarily with parents. We do our children’s chores, either to keep them happy or because we can do them better or quicker. We overcommit them with one activity after another and feel guilty if we also ask them to sweep the garage. We allow play to come before work. We permit hours and hours of time with their endless technology, media, and entertainment options. It all adds up and manifests itself in a big way during the teen and young adult years.

Oh, and, educators will tell you the lack of motivation is apparent in their classrooms, too.

There are many, many reasons why a strong work ethic and motivation (both inextricably linked) are so important in the workplace and in life:

- It is an admired character trait and a MUST for a productive life
- We owe it to our employers who are paying us for excellent work
- It directly affects our job performance, pay potential, reputation, job security, and promotability; also, several careers pay directly by output and sales, which are heavily influenced by our work ethic and productivity
- Our team members are depending on us
- It is a necessity for building grit and resilience
- We make ourselves easier to manage in the eyes of our supervisor
- Businesses are much more “bottom line” focused than in the past and less tolerant of mediocre performers; we have to *compete* to *keep* our jobs!
- A strong work ethic can overcome an average skillset
- We receive the “psychic benefits” from a job well done
- And, we accomplish so much more

Individuals with a strong work ethic and motivation:

- are self starters and needn’t require reminders
- don’t require rewards each time for hard work; it’s intrinsic
- are proactive and take initiative
- are productive and efficient with their time; they focus just as much on working *smart* as working *hard* and accomplish more than others during their work time
- are conscientious, take directions, and follow policies and guidelines
- are lifelong learners
- avoid complaining about the less interesting aspects of their job
- meet or exceed the requirements of the job

- give their employer a high return on investment

**Parents**, here are some tips to help build these essential qualities:

- Instill the values of a strong work ethic and motivation by modeling it yourselves and teaching your children why it's so important
- Have your children do age-appropriate chores and message that doing them is not optional (this is where your tough love really pays off!). Introduce them to a wide range of chores, but be somewhat flexible when choosing which ones they are routinely responsible for. Use chores as a learning experience. They'll be on their own soon!
- Limit the amount of time they spend on technology and media and adopt a "work before play" strategy
- When it comes to career selection, encourage them to choose options they will enjoy and be interested in. We are naturally more motivated when we do the things we like.
- Encourage them to choose friends who take these qualities seriously. Peer influences are huge. If our kids surround themselves with positive and productive people, it will rub off. And if they don't, that will rub off, too!

Let's do everything we can to build an intrinsic work ethic in our younger generation and reverse these trends. Today's tough love will pay dividends in the long run, and, one day, they might just thank you for it.

## **5. RESOURCEFULNESS**

*A resourceful person can see the opportunity when others only see obstacles.*  
~Garrett Gunderson

In a world that is changing faster than ever, and in a business environment that is more competitive than ever, today's employers are facing challenges like never before. The implications on the workplace are profound:

- More innovation is required just to keep up
- Product life cycles are shrinking so businesses need to be vigilant and nimble
- Low cost competitors like Amazon can reduce one's market share in a moment
- Customers have very high expectations and are more difficult to please
- There are more problems (challenges) to be solved as well as new opportunities

So, it comes as no surprise that employers are emphasizing resourcefulness, problem solving, creativity, and innovative thinking in their recruiting. Thankfully,

these qualities can be learned and they are found in all personalities, from the highly creative to the analytical.

Generally speaking, employers benefit from resourcefulness in a variety of ways:

- **Increasing revenues:** creating new products/services, improving customer loyalty, increasing market share through product enhancements, improvements to sales effectiveness, etc. If you think about it, all of the products we enjoy today were invented in the past by a person or team. Some, like the inventors of the printing press, light bulb, radio, automobile, phone, steam turbines, computer, and vaccinations, were *responding to an existing need*. They were incredible problem solvers! Others enter a market because they believe they've created a *better product or value proposition* (food and restaurant chains come to mind).
- **Reducing costs/improving efficiency:** discovering new ways to produce products or services at lower cost and become more efficient. These savings, too, result in higher profits.
- **Solving day-to-day problems in each of our jobs:** no matter what position we hold, unexpected challenges arise. Our business unexpectedly slows. A key employee leaves the company. Raw material prices rise. A co-worker is spreading rumors or missing deadlines. A supplier delays delivery. A client is upset over product performance. Students disrupt the classroom. We fall behind due to a long illness. Stuff happens! Do we cower in fear or embrace the situation using our creativity, analytical, and relational skills?

Is it any wonder why resourceful people are so highly valued in the workplace?

So, what are the qualities of resourceful people? Here are some descriptors: *creative, analytical, objective, problem solvers, decisive, visionary, courageous, resilient, determined, opportunistic, skillful, ingenious, enterprising, discerning, and solutions minded*. Isn't it a wonderfully diverse list! *Anyone* can become resourceful!

**Parents**, don't be fooled into thinking that just because your children are strong academically that they're good problem solvers. It's not always the case—just ask any employer. But, you can help build resourcefulness by encouraging your children to solve problems themselves and involve them in family decisions like planning vacations, charitable giving, managing a tight budget, or choosing a college. So often, we instinctively tell our children what to do rather than to first hear their thoughts and potential solutions (e.g., "How do you plan to solve the problem?"). By first asking for their ideas before sharing yours, you'll build a quality that will serve them well in life.

## 6. POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Have you noticed how some people see the glass half full and others, half empty? Or, given the same set of circumstances, how some will rise to the occasion while others are consumed with fear and negativity? And, how truly successful people exude positivity and surround themselves with it?

Ask any employer or coach and they will take a B+ performer with an outstanding attitude over an A- performer with a negative attitude any day of the week. Attitude is a vital ingredient to both individual and team success.

When you demonstrate a positive attitude, you will:

- Perform better and so will your team
- Make and keep more friends
- Be given more opportunities
- Overcome average skill and adversity
- Be appreciated by customers, prospects, and colleagues
- Energize your workplace and have more influence
- Be happier

So, is it any wonder why employers value this quality so much? And, why it's so important for parents to help build a positive attitude in their children?

Many wise people have said wonderful and profound things about a positive attitude, and in better ways than I could ever dream of. So, allow me to leave you with some of my favorites. Enjoy and share!

*Cultivate an optimistic mind, use your imagination, always consider alternatives, and dare to believe that you can make possible what others think is impossible.*

**~Rodolpho Costa**

*When you are joyful, when you say yes to life and have fun and project positivity all around you, you become a sun in the center of every constellation, and people want to be near you.*

**~Shannon L. Alder**

*Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.*

**~Colin Powell**

*Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.*

**~Lou Holtz**

*Happiness is an attitude. We either make ourselves miserable, or happy and strong.  
The amount of work is the same.*  
~**Francesca Reigler**

*Heredity is much, environment is much, but I am much more.*  
~**Muriel Strode**

*A bad attitude is like a flat tire, you won't get nowhere till you change it.*  
~**Author Unknown**

*The most important thing you wear is your attitude.*  
~**Jeff Moore**

*I am an optimist. It does not seem to be much use to be anything else.*  
~**Winston Churchill**

*Our ultimate freedom is the right and power to decide how anybody or anything  
outside ourselves will affect us.*  
~**Stephen Covey**

*Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones,  
you'll start having positive results.*  
~**Willie Nelson**

*Life is 10% of what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it.*  
~**Charles Swindoll**

*The day is what you make it! So, why not make it a great one?*  
~**Steve Schulte**

*Misery is a communicable disease.*  
~**Martha Graham**

*I have had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened.*  
~**Mark Twain**

## **7. TEAM MINDEDNESS**

*If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.*  
~**Henry Ford**

*Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.*  
~**Michael Jordan**

*None of us is as smart as all of us.*  
~Ken Blanchard

What do choirs, symphonies, NASA space launches, the Golden State Warriors, military operations, Olympic pair skating, successful marriages, hospital emergency rooms, business projects, and your favorite restaurant have in common? The answer: their success depends on teamwork. Great teamwork. Not surprisingly, as our economy shifts and workplaces become more collaborative, employers are placing a premium on *teamwork* and *interpersonal skills* in their staffing decisions.

The fact is, teamwork takes work! There are many moving parts in any team and success is highly fragile. Here are the reasons why: 1) egos and self interest get in the way, 2) weak leadership, 3) personality clashes, 4) underperformers, 5) insufficient skill diversity, 6) blaming and internal strife, and 7) poor communication. Is it any wonder why so few sports franchises are truly dynasties?

So, what makes teams work together skillfully and harmoniously toward a common vision? Here are four essential ingredients: 1) each member delivering great performance, 2) effective leadership in assigning responsibilities to team members, 3) an ability to work well with each other, and 4) putting the team ahead of the individual. Simply stated, successful team members abide by the formula:

We > Me.

Here's a sampler of the qualities of team minded people: respectfulness \* subordination of self interest to team interest \* solutions minded \* encouragement and appreciation of others \* resilience \* loyalty \* excellent listening \* goal orientation \* dependability \* diplomacy \* conflict resolver \* helpfulness \* positivity \* courtesy \* affability \* tact. No wonder why team mindedness is such a prized quality in the workplace! How would you rate yourself on these qualities?

Also, it takes great interpersonal skills to be an excellent team player. Relational skills are vitally important in the workplace and often are underestimated by people who unfortunately think success is all about smarts. In the business arena, our relationship spheres include colleagues, customers, sales prospects, owners, the community, suppliers, and, yes, your supervisor. Each of these relationships offers the potential for professional and personal friendships, too.

Here are some interpersonal success pointers we share in our *What I Wish I Knew at 18* book and curriculum:

- Be an encourager rather than a critic
- Give others credit before yourself
- Strive to be an agreeable disagreeer
- Work synergistically toward common goals
- Regularly show appreciation and gratitude

- Solicit and embrace constructive feedback
- Remember that *how* you say it can be more important than *what* you say
- Focus on solutions more than the problem
- Don't whine; just do it
- Talk it out, don't write it out; avoid using written communications on sensitive or emotionally charged topics
- Give others the benefit of the doubt and avoid assuming bad intentions
- Take responsibility for your mistakes and shortfalls and avoid blaming
- Laugh often

**Parents**, team mindedness and strong interpersonal skills in your children are critical to their success in life. Unfortunately, signs are everywhere that technology overuse is having harmful effects on our children's relational skill development. Isolation, social awkwardness, and a preference for tech-based communication over face-to-face communication are growing tendencies in a world that values collaboration more than ever. It's a disconnect that deserves *all* of our attention.

## 8. FRIENDLINESS

*A friend is one of the nicest things you can have, and one of the best things you can be.*  
~Douglas Pagels

"TGIF." It's arguably the most common weekly comment I hear or see on social media. Shared by people who can't wait for the weekend. And, more often than not, by people who aren't especially happy in their jobs. Maybe it's just me, but I don't recall ever "TGIFing," even though I enjoy my weekends just as much as anyone.

For 28 years, I was blessed to work for a company I loved, in a job I loved, and with people I loved (or, at least liked!). Our leaders, George and Jane Russell, believed that success was all about putting employees first. We even had a People Division to ensure that we were doing all we could to bring out the best in our people and create a positive work environment. I made many lifelong friends there that I cherish to this day. We worked in a high stress industry, yet our friendly culture made me look forward to coming to work every day. Not surprisingly, our company routinely won awards for being the "best place to work."

There were many reasons for our company's success during my tenure, and a top one was our culture of *friendliness*. Yes, friendliness! Here were some of our secrets:

1. Our "employees first" culture, where everyone felt valued
2. People took a genuine interest in each other and were united in our mission
3. We valued "likeability" in our recruiting. If it came down to two finalists, we'd pick the person we wouldn't mind as our next-door neighbor. Seriously!

4. For the most part, we avoided politically charged conversations that had nothing to do with our work and serve mainly to divide. HINT!!!
5. Leadership challenged us to live out the values to which our company subscribed.
6. We had fun and found many occasions to celebrate each other.

From my experience, this culture of friendliness improved sales, cemented customer loyalty, increased morale, reduced employee turnover, built friendships, and brought out the best in each employee. It also helped us deal with conflict and disappointment because we genuinely cared about each other and the company. It helped frame and soften our responses.

All this is why friendliness can be one of the most important qualities of employees and organizations. The fact is, most of us work in diverse organizations with colleagues of different backgrounds, worldviews, positions, and personalities. We may not become long-term friends with everyone, but we can (and should) be friendly to everyone. It's a win for you, a win for them, and a win for your organization.

So, how friendly are you? Especially with people who are not your friends? Here are some descriptors of friendliness to help you evaluate yours: *collegial \* affable \* kind \* considerate \* good-natured \* positive \* cheerful \* cooperative \* helpful \* patient \* genuine \* good listener*. From this list it's obvious that **friendliness is a choice**. How are you choosing?

But, let's be honest. Sometimes we work with people who aren't destined for "BFFhood." They may be socially awkward, irritating, self-absorbed, or have personalities or worldviews that clash with ours. In these situations, peaceful coexistence might be the best you can hope for. Regardless, friendliness is still the best way, and who knows, it might just rub off! And, in case you haven't, familiarize yourself with the DISC personality test (a free one is available at [123test.com](http://123test.com)). It might help you understand your colleagues better, improve your communications, and even increase your friendliness quotient.

There's an old saying that cleanliness is next to godliness. I think friendliness is too.

## 9. RESILIENCE

*A bend in the road is not the end of the road unless we fail to make the turn.*  
~Author Unknown

*If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere.*  
~Frank A. Clark

Hard stuff happens. As much as we might wish that the path to success is a straight line, it's not. In our personal lives, it might include loss, disappointments, mistakes, mistreatment, family/marital struggles, financial stress, health challenges, job losses, disasters, etc. And, when it happens to us, it's not always easy to compartmentalize it as we head to work. If we're not careful, it can easily spill over into our job performance.

Adversity happens routinely in the workplace, too. Common examples include: layoffs, loss of key customers, business slowdowns, departmental underperformance, lawsuits, new competition, product failures, missed deadlines, internal conflicts, etc. In addition to these corporate matters, adversity can also arise from our own underperformance. Regardless of the source, workplace adversity can cause fear and anxiety and affect our performance.

Because of rapid technological change and growing competitive pressures, employers are facing adversity like never before. Therefore, it's not surprising that *resilience* is becoming an increasingly valued quality in the workplace.

People respond so differently to adversity. Some are consumed by fear or worry and focus more on the problem than on potential solutions. Others, after the initial shock or disappointment wears off, go into problem solving mode and are actually energized by it. Among the qualities they demonstrate are: *perseverance, endurance, persistence, determination, grit, adaptability, and courage*. This is resilience.

Although adversity can be brutal and challenging, there is a silver lining. For example, it is the surest way to character and personal growth. Also, it provides valuable experience and wisdom to handle future situations. And, it equips us to inspire and encourage others who are facing similar challenges. There's no substitute for talking with someone else who has "walked in our shoes" and overcome their adversity. When those opportunities arise, it can be transformational for *both* parties. I've observed this firsthand, and it's powerful!

So, how do we build resilience? Here are some strategies we describe in *What I Wish I Knew at 18*:

- Remember, adversity is part of all of our lives and can be preparation for even greater things. Sometimes, it can even make sense with hindsight!
- Day follows night, so try to see other side of the valley.
- Release your pain and worries using constructive stress outlets, your support system, and by taking care of your health. Don't go it alone.
- Take seemingly insurmountable challenges one step at a time. It reduces fear and builds momentum.
- Always keep the faith and focus on the problem and what you can control. This is especially important in a workplace context.

- If you feel consumed by the problem, “project” it onto a third party and imagine giving advice to them. It’s a great way to stay objective.

**Parents**, building resilience in your children should be a top priority. The key is allowing them to experience challenging situations where they might fail, and letting it happen. Resist the temptation to jump in and rescue them. It’s easily one of the most difficult things a parent can do, but, in the long run, it’s unequivocally in your child’s best interests.

Knowing that life is a journey filled with ups and downs, resilience is truly a gift you can give to yourself and to your children. And, it’s a quality your employers will truly admire.

Remember, #youcandothis!

## 10. PROFESSIONALISM

*A man’s manners are a mirror in which he shows his portrait.*

~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*A professional is someone who can do his best work when he doesn’t feel like it.*

~Alistair Cooke

For young adults who are just entering the workforce, it can be an eye-opening experience. In a culture that has grown more coarse and casual by the year, and where parents and educators expect the *other* to take responsibility for building employability skills, many employers have significant retraining to do. So, it’s no surprise they are increasingly valuing *professionalism* in their employees.

When we hear the word, “professionalism,” the first thing that usually comes to mind is appearance and language. However, the scope is *much* broader. So, let’s review some of the key aspects of professionalism in a workplace context. *Each* one is important for adults and children to master.

**Appearance:** this includes dress, hygiene, countenance, body language, neatness, cleanliness, posture, etc. When you start a new job, err on the side of more conservative dress and closely observe how others, especially the most admired employees, appear. They’re your best role models. Workplace functions vary from casual to business-casual to business. Be sure to come properly attired no matter what. Would your CEO be comfortable including *you* in a major client dinner? There is only one right answer!

**Attitude:** employers expect you to arrive on time with a positive attitude and ready to rock. You must try your best regardless of what else is going on in your life or whether it’s a Monday morning after a week of vacation. Keep a positive disposition, even if you’re in stressful situations. Positivity is the sign of a winner!

**Excellent Performance:** true workplace superstars deliver high job performance and contribute to the success of the organization. They go above and beyond. They can be relied upon to achieve their goals and meet deadlines. Also, they work well with others (both inside and outside). Think “dependable excellence.”

**Manners and Etiquette:** these reflect on one’s personal standards and respect for others. They are especially important in business/social settings and meetings with clients and prospects. You needn’t be an Emily Post, but you must “show well” to others in your basic etiquette. Closely observe, and learn from, those with excellent manners, courtesy, and graciousness. You won’t win an account with exceptional manners, but you’ll surely lose one if they’re lacking.

**Ethics and Confidentiality:** every employer has basic policies and procedures that must be followed, in addition to laws and regulations. And, depending on the position, employees are often privy to confidential information. Here, your standards must be *impeccable* and nothing less. A broken trust, or failure to adhere to ethics and policies, can be disastrous. When in doubt, ask!

**Representation of Employer’s Brand:** most companies have a mission, vision, and statement of values to which employees are expected to honor. Your supervisor and leaders must be able to trust that you will capably represent the company’s values, both at work and in the community. As we’ve increasingly seen, that includes our comments and posts in the public square, especially on social media.

**Communication and Relationships:** in the workplace, our relational standards need to be even higher than with our personal relationships. Communication, both written and oral, must be more formal and appropriate, and always tactful and courteous. In order to build a harmonious working environment, positivity and constructive communication are the order of the day. Also, many lifelong friendships are formed at work, where *mutuality* and *respect* guide our behavior (*especially* in mixed gender relationships). Finally, one must *never* use position or power to abuse, disrespect, manipulate, or harass another. **No** exceptions.

**Growth Mindset:** successful employees are committed to lifelong learning. They seek professional development opportunities through webinars, journals, podcasts, and the experienced pros surrounding them. All of this positions employees for advancement in their current job and next-level opportunities.

Here are some key reasons why professionalism so important to employers:

- Employees are representing their employer and its brand, both internally and externally. Thus, professionalism is a personal *and* organizational issue.

- Customers and prospects expect and deserve it! Professionalism is a sign of respect we show others. We've all experienced unprofessional sales and service calls, and it motivates us to take our business elsewhere, doesn't it?
- Employees who struggle with professionalism rarely last long and certainly receive fewer opportunities. This is especially the case if the position is people-centric like sales or customer service.
- It builds stronger relationships and helps us make good first impressions when we meet new people.
- It helps us do a solid job, even on those days when we're not at our best.
- It helps us bring out the best in our colleagues, especially when we're in managerial roles.
- It's the right thing to do.

**Parents**, don't take for granted that your children are learning these valuable employability skills at school. Take primary responsibility for it, and introduce them to successful professionals whenever you can. Today's cultural messages are *not* preparing them in any way, shape, or form to be a professional, and our schools and universities aren't consistently helping either. The ball is in your court.

## **CONCLUSION**

We hope you've enjoyed our summary of the qualities of workplace superstars. While intelligence and technical skills are important elements of success, the leadership and relational skills we shared in our "top ten" list are arguably even more instrumental. Whether we're parents, relatives, educators, or mentors, we can all do our next generation a great service by modeling and building these essential qualities. Let's truly and holistically set them up for success.

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