

Student name: _____ Date: _____

Describe work ethics.*

Objectives:

- A. Define the “work ethic.”
- B. Define “work ethics.”
- C. Distinguish between ethical and unethical work behavior.
- D. Evaluate your own commitment to the “work ethic.”
- E. Prepare a list of ethical standards for the performance of your job.

MODULE 4F: INFORMATION SHEET

TO THE STUDENT: Read and study this information sheet and then complete the student activity at the end of this section.

What is ethics when used with or without an "S"?

Have you ever heard of “work ethics” before? If you look the term “ethic” up in the dictionary, you will see that it has to do with what is good and bad; that is, it has to do with moral issues.

There are two ways the term “work ethic” is used today: with and without an “s.” The singular form, “the work ethic,” means something slightly different than the plural form, “work ethics.”

What is ethics without an “S”?

“The work ethic” is a phrase that describes actions and beliefs of certain people. If a person works very hard and exhibits a great deal of pride in that work, that person is said to have a good “work ethic.” These people tend to be loyal, dependable, self-motivated, and satisfied workers. They believe that they have an obligation to work hard in order to provide for their families, contribute to the economic health of their community, and achieve a level of success for their own self-esteem.

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The “work ethic” concept originated back in the early Protestant church, as part of the Reformation movement in Europe. People believed that God had given them each a talent, gift, or skill (or maybe several skills) that they were expected to use to the best of their ability. To not use their God-given abilities in service to their fellow citizens was a form of sin, and the “Reformationalists” dedicated their entire lives to avoiding sin. They wanted to serve God and their fellow citizens with all their heart, thus fulfilling their purposes in life.

As you may see, some aspects of this “work ethic” concept remain in our society today. The moral obligation that many people feel to engage in productive, demanding, and appropriate work comes from these religious roots. In fact, our society sees this desire as a very good one. Employers are pleased when their employees exhibit qualities of this “work ethic.” The more of these qualities the worker exhibits, the better worker he or she is considered to be.

So the “work ethic” could be defined as the belief that one should work diligently, beyond minimum expectations, striving for excellence in every aspect of the labor. This belief, along with resulting similar actions by a worker, makes for an employee that any supervisor would be pleased to have.

What is ethics with an “S”?

With an “s” on the end, “work ethics” means something slightly different. With roots in the same religious belief system, the “ethics of the workplace” are usually thought of today as a set of moral standards for each trade, profession, or job classification. For example, psychologists would never disclose information about their clients outside of their professional duties. To do so would be a violation of their workplace ethics (or their moral/professional standards). A good mechanic would never repair one item in a car while sabotaging another part to malfunction later. It would be unethical. In the same way, it is considered unethical to advertise a certain product as having certain qualities if it really doesn’t.

At times, fine lines are drawn between the ethical and the unethical. One salesperson might believe it is all right to say his/her product is the best, while another might say there are none better (implying that this is as good as they come, but no better than other fine models). The sales people may disagree; the first maintaining there is nothing wrong with his statement, and the second refusing to “lie” to the customer. These types of differences among standards can confuse younger workers and many people argue and debate such issues at length.

As confusing as it can become, each type of job has certain ethical standards that most workers agree on for that occupation. Medical care workers agree that they should do everything they can to save a patient in danger of dying. Most workers agree that misrepresenting information to a customer or client is unethical. There are many, many other standards that workers within each occupation or profession try to live up to. These are workplace ethics (plural, with an “s”).

There are also many general ethical principles, applicable to any occupational area. Honesty, loyalty, confidentiality, accuracy, and open-mindedness are qualities that most employers hope their workers will possess. You could probably think of many others as well.

Every worker, including you, practices workplace ethics. Some workers practice them more conscientiously than others. Unfortunately, some workers are unethical in their performance of duties. At times, they break laws and are prosecuted, but more often they simply fail to live up to accepted standards of doing the job well. Perhaps they “juggle figures” to make their books balance (fraud/embezzlement). Perhaps they copy someone else’s work and call it their own (plagiarism). Maybe they hire a relative or a friend for a job rather than the most qualified applicant (nepotism). Although these practices could be challenged if discovered or uncovered, they often go unnoticed to all but the guilty party.

What about you?

How good is your understanding of the “work ethic” and “workplace ethics”? Do you exhibit qualities of a strong work ethic? Do you practice good workplace ethics? Do you do your job in a way that would earn respect from your employer? If every one of your actions and attitudes could be seen on videotape and played back in front of your employer, would you be pleased or embarrassed? Would your boss be proud or disappointed? Or worse yet, would you be fired for some unethical act?

The following activities will help you to be able to describe work ethics (both with and without an “s”) and to evaluate how ethical your own actions are. Most workers are reasonably ethical and exhibit at least some qualities of the “work ethic.” But many employers complain that they only have a few “really good workers.” It would undoubtedly please the bosses of America if we workers would launch an “old-fashioned work ethic” campaign, improving the work ethic (and ethics) in each of our organizations. Will it start with you and me?

MODULE 4F: STUDENT ACTIVITIES

TO THE STUDENT: After reading and studying the above information sheet, complete these activities to demonstrate your understanding.

1. Defining the terms:

In the space below, contrast the meanings of the terms “the work ethic” and “work ethics.”

2a. Using the terms

Next to each item below, write the term “ethical” or “unethical,” indicating how each action should be viewed by workers. If there is some doubt, or the item is unclear, write “depends,” and state what additional information would be helpful.

1. _____ A Dairy Queen worker weighs each cone before serving it to customers.
2. _____ The mechanic lets his brother use the garage bay for fixing his brakes after the shop has closed.
3. _____ The carpentry co-op student enters 5:00 on the time card after his co-worker urges him to do so, even though she is going home at 4:20 p.m.

4. _____ A nurse aide works past the end of the shift in order to finish assigned work. The aide was asked to be certain to finish the work during the shift because there would be no overtime paid.
5. _____ A machinist co-op student scraps forty pieces and decides not to tell anyone because of the trouble it would cause.
6. _____ An assembler slows down the production rate at his station, even though he could work faster because workers at other stations seem unable to keep up.

2b. Check which of the following worker characteristics would reflect a worker with a good “work ethic.”

- | | | | |
|-------|--------------------|-------|----------------------|
| _____ | punctual | _____ | sociable |
| _____ | respectful | _____ | uncooperative |
| _____ | independent | _____ | critical |
| _____ | conscientious | _____ | loyal |
| _____ | self-centered | _____ | reports off when ill |
| _____ | works when ill | _____ | seeks improvement |
| _____ | satisfied | _____ | interdependent |
| _____ | takes on no extras | _____ | disinterested |

**Note to instructor: The above exercises may have some ambiguous or unclear responses because many issues relating to work ethics are ambiguous. Please discuss the activities with students and help them draw conclusions based on your additional input and experience. Students should be able to justify their responses.*

3. Evaluate your commitment to the work ethic

Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 on each of the following items using this scale:

- 5 - A leader; consistently act this way and encourage others to do so as well.
- 4 - A role model; usually act this way and try to be an example.
- 3 - A good worker; can be depended upon to act this way most of the time.
- 2 - Could improve; not always the best at this, and should try to do better.
- 1 - Negligent; never gave it much thought.

1. _____ I attend every day, arrive on time, begin my tasks promptly, and work continually except for scheduled breaks.
2. _____ I realize my own errors quickly, admit when I have made a mistake, try to solve error-caused problems, and avoid making the same mistake again.
3. _____ I wear clean, well-fitting clothing, keep my body clean, and dress appropriately for my assigned duties.
4. _____ I complete tasks in the expected time, combine tasks for greatest efficiency, and refrain from nonproductive time wasting (unscheduled breaks, etc.).
5. _____ I conform to all safety rules and exhibit extra concern for the safety of others.
6. _____ I get enough rest, work enthusiastically, and avoid destructive health habits (smoking, substance abuse, drinking, and overeating).
7. _____ I work 60 minutes every hour and seek alternative tasks when assigned work is complete.
8. _____ I avoid complaining and criticizing, maintain a productive pace, and am committed to the company's goals.
9. _____ I make sure I achieve only the highest quality workmanship and I refuse to be represented by second-rate work or products.
10. _____ I work cooperatively to achieve group goals, compliment others' work, and participate in group efforts.

Add up your score and see where you could improve:

- 40-50 - what a worker!
- 30-40 - not bad, most employers would be happy
- 20-30 - you could stand to improve your work ethic
- below 20 - you may soon be unemployed

4. List ethical standards for your job

Prepare a list of ethical standards for workers in your occupation. List at least five GENERAL ethical standards (applicable to any job), and at least five ethical standards that apply specifically to YOUR job.

General Standards:

Your job title: _____

Your occupational ethical standards:

MODULE 4F: STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THIS MODULE

Pennsylvania’s Academic Standards for Career Education and Work

13.1.11. Career Awareness and Planning

- A. Analyze career options based on student interests, abilities, aptitudes and accomplishments.

13.3.11. Career Retention (Keeping a Job)

- A. Evaluate personal attitudes and work habits that support career retention and advancement.

Pennsylvania’s Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening (RWSL)

1.1.11. Learning to Read Independently

- E. Establish a reading vocabulary by identifying and correctly using new words acquired through the study of their relationships to other words. Use a dictionary or related reference.

1.6.11 Speaking and Listening

- A. Listen to others.
- Ask clarifying questions.
 - Synthesize information, ideas and opinions to determine relevancy.
 - Take notes.