



Generalizing Social Skills for Career Readiness

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Employability skills, career readiness skills, or soft skills. No matter which terms you use, these generally refer to the same concepts. Employers are looking for employees with certain knowledge, skills, and abilities that, when combined, form key workplace competencies. If you go online and conduct a search for “career readiness” or “career soft skills,” more often than not, the results will include lists with the following competencies: problem solving/critical thinking, teamwork/collaboration, work ethic/professionalism, oral/written communications, leadership, and self-management. Though the order of the list may vary, this list has remained mostly consistent for the past decade. When onboarding new hires, most employers are focused on job-specific skills and training – hard skills; so they tend to recruit and select employees who come in the door with these soft skills.

Then who is responsible for teaching students these skills? Isn't it enough that educators need to teach math, science, history, English and so on?

Before answering these questions, let's give some thought to what skills students need in order to be successful in our classrooms. We need our students to listen, to problem-solve, to work with others, and so on. As students move through our education system, one important thing we can do for them as educators is to help them realize that all the rules, expectations, and skills they need to be successful in school do not stop being important once they leave high school. These same expectations will apply later in life – whether they choose to go straight to work after high school, or pursue a college degree or vocational trade. They also help students develop positive friendships and romantic relationships (which is a great rationale to help students understand the “why” behind all of this). And it's safe to assume that not all students will come to this conclusion by themselves.

As they become more proficient with important skills like following instructions, disagreeing appropriately, accepting no, and so on, we need help them learn to generalize these skills outside the classroom. Taking the time to help students think about what these important skills look like in the work world could potentially mean the difference between their getting hired and getting fired.

Let's look at the keys to generalizing soft skills:

1. **Teach the basic skill steps.** Proactively take the time to help students analyze what a specific skill might look like or use the Boys Town resource [Teaching Social Skills to Youth](#) to teach the basic skills. This book has 183 different skills broken down into specific, observable, and measurable skill steps. Doing this teaching at a neutral time is a great way to keep the teaching positive!
2. **Teach students that these same skills apply in other environments.** Once students are proficient with the basic skills and you have practiced what these skills look like in the school environment, show them how these skills look in other situations. Use the provided tools to help your students find success beyond the classroom:



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Use the [Career Readiness Competency Identification Worksheet](#) to help students understand which competencies employers are looking for, and have students identify which skills help them develop/perform these competencies successfully.

Use the [Skill Generalization Worksheet](#) to identify and practice how to apply these skills in different settings, especially in a workplace.

3. **Practice, practice, practice!** Just like so many things in life, skills don't become habits without practice and reinforcement. Taking five minutes to teach a skill with practice, then shaping skill mastery through praise, correction, and appropriate reinforcement, will pay off more than you can imagine in the long run.

So when thinking about whose job it is to teach these skills to students, try hard to focus less on whose responsibility it is, and more about the long-term benefits of a collaborative effort. These simple steps not only improve your classroom environment, but also prepare students for success in work and life. There is nothing better than running into a former student in their new work environment, and seeing an adult who is succeeding in the workforce.