

SOFT SKILLS SOLUTIONS

# Stepping Stones to Success!

Goals & Attitude

Ann Cross | Martha Lanaghan



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# Preface

Today's job seekers face tough challenges. New technology, high unemployment, and fewer jobs make it essential for job seekers to set themselves apart from other applicants. That is, to grab the attention of an employer, a job seeker must stand out!

Employers today want more than someone with the necessary job-related skills. They want an employee who exhibits what many refer to as soft skills. **Soft skills** are the personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. Simply put, they are the skills an employee needs to get along and work well with others.

A recent survey found that the number one characteristic employers want to see in their workers is professionalism.<sup>1</sup> Professionalism encompasses multiple soft skills, including (but not limited to) communication, time management, self-management, leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.

The *Soft Skills Solutions* program will help you learn about and practice soft skills that will make you stand apart from others in your field. The *Soft Skills Solutions* program includes the following books:

- *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude*
- *Make Yourself Heard! Professional Communication Skills*
- *How You Act & Dress Matters! Professional Etiquette & Image*
- *Wake Up & Work! Keys to Self-Management*
- *Demonstrate Your Value through Collaboration! Teamwork & Motivation*
- *Play Nice & Stay Employed! Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations*
- *Lead with Integrity! Leadership & Ethics*

Each title concentrates on specific soft skills to help you attain skill mastery. Whether you are a new job seeker, a person re-entering the business world, a recent college graduate, or a longtime employee, completing these exercises to master these important soft skills will help you now and for the rest of your life. Even the most seasoned professionals will benefit from refreshing their skills from time to time.

Try to complete one book from the *Soft Skills Solutions* program per week. Although it may be helpful to begin with *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude* followed by the other titles in the program, these books are stand-alone pieces and can be used in any sequence.

1. Meghan Casserly, "Top Five Personality Traits Employers Hire Most," *Forbes*, October 4, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2012/10/04/top-five-personality-traits-employers-hire-most>.

## Program Features

Each *Soft Skills Solutions* book introduces skills necessary for success in business and explains their role in employment success. The program provides self-assessment activities to identify and address your individual needs and application activities to challenge you and to allow you to practice your skills. In addition, the text includes margin tips and informative sidebars to point out key information.

You will encounter these interactive features:

- Thinking Breaks
- Self-Assessment activities
- Apply the Skills activities



**Thinking Breaks** Part of learning a new skill is being able to apply it to your own experiences. These thought-provoking questions require reflection and honesty that, when applied, will help you identify your own opinions and beliefs relating to a specific aspect of employment success.



**Self-Assessment activities** The self-assessment activities help you assess your current soft skill level and provide a brief snapshot of your strengths and weaknesses. The more honest your answers, the more accurately you will be able to identify areas for improvement.

If the assessment section indicates that your skill level is high, you should still practice the daily workout but make it more challenging by trying to mentor or teach another person that skill. Attempting to teach others how to successfully master a skill is the ultimate test of your knowledge.

The self-assessment tool is for your own personal use. After you have identified areas in which you would like to improve, practice these exercises and continue to seek out ways to strengthen your competencies in your daily life.



**Apply the Skills activities** After skills are introduced and explained, Apply the Skills activities challenge you to use these skills. Complete these exercises daily until you've achieved mastery of the professionalism skill you are studying. Some of the activities require working with a partner or mentor. For others, working with a partner or mentor is simply recommended.

When choosing a partner or study buddy, seek out someone who supports you and wants to see you succeed and who can, above all, be honest with you about your current skill level. Your ability to reciprocate this effort is essential to your partner's success as well;

you will equally share in your progress and take an active role in each other's individual success, so choose wisely.

Having a mentor is ideal. Your mentor should be someone with whom you have a positive relationship and someone who is a professional in a position of authority. For example, you might seek out a teacher, boss, friend who is a manager or executive at a company, career services advisor, student advisor, human resources manager, current employer, or parent.

Employment success largely depends on your ability to identify and address areas in which you need to improve. To accomplish this, be willing to receive feedback from others. If you are not able to receive this kind of feedback easily—and if you get upset, angry, or defensive—then seek the help of a trusted expert who can help you learn to give and receive constructive feedback prior to beginning the program.

## **Additional Resources**

You will find additional resources on the *Soft Skills Solutions* Internet Resource Center (IRC) at [www.JIST.com/irc/softskills](http://www.JIST.com/irc/softskills).



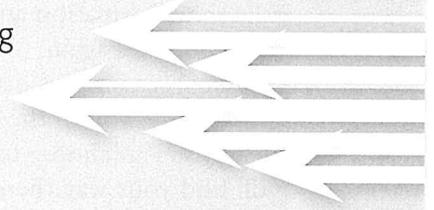
# Stepping Stones to Success!

## *Goals & Attitude*

### OBJECTIVES

Completing this book will allow you to

- Understand the importance of goal setting
- Define goal-setting techniques
- Create short-term and long-term goals
- Identify and obtain a mentor
- Understand the relationship between personality and a positive attitude
- Identify your own personality traits and values
- Understand and influence the atmosphere in the workplace
- Develop a strategy for maintaining a positive attitude



### Goal Setting: So What?

One of my favorite stories about attitude involves a person I know. She is the type of woman we all love (and secretly envy) in the office. She is always in a good mood, is upbeat and positive, and generally seems to be happy all the time.

One day, an especially challenging project failed. Afterward, she looked at me and in her cheerful voice said, “Well, we sure did learn a lot! Let’s call it a day and try again tomorrow.”

That response did not match my own feelings. I was downtrodden, frustrated, and, honestly, a bit annoyed that all our hard work had failed. So I asked her, “Tammy, how do you do it? How is it that you are *always* so positive?”

“It’s easy,” she replied. “I have a choice, and I have goals.”

She explained that she thinks about her choices in every situation. She can choose to be angry, frustrated, or hurt. *Or* she can choose to view disappointments as learning experiences, frustrations as signs that she needs to try a different approach, and hurt feelings as an opportunity to vocalize her feelings in a constructive way.

“But!” she added, “I also weigh my choices against one important test: would my choice bring me closer to or further from my goal?”

When she could determine the answer, she acted accordingly. For example, she set a goal to be well respected by her peers. To do this, she knew that she couldn’t fall apart when something didn’t work out as planned. Therefore, when a disappointment occurred, she chose to look at the positive side of the disappointment. In the case of our failed project, for example, we learned a great deal along the way. We could take the information and use it going forward to help us avoid the same mistakes again.

Goal setting and having a positive attitude are related in this way. Goals guide you in the direction you need to go. When your path is clear, you can choose to be positive, because you know eventually you will find your way there, even if you encounter some obstacles along the way.

When you understand this connection, goal setting becomes fun. Being positive even in the face of adversity becomes natural. As a result, you can literally shape your personality to how you want it to be.

## Goal Setting

You probably know people who constantly talk about wanting a better life, job, or house. They want to improve their life overall. When asked what that something better is, however, they can’t define it, or they define it in terms that are too general. Perhaps they can’t explain what they are doing to improve their life.

Moving to something better is difficult when you don’t clearly define what you want or detail the steps you will take to achieve that goal. For example, you may say you want a better job. Without clearly defining the attributes of the better job, though, you will go around looking aimlessly for something that is unclear to you. Or worse, you will take a different job thinking it will be better only to find out it isn’t, but by then, it’s too late and you start to condition your thinking to the belief that there is nothing “better” out there. This is why clearly defining your goals is important.

A **goal** is a target. Think of a goal as a destination on a map. To reach the destination, you have to gather the necessary essentials for the trip and plot out a defined route. You also must have resources available in the event you hit a roadblock and be prepared to take any necessary detours. And lastly, you must celebrate when you’ve reached your destination.

**TIP** A goal should keep you focused on your own success and keep you motivated when you encounter setbacks.

Goals help you stay focused on the future and keep you motivated to continue when you encounter setbacks. They help you achieve, not just hope for, what you want in life. You should set goals in all major areas of your life, including your personal, professional, financial, educational, physical, and social areas. Goal setting may help you view yourself more positively, which can manifest itself into a more positive attitude. Others may sense this and be drawn to help you pursue your goals.



### *Self-Assessment—How Good Are You at Goal Setting?*

For each of the statements, refer to the scale that follows and ask, “How often is this statement true for me?” Choose the most accurate answer: always, sometimes, or rarely.

Statement	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
1. When I set a goal, I write it down.			
2. When describing my goals, I do so using specific measurable terms.			
3. I visualize my goals.			
4. My goals are achievable.			
5. I break down my long-term goals into manageable short-term achievements that I must accomplish.			
6. I set deadlines for my goals.			
7. I try to anticipate and then prepare for possible obstacles I may encounter while in pursuit of my goals.			
8. I take actions, before I begin, to lessen any potential problems.			
9. I review progress toward my goal on an ongoing basis.			
10. I know the personal rewards of reaching my goal.			

Use the following scale to add up the points for each of your answers and record your total in the box that follows.

## Tally Your Score

Always = 5 points

Sometimes = 3 points

Rarely = 1 point

Total Score:

**40 to 50 points:** You are doing a very good job of setting goals. You understand the basic steps of goal setting and have incorporated them, to some degree, into your personal or professional life.

**20 to 39 points:** You are on your way to achieving effective goal setting. However, you still need to concentrate on the areas to which you answered "Sometimes" or "Rarely."

**Below 20 points:** You can improve your goal setting in several areas.

## How to Set Goals

Knowing *how* to set a goal is a skill that all people should learn. It begins with self-reflection and introspection (because the goal must be your own) and requires a firm grasp in reality (because a goal must also be attainable). Consider the following when setting a goal:

- **A goal must be your own.** Goals dictated by someone else are difficult to accomplish and are rarely achieved. *You* should be the person deciding your goals, not your parents, spouse, friends, partner, relatives, or anyone who may have influence in your life. This is why some people find goal setting to be a difficult process. They may have a difficult time standing up for their own decisions, or they may be swayed by the good intentions of others.
- **A goal should be inspired.** Having a source of inspiration or something to aspire to will help people set and achieve their own goals. Without positive reinforcement, a person may become lost and work according to other people's needs or desires.
- **A goal should be attainable.** Goals must be realistic so that they can actually be achieved.
- **A goal should be in your control.** Having a goal that requires the involvement or approval of others may make achieving the goal difficult. Therefore, try to set goals that you have significant control over, or make sure that you maintain reasonable control of your goal by exercising flexibility.

- **A goal should include a time frame.** Setting a time frame will make the goal measurable. For example, if you have a goal to become a manager at your company, make it specific by writing it down. You might write, “My goal is to become a manager in my company within the next 12 months.”
- **A goal should include an action plan.** You need a detailed action plan to achieve your goal. You need to identify who may be involved in helping you achieve the goal and the steps you will take to get there. Most important, you need to identify what resources you’ll need to accomplish your goal, such as education or training, finances, and so on.



### *Apply the Skills—Consider Prior Goals*

Think of a goal you had in the past that you did *not* achieve. Record it below:

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Now try to identify where the goal fell short by answering these questions:

1. Did you try hard enough? If not, why not?

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2. Were any of the techniques, skills, or information you used faulty? If so, identify these shortcomings. Then describe what you can do to enhance or improve for the future.

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3. Was the goal realistic? Why or why not?

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4. Did you write it down? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Did you create an action plan? \_\_\_\_\_

Next, think of a goal that you had in the past that you *did* achieve.  
Record it below:

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Now try to identify what you did that helped you reach the goal  
by answering these questions:

6. What did you have to do to achieve this goal?

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7. Were there any unexpected problems? If so, when did they  
occur (from the start, further down the road, and so on)? Did  
you anticipate and prepare for them in advance? How did you  
overcome them?

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8. Was the goal easily achieved? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, is there a more difficult goal you can set for yourself going forward?

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If not, what can you do next time to reach the goal more easily or make the goal a bit easier next time?

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9. Did you notice any knowledge or skills that you lacked that would have made reaching the goal easier? If so, what were they, and what steps will you take to gain that knowledge or skill?

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2. **How would you rank the goals that you have listed?** Review your list and rank your goals based on what you value most. Rewrite your top five in order of importance in the space below.

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3. **Which goal do you want to work on first?** Select one goal from the previous list. Ideally, this would be one of your top-ranking goals. Starting with one goal will help you focus. Identify your selected goal in the space below.

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4. **Why do you want to complete this goal?** There must be a reason to reach the goal you have selected. Identify why this long-term goal is important to you. Then explain how you think it will improve your life.

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## Short-Term Goals

Now that you've identified a long-term goal, you need to define and describe the details of how you will achieve the goal. This step typically involves a set of planned actions that lead you to your desired long-term goal. These short action plans often become your short-term goals.

You can typically achieve a short-term goal within a year. In some cases, short-term goals are the steps necessary to achieve a long-term goal. However, short-term goals have value of their own; they do not have to inevitably lead to some larger, long-term goal. In fact, you may find this especially true in the work environment. Some projects have to be completed in a short time period, whereas others refer to completing the project by a deadline as a "goal."

In business, short-term goals are often referred to as *objectives* because they are measurable and may have specific time frames. When you are setting personal goals, your timeline may be one day, a week, or a month. However, you should complete your short-term goals within a year and, in some cases, these should support a long-term goal.

An easy way to help remember the strategy for developing short-term goals is to use the acronym SMART:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**esult-focused
- **T**ime-bound

**Specific** Write your goals simply and clearly, and describe exactly what you are going to do. This is your goal statement. For example, "By working hard, showing up on time, and going above and beyond what is expected of me, I will be promoted to manager by year's end."

**Measurable** Goals should be measurable so that you have evidence that you have accomplished the goals. Usually, you can use the goal statement to measure your short-term goals. In the previous example, the measurement is whether or not you are promoted to manager.

**Achievable** As stated previously, it's important to have goals that challenge you but are also attainable. For example, say the company for which you work has a strict policy that states you must work in your current position for at least two years before being considered for a promotion and you've just started. In that case, setting a goal of becoming a manager by the year's end is *not* achievable and therefore not an appropriately stated goal.

**Result-focused** Measure your goals by outcomes, not activities. For example, say the stated goal is “Lose 20 pounds through a combination of balanced diet and exercise over the next six months.” However, all you do is track the food you eat and the exercises you engage in *without* weighing yourself. In that case, you are tracking or measuring only your activities and not your outcomes. You need to include your outcomes (how much you are losing or gaining) to know if what you are doing is working.

In the manager example, you should track instances when you go above and beyond your expectations (such as staying late to help a coworker finish an assignment). You also should track the outcomes (such as the company benefitting from your extra effort or someone acknowledging your hard work).

**Time-bound** Link your goals to a time frame to create a practical sense of urgency.



### *Apply the Skills—Goal-Setting Activity: Part II*

Complete the steps below to practice goal setting:

1. Think about a goal you would like to achieve. Write down your goal statement on the lines below.

Goal statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Write down the actions you’ll need to take today, next week, monthly, and so on to achieve your goal. Think of these actions as the steps leading you toward your goal.

Action steps (today): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Action steps (next week): \_\_\_\_\_

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Action steps (in six months): \_\_\_\_\_

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Action steps (in one year): \_\_\_\_\_

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3. List the resources you'll need to accomplish the goal (such as child care, funds, or transportation).

Required resources: \_\_\_\_\_

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4. List all the resources that are available to you now and that may become available to you in the near future. You may not have many resources available to you at this time, so don't be concerned if you don't have a lot to write down.

Available resources (today): \_\_\_\_\_

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Available resources (next week): \_\_\_\_\_

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Available resources (in six months): \_\_\_\_\_

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Available resources (in one year): \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Now that you have identified your needed resources, go back to the action steps you identified in Step 2 and consider if additional steps are needed.
6. Identify other individuals who are either affected by the goal, or whose participation is needed in achieving the goal. After you identify these people, ask yourself if they are a willing or unwilling party. If they are currently unwilling or don't yet know that their participation is needed, you need to describe what you'll do to gain their help and engage them as willing participants.

People involved (today): \_\_\_\_\_

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People involved (next week): \_\_\_\_\_

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People involved (in six months): \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
People involved (in one year): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Finally, identify any current or potential obstacles. Then describe a plan in which you'll overcome these obstacles. For example, if one obstacle to your goal is "child care," you can describe your plan to overcome this. Your plan may include "talk to Mom about watching her grandchild three hours per day" if that's what you need to accomplish the goal.

Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Consolidate Your Work

Now that you better understand the steps required to set a goal and a plan of action, you may want to record your work in an easy-to-reference table. Use the table on the next page to record your work. Or go to [www.JIST.com/irc/softskills](http://www.JIST.com/irc/softskills) for a blank copy of the table that you can print and use again and again.

## Goal-Setting Action Plan

<b>Goal Statement</b>	
<b>Action Steps</b>	
Today	
Next week	
In six months	
In one year	
<b>Resources Needed</b>	
<b>Available Resources</b>	
Today	
Next week	
In six months	
In one year	
<b>Current Financial Resources</b>	
<b>Financial Resources Needed</b>	

*continues*

## Goal-Setting Action Plan

### People Involved

Today

Next week

In six months

In one year

### Potential Obstacle

### Potential Solution

## Finding a Mentor

As you can see, goal setting is a detailed process that is not easily understood without some patience and practice. Don't be discouraged if you struggle with these exercises in the beginning. Like most skills, goal setting takes time to learn. If goal setting doesn't come naturally to you, one of the best things you can do for yourself is find a mentor who can help you learn the art of goal setting.

Having a mentor who can help you achieve your goals will be helpful. Think of mentoring as an education of sorts. A mentor serves as a guide or advisor to you as you embark on achieving your goal. Through a formal or informal relationship, the mentor teaches, advises, supports, and provides guidance on how you may successfully reach your goal.

**TIP** A mentor is a wonderful resource to have in your life.

Although mentors can be parents, teachers, colleagues, clergy, or friends, your mentor should have knowledge and expertise related to your goal. Your mentor then can provide you with valuable insights on what will or will not work.

As you search for a mentor, look for qualities that will allow the relationship to succeed. When considering which person to choose as your mentor, you should find someone who meets the following criteria:

- A good mentor is someone you respect.
- He or she is respected in his or her field.
- You are comfortable with this person and his or her personality is compatible with yours.
- He or she has achieved the same goal or a similar goal to the one you are attempting to achieve.
- A good mentor is an effective communicator.
- He or she can provide constructive feedback.
- He or she has a passion or interest in others.
- This person is willing to be your mentor.

After you identify the person you would like to be your mentor, contact him or her, share your short- and long-term goals, and explain that you are looking for a mentor.

Explain why you feel his or her expertise could help you reach your goals. Also explain that if he or she is your mentor, you'll need feedback on your plan and a periodic review of your progress. Discuss any guidelines and expectations (of both parties) before you begin. You'll want to determine things such as when, where, and how often you will meet.

Lastly, determine what you can provide to the mentor in return for his or her help. Consider offering to help with projects or offer your services in an area for which you have expertise in exchange for help.

### **Can You Ask *Anyone* to Be Your Mentor?**

Do not ask a complete stranger to be your mentor. Asking someone to be your mentor is asking that person to invest time and energy into your success. Therefore, you should establish some level of acquaintance before this relationship begins. If there is someone in your field whom you do not know but would like to contact, consider asking that person for an informational interview instead. This way, you can learn about his or her experience and any recommendations. However, it does not require this person to be your mentor.



*Who might you consider asking to be your mentor? Write a short list of potential mentors in the space below:*

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## Professional Attitude

Setting goals and finding a mentor are both helpful first steps in finding a new job, making a life change, and starting a new project. Having goal-setting skills will help you as you progress in your career. It's a process of systematic thinking that is sometimes very useful in the business world, especially when you start to progress in your career toward management.

Of course, as you strive to achieve more difficult goals and challenge yourself to think bigger, the challenges you face along the way become equally more challenging. This is the reason that maintaining a positive, professional attitude is crucial to reach your goals successfully. As the obstacles become more difficult to overcome, sometimes the difference in whether or not you persevere is all in your attitude.

In a recent article published online by LinkedIn Business Insider, Richard Branson, the multibillionaire and founder and CEO of Virgin Airlines, says, "The first thing to look for when searching for a great employee is somebody with a personality that fits with your company culture. Most skills can be learned, but it is difficult to train people on their personality. If you can find people who are fun, friendly, and caring and love helping others, you are on to a winner." He goes on to say, "If somebody has five degrees and more A grades than you can fit on one side of paper, it doesn't necessarily mean

**TIP** Studies show that a positive attitude can be the difference between achieving a goal and not achieving a goal.

### LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a terrific resource for people who want to find a job or advance their career. LinkedIn allows users to post professional information online and connect with others to network. Joining LinkedIn and creating a professional LinkedIn profile will help you network and meet people in your chosen career. To create a profile, go to [www.Linkedin.com](http://www.Linkedin.com) and follow the easy instructions to create a profile.

they are the right person for the job. Great grades count for nothing if they aren't partnered with broad-ranging experience and a winning personality."<sup>2</sup>

Many top CEOs of some of the largest companies in the world echo this sentiment. You can have all the talent in the world, but if you don't have the personality to match, you may find your career stuck in neutral.

## **Attitude, Personality, and Positive Thinking**

Personality and attitude dictate how a person responds to stress, conflict, crisis, and any other situation. Therefore, understanding your own personality is the first important step in maintaining a positive attitude. When you understand your own personality, it will be much easier to recognize how you respond to the personality traits and attitudes of others. This is why personality assessments are recommended for job seekers.

Many types of personality assessments are available. The two most popular assessments are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Dominance, Inducement, Submission, and Compliance (DISC) profile. Most workforce centers or college entrance departments have these personality assessments available for free. You can also access them online.

You can go to <http://softskills.emcp.net/DISC> to take a DISC assessment for free. The results will provide you with detailed information on your personality type and how you react, respond, and work best with the other personality types. After you complete the assessment, you are provided with a detailed document that you should read thoroughly. Knowing as much as you can about yourself will help you in many ways during your career.

Many people with different personalities make up a workplace. Having harmonious relationships between employees is essential in any business. Interactions create relationships, and remaining positive during all your interactions will help you build healthy and strong relationships with your coworkers. Healthy relationships with coworkers will, in turn, make your time at work more enjoyable and lead to increased productivity.<sup>3</sup> Of course, when you are more productive, everyone benefits. Ultimately, being productive will help you get noticed and get ahead within the organization.

2. Richard Branson, "How I Hire: Focus on Personality," LinkedIn, September 23, 2013, <http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20130923230007-204068115-how-i-hire-focus-on-personality>.

3. D. H. Masiter, "Employee Attitudes Affect a Company's Financial Success," *Employment Relations Today* 28, no. 3, (2001): 17-33.

Research shows that when people work with a positive mind-set, performance improves on nearly every level (productivity, creativity, and engagement).<sup>4</sup> Leaders at all levels who were interviewed by the authors cite the following positive effects on the advancement in their careers when they displayed a positive attitude:

- People will be drawn to you, and they will want to help you. This connection will help you in all areas of your life. Attracting the right people will make it easier to achieve your goal of being successful.
- You will more easily remain focused on your goal instead of on your problems. Positive thinking is aligned with your goals; negative thinking is not.
- When you are positive, your energy is high. The higher your energy, the more productive you will become and the faster you will achieve your goals!

Positive thinking can be, and should be, automatic. However, if you've been conditioning yourself throughout your life to think negatively, negativity is your *current* default attitude.

Do a quick assessment:

- Are you often anxious or impatient?
- Do you get angry or frustrated quickly?
- Do you criticize?
- Do you worry?

These are symptoms of automatic negativity. They reflect the negative beliefs held in the subconscious mind. Beliefs trigger automatic negative thoughts, speech, and behaviors. But even though they may be deeply entrenched, they are not cast in stone, either!

Let's dig a bit deeper to find out how positive you really are!



### *Self-Assessment—How Positive Are You?*

For each of the statements, refer to the following scale and ask yourself, "When I am at work, I..." Choose the most accurate answer: always, sometimes, or rarely. When you are finished, calculate your total using the scoring chart on page 26.

4. Martin E. P. Seligman, Tracy A. Steen, and Christopher Peterson, "Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 5, (2005); D. H. Masiter, "Employee Attitudes Affect a Company's Financial Success," *Employment Relations Today* 28, no. 3, (2001): 17–33; M. Fishbein, *Readings in Attitude Theory and Measurement* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967).

Statement	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
1. Speak in a friendly tone of voice.			
2. Smile and try to use people's names while speaking with them.			
3. Show a genuine interest in others.			
4. Strive to do the best work possible.			
5. Treat others with patience and tolerance.			
6. Praise others generously.			
7. Ask questions and listen openly to their responses.			
8. Consider others' feelings and points of view.			
9. Communicate openly and honestly.			
10. Can be counted on to do the right thing.			
11. Solve problems instead of complaining.			
12. Support others in decision-making processes.			
13. Take a win-win approach to resolving conflict.			
14. Work well as part of a team.			
15. Have a good sense of humor.			
16. Stay committed to reaching organizational goals.			
17. Focus on the process as well as the results.			
18. Take responsibility for the quality of my work.			

*continues*

Statement	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
19. Demonstrate personal motivation.			
20. Maintain a proactive attitude.			

Use the following scale to add up your points for each of your answers and record your total in the box that follows:

### Tally Your Score

Always = 5 points

Sometimes = 3 points

Rarely = 1 point

Total Score:

**80 to 100 points:** This score indicates you have a strong foundation for having a positive attitude at work. You may make improvements by tweaking specific situations or circumstances.

**50 to 79 points:** This score indicates that although you are positive at work some of the time, overall, you do not present yourself as a positive influence in most situations. It is recommended that you work on increasing your positivity on a more consistent basis.

**Below 50 points:** This score indicates a need for immediate attention, including—first and foremost—whether the job you have is the right job and whether you are totally committed to the overall success of the organization and your own success.

Your results from this attitude self-evaluation are a good indication of how others perceive your attitude. They also indicate how you might need to adjust your attitude and behavior in the workplace. You should take these results seriously and consider following the advice for exuding a positive attitude.

The good news is that you can train yourself to be positive in any situation using the following positive thinking exercises.

## Practice Positive Thinking

Just like physical exercise, these mental/emotional exercises require daily practice until they become automatic. When they're automatic, you'll experience a dramatic shift in your attitude. Plus, you'll start viewing others differently too. Eventually, this will translate to better outcomes in your professional and personal life.

**Be grateful** Give thanks for everything in your life, including the difficulties, frustrations, struggles, and trials. Try including the people who make you angry and frustrated because they've provided you an opportunity to grow. Think about your life in terms of what is great, not what is missing. Give serious thought to what the silver lining might be in every situation. Give thanks for what you have and for what brought you to where you are now.

### A Video on Gratitude

You can find a terrific video online at <http://softskills.emcp.net/Happiness>. This video shows a study that was done which supports the idea that people are actually happier (more positive) after giving thanks and showing gratitude to others! Watch the video; then try the exercise shown for yourself and see how you feel.

**Say no to negative thoughts** Make it a point every day to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts. If you find yourself in the throes of negativity, STOP, say "No" to those thoughts, and try writing down some positive thoughts to replace them with. For example, let's say you make a mistake on something and find yourself thinking, "I'm so stupid. I never do anything right." Immediately make a list of the last five things you did correctly. You can start with simple things like "I drove my car safely to work" or "I made an excellent sandwich for lunch." This kind of thinking will start to take over when you begin beating yourself up mentally.



*Record what you are grateful for in the space below:*

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### **Additional Activity: Keep a “Gratitude Journal”**

A gratitude journal is a great way to maintain a thankful and positive state of mind. If you want to get the full benefit of a gratitude journal, we recommend that you record your “things I am grateful for” at the end of the day. Ideally, you should make it the last thing you do before you go to sleep. Follow these steps to get started:

1. Be thankful.
2. Set a goal to write down at least five things to be grateful for each day. This will help you stay mindful to look for things throughout the day.
3. Write down some obvious things you’re grateful for in your life, such as food, clothing, and your home.
4. Write about relationships or people in your life, such as the love of your family, the support of good friends, or the help of a stranger.
5. Describe the personal attributes and strengths you possess for which you are grateful.
6. Write about situations and experiences.



### *Apply the Skills—Negative Words: Lose Them!*

Write down ten negative words or phrases that you use a lot, such as *no*, *can’t*, *won’t*, or *too difficult*. Try to eliminate them from your vocabulary. Enlist the help of close friends and family if possible. See if they know of any negative words or phrases you use often. Add any additional negative words or phrases to your list. Explain to your friends and family that you’re practicing using positive words. Ask them to alert you whenever they hear you using a negative word or phrase.

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**Find at least one happy person and spend time with him or her**  
Avoid people who are angry, negative, sour, jaded, critical, judgmental, or dramatic. If you surround yourself with positivity, you’ll adopt it as your way of being—and very quickly at that!



### *Apply the Skills—Pondering the Positive People*

Write down the names of two or three people you know who are positive. Keeping these people in mind, write down what you believe makes them positive. Also write down how they behave that demonstrates to you that they are positive.

Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Traits: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Traits: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Traits: \_\_\_\_\_

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After you identify those behaviors and traits, go to a public place where you may or may not receive great service. For example, you might go to a restaurant, grocery store, post office, department of motor vehicles, or other place. Then, when you find yourself in a “not so great” situation, mentally note how you control your feelings by practicing positive behaviors, regardless of how another person is behaving toward you.

**Fake it until you make it** Some days, being positive feels almost impossible. So fake it by SMILING! When you smile, the message from your facial muscles gets transmitted to your brain. As a result, you start to feel happier. Practice smiling every day. Be conscious of your face and whether you are smiling or frowning. It’s scientifically proven that smiling is an instant mood lifter. In fact, an article cites a number of studies conducted around the globe about the influence our facial expressions have on our mood and even our ability to process pain!<sup>5</sup>

**TIP** When you find yourself in a not-so-great customer service situation, see how you feel and how the other person reacts if you maintain a smile throughout the interaction.

5. Melinda Wenner, “Smile! It Could Make You Happier,” *Scientific American*, August 1, 2009, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/smile-it-could-make-you-happier>.

**Say “yes” to having a positive impact on others** Volunteer at a homeless shelter or an animal shelter. Spend a day clearing out your garage and donating unneeded items. Offer to help a neighbor with a project. Spend some time at a senior center. Do whatever makes you feel good, useful, and valuable! Experience what it feels like for you if you put aside your own struggles and focus on helping others.



### *Apply the Skills—Brainstorm Ways to Make a Positive Impact*

There are many informal ways to help or have a positive impact on others. Write down the names or locations of some of your usual casual encounters (coffee shop, tollbooth, gas station, grocery store). Then make a specific and conscious decision to offer to help or improve someone’s day. Your effort may be as simple as saying to someone who seems to be having a tough day, “Hey, it looks as if you are having a tough day, and I just want to say thank you for all that you do.”

**Visualize success** Use your imagination to see yourself reaching your goal of finding employment or getting a promotion. Creatively visualize what you want. Then hold that mental image until it feels right and normal. Although doing so takes practice, it has a huge payoff!



*Write down in great detail what success will look like for you. How will you look, feel, or act? How will others behave after you’ve achieved your goal? What material gifts or incentives will you receive as a result of achieving your goal? Consider all possibilities, no matter how crazy!*

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## Tying It All Together: Positive Attitudes and Goal Setting

You now understand that all thoughts, good and bad, have influence on your behavior. That is why you must learn to be more positive. However, you don't want to completely ignore your negative thoughts because these negative thoughts can alert you to something that needs attention. Remember, you can think positively or negatively in almost every situation. So in this case, take a negative thought and turn it into something positive!

Think of a negative thought that has been predominant in your subconscious. A predominant thought is one that is recurring and habitual; it lasts for some time (weeks, months, years). The thoughts in your mind that you don't necessarily notice make up your subconscious. For example, "I feel and look terrible; therefore, no one will hire me." This kind of negative thought can lead to discovering what needs to be done. Therefore, this is an opportunity to set a goal to address your concerns. Many people fail to see a negative occurrence as a learning experience. They continue to feel victimized and helpless, ultimately blaming others for what they had the power to fix all along.



### *Apply the Skills—Use Goal Setting to Change Your Attitude*

Take your predominant negative thought, turn it into a goal statement, and then make a plan to change *how you feel*. Refer to the activity and directions on pages 13–18 to complete this activity.

For example, the negative statement "I feel and look terrible; therefore, no one will hire me" can be turned into this goal statement: "I will take steps to feel and look better, and as a result, within 90 days, I will find a new job."

Now repeat the process you used earlier to overcome your own negative thought and set a goal!

Negative thought: \_\_\_\_\_

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Goal statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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Action steps (today): \_\_\_\_\_

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Action steps (next week): \_\_\_\_\_

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Action steps (in six months): \_\_\_\_\_

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Available resources (next week): \_\_\_\_\_

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Available resources (in six months): \_\_\_\_\_

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Available resources (in one year): \_\_\_\_\_

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**TIP** Remember that after you identify the resources needed, you may have to go back to your action steps and add additional steps.

People involved (today): \_\_\_\_\_

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People involved (next week): \_\_\_\_\_

People involved (in six months): \_\_\_\_\_

People involved (in one year): \_\_\_\_\_

Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_

Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_

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Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_

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Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_

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Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_

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Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_

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Potential obstacle: \_\_\_\_\_

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Potential solution: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Summary

There's nothing like the feeling of success. It is such a thrill to know you're on your way to achieving your goals and achieving the success for which you worked so hard. Positive reinforcement is an essential part of achieving your goals, and your ability to embrace it is crucial to your success. Remember to be positive and have confidence in yourself, always. You can accomplish a goal without believing that it is possible as long as you have a strategy in place.

I always had a goal of becoming a published author. I never actually believed I would do it, but I wrote down this goal, jotted down some actions I could take, and went about the business of building my career in education. Occasionally, I would revisit the goal I wrote down, and slowly the reality of it started to take shape. I started to *believe* it was a possibility, and once belief kicked in, my hunger to achieve the goal took over.

You will accomplish your goals only if you are "hungry" enough to achieve them. To be hungry, you need to really want it and be sure that you will do anything in your power to get there. Self-confidence, combined with a positive attitude, is the key to quickly achieving your goals. So get out there, think positively, and get what you want!

## Next Steps

Consider all you have learned and answer the following prompts:

1. From my experience, I consider these to be the three most important takeaways:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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2. I plan to implement the following changes immediately:

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3. I feel I still need to work on this area(s):

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4. I plan to keep improving by doing the following:

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