



Let's Get to Work!

(What you and your employer can expect at the job site)

Introduction: Getting a job and going to work is an important but difficult step in transitioning to adult life. It is often assumed that young people can easily transition from the life of a child, going to school every day and behaving as a child, to the life of an adult, going to work every day and behaving as an adult. In reality, this transition is difficult and many employers and employees get frustrated, jobs are lost and self-confidence is damaged simply because young people have not learned the skills necessary to be successful at a job site. With this in mind, we have created this brief instructional guide for young people getting ready to start a job. Take a few minutes and read about what both you and your employer can expect when you are at work. We think you will find this to help clarify some things and to be a good use of your time.

Work Vocabulary: One of the difficulties in entering the working world is that the language of the job site is often very different than that of home or school. Try to become comfortable with the following terms and this will help keep things simple at work:

1. **employee:** person who works for someone else in exchange for pay
2. **employer:** person or company that puts someone else to work and pays him/her
3. **employment:** a job; work that pays money
4. **application:** a form to complete asking to be considered for a job
5. **resume':** information about someone detailing why he/she should be hired
6. **interview:** a formal talk in which someone looking for a job talks with someone hiring
7. **vacancy:** position at work to be filled
8. **full-time work:** in the USA, usually 40 hours a week or more
9. **part-time work:** in the USA, under 40 hours weekly
10. **overtime:** working more than the expected 40 hours weekly; often paid at a higher rate

11. **“comp” time:** paid time off granted to an employee for working extra hours
12. **permanent work:** work expected to last for a long time
13. **temporary or seasonal work:** work not expected to last; daily, weekly, monthly work
14. **fringe benefits:** payment besides money for working; vacation time, health insurance, dental insurance, sick leave, retirement, etc.
15. **maternity leave:** period of absence for female employee when having a baby; protected by law in the USA
16. **personnel:** people working for a company
17. **Human Resource office:** people in charge of hiring and training workers
18. **wage:** pay by the hour
19. **salary:** pay that is fixed weekly, monthly or annually
20. **piece work:** pay by the job (e.g. \$20 for mowing a lawn)
21. **commission:** pay by a percentage (usually of a sale) earned
22. **bonus:** pay awarded above expectation
23. **pay check:** check issued to an employee in payment of salary or wages
24. **check stub:** the part of a **check** that is kept as a record
25. **deductions:** money taken from your check for taxes, Social Security, insurance, etc.
26. **payroll tax:** money paid to the government out of your pay check
27. **gross pay:** the total amount of money you earned (e.g. 40 hrs x \$10 per hour =\$400)
28. **net pay:** the amount of money you take home; gross pay minus deductions
29. **Social Security:** money that is taken from your check by the government to support the elderly, those unable to work, etc; listed as FICA on your check stub
30. **training:** learning something new to help you on the job
31. **initiative:** willingness to take on new responsibilities
32. **evaluation:** judgment about your work, may include criticism or recommendations for improvement

Many other terms could be included here but these are terms we consider most important. Other terms related to work sites will be discussed in later sections of this guide.



Things Your Employer Will Expect From You: When you have a job your employer is paying you to perform duties necessary for the business to either make money or to function effectively. You may find your work duties to be easy or difficult, exciting or boring; they might be performed inside or outside and you might be physically active or you might sit at a computer. If you have agreed to accept the job in return for performing the work, your employer has a right to expect from you a number of characteristics and behaviors at the job site. Most employers will expect the following from their employees:

1. **Honesty:** An employer is inviting you into his/her business to work. The employer must be able to trust that his/her workers are NOT going to steal from him/her. Whether it is stealing money from the cash register, supplies out of the office, a piece of jewelry off a shelf or a lunch out of the employee lunchroom, stealing WILL get you fired from your job and it may get you arrested as well.



Consistently getting to work late or taking off early is also stealing from your employer as is giving less than your best effort, chatting with friends on the phone when you are supposed to be working, and giving friends who come in to the business discounts. (* Reserve use of your cell phone to emergencies only and NO texting!) Lastly, do not engage in lying at work especially with regard to gossip about co-workers.

2. **Dependability:** A huge part of success on the job involves being at work every day and being on time. There is work to be done and your employer is counting on you to be there to get it done. Of course, occasionally we all get sick, or have an appointment with the dentist or get a flat tire on the way to work. When these types of things



happen, your employer will expect you to call off as early as possible.

And if you know you will be out (as with an appointment) be sure to check with your boss on this before you take off.

3. **Enthusiasm:** Rarely do we like absolutely everything about our jobs. For most of us there are some things our jobs entail which we find to be difficult or boring or we just don't like doing them. With this in mind , an employer has a right to expect an employee



to always do his/her best on a job and to do so with enthusiasm. It is important to concentrate on the positive, more interesting aspects of your job and soon you will find the total job to be more enjoyable. And be sure to communicate this to others by having a smile on your face, by keeping yourself active and busy and by



communicating positive messages to those you work with.

4. **Cooperation:** It is very important that you do your best to get along with everyone with whom you work. Sometimes this is very difficult but other than situations in which you are threatened or directly offended, this is a responsibility you hold as an employee. Most workers must cooperate with other workers and/or customers to get things done .



5. **Following Directions and the Rules:** When your boss or supervisor gives you directions on what to do or how to do something, it is very important that you follow those directions as exactly as you can. Other than directions which could put you in an unsafe situation or instructions that somehow offend you, you are expected as an employee to do the work as you are told to do it. Also be sure to follow the rules of the worksite with regard to your **dress** and your **language**. Be sure to dress appropriately for the work you are doing and keep your language clean.
6. **Showing Initiative:** At the job site, be willing to do more than just the basic tasks you have been given. Be willing to assist others, be willing to take on new responsibilities and stay busy! Do, however, be careful to stay within your training and ability level. Do NOT attempt to do work for which you are not qualified.



7. **Productivity:** It is very important at work that you get your job done, and get it done on time. Unlike school, at work there is no make-up work, nor extra credit, nor is late work accepted. Rather, you will be given work to do and you will be expected to get it done. Stay focused, stay on task and do your best and you will do fine.

8. **Adaptability:** Be flexible in how you do your job at the work site. You may be asked to change your hours or you may be asked to work at a different location. You may be



asked to try something new or you may be asked to work with a new worker.

Do your best to display your ability to adapt, to adjust to change in a positive, easy-going way.

9. **Open-mindedness:** Your employer will expect you to learn to do things the way they are done in the business. You will also be expected to train for new job responsibilities and you will need to be able to handle constructive criticism so as to improve your work performance. It is best to view a job as an opportunity for growth and to embrace the



learning that will come with it.

10. **Have a Positive Attitude:** Each of the characteristics and behaviors an employer will expect from you is related to having a positive attitude. Simply put; follow the rules, be there and on time, get along with others, complete the work assigned to you, work “above and beyond” and do all this with a smile on your face. If you do these things, soon you will be hiring and/or training the new employee yourself.



Things You Can Expect From Your Employer: Just as your employer will expect you to perform and act in certain ways, there are certain things you have a right to expect from your employer. After all, you are putting forth time and effort to do your very best at the work site and hence, you can expect certain things in return. In fact, employers even have some legal responsibilities to their workers. Carefully read through the items below to learn what you can expect from an employer.

- 1. Pay:**  Almost always, you can expect your employer to pay you for working. Exceptions to this usually involve training situations or work sites that award school credit of some type. Different work sites and different jobs are rewarded with different types of pay. Most workers new to the working world are paid wages, that is, pay by the hour. Other workers are paid a salary for their work. A salary involves pay that is fixed weekly, monthly or annually. Others are paid what is called piece work, that is, pay by the job (e.g. \$20 for mowing a lawn) and still others earn commission or pay by a percentage (usually of a sale) earned. In all cases, in the USA minimum wage laws apply. This means that the US government sets a minimum wage, which by law, your employer must meet or exceed. Lastly, it is likely that you will not take home all the money that you earn. Rather, your employer will deduct (or take out) some money from your check to pay for taxes, Social Security (FICA), Medicaid, etc.
- 2. Safe Working Conditions:** You have a legal right to be safe at your job site. With this in mind, there are certain jobs which federal and state law will prohibit you from performing until you turn 18. And no matter what your age, your employer is prohibited by law from requiring you to perform work that places you at high risk for injury or death. In the USA the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has rules and regulations which employers must follow to protect the safety and health of workers. This may involve training, clothing and/or equipment.



- 3. A Safe Working Environment:** Safety on the work site involves more than being safe from physical harm. As a worker you also have the right to be protected from discrimination on the basis of your race, religion, gender, etc. You also have a right to work in a setting free of sexual harassment and you have a right to confidentiality with regard to your past, your need for accommodations, etc.

4. Training: Your employer should provide you with whatever training is necessary to keep you safe and productive on the job. This may involve having a mentor assigned to teach skills to new workers, or providing time for job shadowing. At some work sites you will be asked to attend training on a regular basis and/or you may receive promotions or pay increases based on you level of training.



5. Fringe Benefits: Fringe benefits involve things you receive from working besides pay. These may include vacation time, sick leave, retirement plans, and/or medical or dental insurance. Often, only full time jobs (40 hours a week) and/or jobs requiring education or higher level skills will pay benefits. (**Note:** A job that pays benefits but awards lower pay may actually be paying you more than a higher paying job without benefits.)



6. Clear Expectations: Your employer should provide you with clear expectations for your work responsibilities, work performance, behavior and dress. Every work site has its own set of rules and regulations. If this is not provided, be sure to ask what is expected of you.



7. Evaluations: Your employer should evaluate your work by telling you what you do well and what areas of your work need improvement. Thoughtful employers will do this in private but some will criticize publicly and some may not do this at all. If you are unsure about your work performance, ask.

8. Honesty: Just as you will be expected to be honest with your employer, you can expect your employer to be honest with you. Your pay should accurately reflect the hours you worked and your evaluations should honestly reflect your performance at work.



9. Other Employer Responsibilities: In the USA, if you are legally employed, Social Security (FICA) will be taken from your paycheck. Your employer is required to match the amount you pay. This is of benefit to you as you will be able to collect this when you are retired. In addition your employer will contribute to workman's compensation, your financial protection if you are injured on the job. In the USA, the **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** requires employers of 50 or more employees to give up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to eligible employees for the birth or adoption of a child or for the serious illness of the employee or a spouse, child or parent. Also, certain persons who serve in the armed forces have a right to reemployment with the employer they were with when they entered service.



10. Employee Assistance: Most labor and public safety laws provide protections for employees who complain about violations of the law by their employers. If you feel your rights as an employee are being violated, you may contact the U.S. Department of Labor @ <http://www.dol.gov/opa/aboutdol/lawsprog.htm>.

Summary: Hopefully this guide has provided some clarification regarding expectations at the work site. Still, you may encounter situations at work that confuse you or cause you distress. If so, talk to your employer, ask your supervisor or transition coordinator for help or contact the U.S. Dept of Labor. Good luck and now it's time for you to **get to work!**

