

EXPANDED LIST OF SKILL SETS AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Use the pages of Skill Development Activities that link with each client's Skill Sets to build development bridges to new opportunities.

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Core Relationship/Interaction – Skill Development Activities



Relationship

Effective in establishing and maintaining productive and positive working relationships.

Collaborate
Demonstrate Social/Cultural Sensitivity

Resolve Conflict

“Honest differences are often a healthy sign of progress.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Practical Application Ideas

Actively listen to a person’s communication by observing non-verbal cues (gestures, glances, physical reactions) and respond appropriately to his/her communication.

Strive to put yourself in the other person’s shoes by really hearing what he/she has to say and try to understand how he/she feels.

Allow an upset person to thoroughly express his/her negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, fear, etc. When negative emotions are discharged, people become more able and willing to listen and focus on the issue.

Seek opportunities to work on a group venture, a task force, committee, etc. Take time to get to know the group members, their interests, capabilities and potential contributions to facilitate cooperation among the team.

Prevent communication problems and conflict by building relationships with co-workers, customers, constituencies and managers. When things go wrong it is harder to project negative intentions on someone you know versus someone you don’t know.

In resolving conflicts, adopt the attitude and position of an equal level partner in search of a fair and advantageous agreement. Look for win-win solutions for all parties.

Encourage people in a disagreement to focus on the issues “what is wrong,” rather than personalities “who is right or wrong.”

Encourage others to voice their disagreement when you sense there is a difference of opinion that has not been expressed.

In negotiating a solution to a problem, demonstrate understanding of each person’s viewpoint by paraphrasing what you hear. Understanding the viewpoint of each party does not constitute agreeing with the viewpoint.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

When you have not achieved a successful resolution in a conflict, ask a neutral party to help you and the other party to talk through the problem.

In a collaborative problem solving situation, probe into the nature of the problem, assess if a similar problem existed in the past, and discuss how it was handled and the outcome achieved. Avoid re-inventing the wheel in solving problems.

Consider ways to build alliances with other groups and departments to provide better service to your stakeholders/customers.

Avoid cross-cultural misunderstanding by researching and learning about the culture(s) of your clients, customers, co-workers and constituents.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Receive training in mediation techniques and volunteer to serve as a mediator for your organization, or an under-represented group that could benefit from your assistance.

Seek unofficial opportunities to act as a liaison between two groups. Gather information, anticipate problems, foresee future opportunities and communicate findings.

Take classes or read books in cross-cultural communications or take diversity training at a local college or through your organization.

Informally interview colleagues, co-workers or friends from other countries of origin to learn about differences in communication styles between their culture and the dominant U.S. culture.

Immerse yourself in another culture by going on field trips to museums showcasing the history of different cultures (national, ethnic or occupational).

Visit local ethnic markets to observe cultural differences.*

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Support/Service – Skill Development Activities



Relationship

Actively seek ways to increase satisfaction level of others: clients, customers and patients.

Advocate
Serve Clients & Customers

Provide Care & Support
Serve as a Liaison

*“Those whom we support
hold us up in life.”*

Marie von Ebner-Eschanbach

Practical Application Ideas

Strive to put yourself in the other person’s shoes by really hearing what they have to say and trying to understand how they feel. Demonstrate your concern through appropriate eye contact, body posture, etc.

Actively listen to a person’s communication by observing non-verbal cues (gestures, glances, physical reactions) and respond appropriately to his/her communication.

Allow an upset person to thoroughly express his/her negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, fear, etc. When negative emotions are discharged, people become more able and willing to work on the issue.

Look for partnership or alliance opportunities between your organization and a non-profit organization to support a worthy cause.

Write letters to a newspaper editor or elected official to express your views and generate support for your cause.

Set up a special topics bulletin board at your place of work to raise awareness on important issues.

Represent your organization at a trade show, conference or community event.

Develop and keep up a network of information and people resources to use in supporting an individual, group or cause.

Look for opportunities to join a hospitality committee, serve as a greeter or assist with team building and social events.

Join a company task force that focuses on improving the quality of work life at your organization. Volunteer to serve as the liaison between the group and your fellow colleagues.

Become a personal advocate for your organization’s customers and clients. Look for and communicate ways to improve products, operations and services that benefit customers.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Look for opportunities to eliminate unnecessary processes, tasks and paperwork to save money and benefit your employer and the customer.

Become part of a mentoring program in your organization or for an organization that provides mentoring to others (students, special needs groups, etc.).

Serve on committee(s) inside or outside your organization dealing with issues that affect policymaking such as safety standards, health and welfare, benefits, environmental practices and recycling.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Research and learn ways to increase self-esteem in others and develop positive relationships. Helpful books include books on communication skills, parenting, mentoring, conflict management, counseling and teaching.

Volunteer the skills you wish to develop for a non-profit whose mission you value. Examples include: becoming a board member, fundraising, grant-writing projects, newsletter writing, volunteer development, etc.

Volunteer to work on a local, state or national political campaign. Strive to understand how issues become divisive and notice what techniques or processes facilitate resolution.

Receive training in mediation techniques and volunteer to serve as a mediator for your organization, Senior Citizen home, or an under-represented group who could benefit from your assistance.

Seek unofficial opportunities to act as a liaison between two groups. Gather information, anticipate problems, foresee future opportunities and communicate findings.

Seek out leadership roles in clubs, groups or student body at your university.

Run for a local community political office such as the school board or city council.*

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Counsel/Teach – Skill Development Activities



Relationship

Skillful in developing and helping individuals and groups achieve their personal and professional goals.

Counsel

Facilitate Groups

Train/Instruct

*“Reach high, for the stars
lie hidden in your soul.
Dream deep, for every dream
precedes the goal.”*

Ralph Vaull Starr

Practical Application Ideas

Actively listen to the person’s message and form of expression including body language, vocal tone and facial expressions.

Allow a person to thoroughly express his/her feelings and thoughts without interrupting. Fully listen and paraphrase what you heard the person say.

Avoid cross-cultural misunderstanding by researching and learning about the culture (s) of your customers, clients, co-workers, and constituents.

Ask open-ended questions to explore the person’s concern. Use questions that begin with how, what, or say more about that, I’m wondering about....

Practice paraphrasing what you heard and ask a follow-up question to expand on the communication.

Refrain from giving advice (statements such as “you should do”) or specific solutions to a person’s stated problem. Instead ask what ideas/solutions he/she has considered that could remedy the situation. Then offer other possibilities to add to the person’s set of alternatives.

In a lengthy or complex communication, summarize what the other person said to check for accuracy, agreement and understanding.

Observe effective and ineffective teaching and facilitation techniques and aim to practice these effective techniques when appropriate. Note how the composition of the group, its intended goal, level of preparedness, and other circumstances impact the effectiveness of the technique.

In meetings or team projects, observe the various roles the participants take on such as the leader, the talker, the question asker, the quiet one, the observer, the harmonizer, etc., to increase your understanding of group dynamics.

When a person is dominating a meeting or provoking conflict, ask all participants to express their thoughts and viewpoints on the topic.

Increase your observational skills by attending community group meetings where you can actively observe others participate in various roles but are not obligated to participate yourself.

In making presentations, outline the key learning objectives to keep your topic focused and organized.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Evaluate your audience and select the best method(s) to present material such as demonstration, role-play, exercise, multi-media, etc.

Prepare visual aids (such as handouts, PowerPoint presentation, etc.) to support and reinforce key messages and capture audience interest.

Think of novel ways to communicate key points using props, analogies, humor, examples and stories.

Convey your enthusiasm on the topic by using appropriate body movements, gestures and facial expressions to enhance the message.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Identify volunteer activities where you can receive training and experience in counseling, mentoring, peer counseling and teaching or tutoring.

Use informal opportunities and situations to fully listen to colleagues, friends and family members, without offering any advice or solutions.

Observe any tendencies to judge another person in a communication process. Actively practice letting go of any judgments about the person or the content of his/her message.

Reflect on your own learning style. Notice how that impacts your presentation style.

Join a Toastmasters Club to acquire skill in speaking to groups.

Take college extension courses or workshops in psychology, group dynamics, interpersonal communications, adult learning theory, instructional design and public speaking.

Consider the ways you learn and the differences among learning styles such as observation, hands-on, experimentation, self-directed study.*

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Core Communication – Skill Development Activities



Communication

Clearly exchange information through verbal, written or non-verbal cues.

Listen

Speak/Interact

Write

“To say nothing often reflects a fine command of the English language.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Practical Application Ideas

Observe others, co-workers, friends, instructors who demonstrate strength in speaking. Pay careful attention to their verbal and non-verbal behavior (gestures) that make them effective.

In entering into a conversation, keep an open mind about the viewpoint of the speaker and the topic under discussion. Refrain from jumping to conclusions.

In a difficult communication where the speaker is angry, irritated, upset, frustrated, etc., listen for the feeling behind the message and verbally acknowledge the speaker’s feeling about the situation. For example: “You sound really disappointed with the outcome of your project....”

Listen carefully to the message of your speaker and practice paraphrasing and summarizing the main idea and key points of the message to the speaker. For example: “So what I hear you say is....”

When asked a question, paraphrase the question to check your level of understanding.

In a communication, seek ways to build the relationship through use of small talk (asking everyday questions), showing personal concern, using a warm vocal tone, being patient while the other is speaking, and sharing common experiences to demonstrate understanding.

When you don’t understand what the speaker is saying, ask, “can you go into a bit more detail,” “what does that mean to you,” or “how did you arrive at that conclusion?” More information often leads to a more appropriate and effective response.

Prepare for meetings or presentations by thinking through and organizing key points and writing out the key ideas you wish to convey.

Volunteer to keep notes at a meeting and summarize the information into a clear outline with key points.

Aim to write like you speak to make the message highly readable.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Give yourself plenty of time to write, rewrite, edit and think about your written communication (report, memo, etc.). For most people it takes a substantial amount of time to be concise and to the point.

Make your message more readable by balancing copy to white space, using bullets and bolding to highlight key points, and using charts and graphs to communicate complex ideas.

Ask for specific feedback from your manager, supervisor and co-workers on the strengths and weaknesses of your verbal and written communication style.

Review the written work of others to identify effective and ineffective writing practices.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Set up a regular time to read. Read about new subjects and topics. Increase your vocabulary by looking up new words in the dictionary. Aim to use new words in your written and verbal communications.

Use a grammar book such as Little English Handbook when you have doubts about grammar.

Use spell-check and grammar-check programs on your personal computer to eliminate errors in your writing.

Take courses in Writing, Business Communications and English at a college extension or an internal training program.

Learn about your personal style of communicating by taking the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® or Keirsey Temperament Sorter® (available online at <http://www.keirsey.com>) and learn about adapting your style to meet the communication style of others.

Take classes through a college or an internal training program on public speaking, acting, improvisation, etc.*

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Persuasion/Promotion – Skill Development Activities



Communication

Adept at using information, ideas and influence to effect a desired outcome.

Persuade Promote Sell Speak to Groups

“One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears – by listening to them.”

Dean Rusk

Practical Application Ideas

Before approaching a potential buyer, use competitive research information to learn as much as possible about your buyer and the business/need.

When communicating with a prospective customer, strive to listen carefully to needs and concerns.

Prior to selling your idea/solution to a group, manager or customer, outline the benefits of your solution and incorporate the benefits into your communication.

In motivating someone to do or buy something, consider key motivations of the buyer, i.e., will buying the product/service or adopting the idea save time or money, make money, increase prestige, enhance effectiveness, etc.

Prior to a presentation, put yourself in your listeners' shoes and make a list of every possible objection they could give you. Then make a list of appropriate answers to each objection.

When your request for something is turned down, seek feedback on what you could have done or said to strengthen your persuasive intent.

Identify and use relevant metaphors and images to communicate your ideas to an audience. Metaphors are an effective device for expressing an idea in a vivid and tangible way.

Consciously promote a product or service and notice when people follow-up on your suggestion.

Represent and promote your organization's products and services at a trade show, conference or community activity.

Observe selling techniques or presentation styles used effectively in advertisements, commercials and speeches. Evaluate the methods used that impact you.

Observe effective and ineffective techniques used by professional and public speakers and salespeople. Aim to incorporate the effective techniques in your style and presentations.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Take time to fully understand your product, idea or service before selling your ideas to others. Make sure you have sufficient facts at hand to support your claims.

Outline the key points for your presentation to keep your message focused and organized.

Communicate persuasive messages with passion, enthusiasm, energy and appropriate gestures to stimulate your audience to listen and to act.

Think of novel and entertaining ways to communicate key points by using props, humor, examples and anecdotes in your presentations.

Use a video camera to tape and view your talk/presentation to identify strengths and areas needing improvement.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Develop and practice the skills of verbal persuasion by participating in a Toastmasters Club or public speaking group.

Take a class in presentation skills to learn about using graphical features such as color, pictures, simple drawings, charts and graphs to enhance the persuasive message.

Serve on committees or a task force and seek opportunities to influence the outcome by offering recommendations and solutions.

Take college or extension courses in psychology, marketing and selling techniques to learn about human motivation and consumer buying behavior.

Set up a "shadowing" opportunity, to spend the day observing a successful salesperson or promoter.

Take classes in public speaking, acting or improvisation through a college extension or internal training program.*

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Consultation/Influence – Skill Development Activities



Communication

Demonstrate skill in collaborating with others to identify problems, provide advice and develop agreeable solutions.

Consult

Interview

Negotiate

“No man becomes a fool until he has stopped asking questions.”

Charles Steinmetz

Practical Application Ideas

Use listening and interviewing skills by asking open-ended questions – questions that begin with what, how, when and where to assess the scope, nature and timeliness of the problem.

Discuss and negotiate your role and your client’s role in defining the problem, gathering and analyzing data, feeding back the data, developing and implementing the solution(s) and evaluating the results.

Take time to interview key people in assessing problems to gain different perspectives on an issue. Ask how they see the situation, the organizational climate, underlying problems, obstacles and potential solutions to the situation.

Consider the most appropriate format to summarize and report the results of your research to your client.

Conduct research into your field or new areas using the internet and online databases to expand and deepen your knowledge and broaden your awareness of issues and resources.

Look for informal and formal activities to share your expertise and knowledge. Activities could include serving on a committee, task force, conducting a class or co-authoring an article for publication.

Interview your manager to understand the inner workings, goals and needs of the department and the organization.

Volunteer to serve on a hiring committee. Develop appropriate questions for interviewing candidates. Observe effective interview styles of other members of the committee.

Create models which explain your understanding of the systematic relationships between different parts of the organization and the organization and its external market.

In developing a project plan, build in a step to interview knowledgeable people who may have ideas and expertise on the project topic.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Network with individuals outside your department, company or field to learn new methods, best practices and alternative ways of doing things.

In negotiating a solution to a problem, demonstrate understanding of the other person’s viewpoint and needs by paraphrasing what you hear. Seek to understand what is of most importance to the person before proceeding.

When negotiating, adopt the attitude and position of an equal level partner in search of a fair and mutually advantageous solution.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Read and learn about the methods used by professional consultants to assess problems, develop solutions and work with clients.

Assess your personal communication style using the Keirsey Temperament Scale (www.keirsey.com) to assist in identifying and adapting your style to those different from yours.

Assess your listening style and learn to detect others’ listening styles very early in the conversation. Your communication will be much more effective and efficient.

Take courses in needs assessment interviewing, conducting employment interviews, enhancing interpersonal communication skills and proposal writing.

Gain skill in using the internet and online databases for conducting research on particular topics.

Volunteer to serve as a consultant to a non-profit organization or community group to gain skills in interviewing, researching and offering recommendations.

Read books on negotiation techniques and apply the principles to interpersonal situations. Read about power and influence strategies and then observe skilled negotiators in action.

Set up a practice role-play negotiation session with a friend or colleague to test out your negotiation approach.*

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Organizational Management – Skill Development Activities



Management/Leadership

Skillful in initiating, structuring and carrying out steps to complete projects and tasks.

Coordinate

Implement
Organize/Plan

Manage Projects

“A first-rate organizer is never in a hurry. He is never late. He always keeps up his sleeve a margin for the unexpected.”

Arnold Bennett

Practical Application Ideas

Stay on top of work-related reading by scanning the table of contents and summary sections of books/periodicals for key topics that specifically apply to your goals/situation. This approach will allow you to gain maximum value in the least amount of time.

When confronted with numerous tasks and projects, or when you find yourself distracted or overwhelmed, ask yourself, “what is the best use of my time now?” “What can be delegated to someone else?”

Volunteer to take on a new assignment/project that will stretch your organizational abilities in new ways.

At the first sign of a problem or need, offer to research the situation and identify potential solutions.

Regularly establish long-term goals and develop daily “to do” lists to focus and direct your energy effectively. Prioritize your task list in order of importance in reaching your goals.

On a large task or project, estimate the amount of time it will take and then increase the amount of time by 50% – most projects take longer than we originally plan.

Set up a tracking system to monitor daily, weekly and monthly tasks/projects. Build in planning and evaluation time into your schedule on a regular basis to monitor and revise tasks/project details and deadlines.

Prepare a master list of unfinished work so you will have a systematic format for controlling your workload and planning your work day.

Break down large overwhelming projects into 5-minute easy tasks that will allow you to make headway into the project. Often, once you get going it’s easier to continue.

Take advantage of “waiting time” such as standing in line, commute time, being put on hold (telephone) and coffee breaks to get started on an activity.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

When working on a large project requiring quiet and concentration, identify unused offices, library space, coffee shops or other spaces devoid of people, phones and interruptions.

Identify and interview co-workers who demonstrate exemplary organizational and follow-up skills to learn new organizational methods.

Before beginning coordinating activities, meet with your boss or client and find out what outcome he/she wants, what the priorities are and what trade-offs he/she is willing to make. This up-front investment will increase your effectiveness and efficiency.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Everyone can be a leader. Review chapter 4 (starting on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) on Leadership and journal the type of leader you are or would like to become. Different leadership goals will lead to different development paths.

Assess your personal work style and utilize the strengths of your style to achieve your goals. For example, some individuals prefer working on one task for long periods of time while others prefer handling multiple tasks for short periods.

Identify your prime production periods where your energy and attention are the greatest and reserve this time for more challenging projects.

Volunteer to assist in planning, coordinating and implementing parties, fund raisers, reunions, conferences, retreats, meetings and other events.

Learn how to use project-planning software to schedule, manage and track large projects.

Read books and take classes on personal organization, time management, leading meetings and decision-making.*

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Facilitative Management – Skill Development Activities



Management/Leadership

Ability to motivate and empower individuals to greater participation, commitment and high standards of performance.

Build a Team

Coach

Set Goals

“Trust mankind and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Practical Application Ideas

Show respect for all people, even those with whom you disagree or don't understand.

Observe individuals who have strong team-building skills. Notice the techniques they use to affect an outcome.

Encourage yourself, co-workers and team members to set challenging goals.

In setting goals, especially challenging ones, build in 50% more time than you feel is required and break down the goal into the smallest parts. Achieving the smaller goals builds momentum to accomplish the large goal.

Acknowledge and congratulate yourself on achieving your personal and career goals.

Develop new traditions to celebrate team successes.

Serve as a role model by demonstrating the behaviors and attitudes you want others to emulate.

In a group project, volunteer to coordinate the activities of the group and keep the group focused.

Look for ways to involve the quietest members of a group in a meeting, committee or project.

Volunteer to take a lead role during your manager's absence or vacation.

Invest time in self-reflection on your own strengths and weaknesses. Build in time to get to know others' strengths and weaknesses.

Ask a fellow employee to partner-up on a project. Capitalize on each other's strengths and interests and compensate for each other's weaknesses.

Learn what types of rewards/incentives work to motivate you, your employees/co-workers and use them.

Pay attention to the efforts made and goals accomplished by individuals. Acknowledge them and share successes outside your group/department/home.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Look for special ways to recognize individuals who are demonstrating high levels of excellence in their work.

Establish informal discussion periods to check in with employees/co-workers on their career goals and progress in meeting goals. Keep developmental goals in mind while making new project assignments.

In giving feedback, first look for and comment on positive behaviors and strengths. Then offer specific and constructive feedback on behaviors that could be improved.

Devote time in team projects to outlining problems and brainstorming innovative solutions. Encourage team members to offer their ideas. Prepare a written summary of the proposed solutions. Publicly acknowledge others' ideas.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Everyone can be a leader. Review chapter 4 (starting on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) on Leadership and journal the type of leader you are or would like to become. Different leadership goals will lead to different development paths.

Interview an athletic coach to learn about inspiring teamwork and motivating members to achieve goals.

Take a course or read a book on how to give feedback in positive and constructive ways.

Take organizational behavior and supervisory skills classes at a college, extension program or internal training program.

Join a task force in your company or community. Use it as an opportunity to contribute to the group effort and practice your preferred leadership role.

Volunteer to lead a staff meeting or give reports at work, at a professional organization or community organization.

Consider creating an informal discussion group at work. Use this time to study issues impacting your industry or organization. Take on an informal leadership role that is consistent with your leadership goal.*

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Leadership/Leadership Potential – Skill Development Activities



Management/Leadership

Skillful in creating a strategic vision and motivating others to achieve excellence in performance.

Envision

Lead

Make Decisions

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”

Warren O. Bennis

Practical Application Ideas

Practice imagining a future that you would like to create for your personal career and life, business or department. Make the vision concrete by writing it down, drawing it or finding a picture that captures the idea. Add as many details, images and impressions as you need to give it clarity and energy. Leaders must have a clear vision to inspire others to follow.

In selling a new idea to others, be sure you have a personal conviction about the idea and communicate your idea with enthusiasm, energy and a well-articulated vision.

A key quality of strong leaders is honesty and integrity. “Walk your talk” to build a reputation of integrity.

Model the behavior that you expect of others.

When establishing new policy, collect all the facts, generate possible solutions, weigh the alternatives and consequences and assess the impact on others before implementing.

Identify the skills and strengths in yourself and your colleagues/team members. Team up with a colleague to draw on his/her strengths in a team project.

Challenge assumptions about how things are or have been done in the past. Think of new ways to do things, better products, systems and services to meet goals.

Actively seek out, listen to, understand and utilize other people’s perspectives in projects and new ventures. Collaborative involvement builds trust and increases commitment to reach goals.

Create opportunities to delegate planning and problem solving activities. This strengthens collaboration and team building skills.

Find opportunities to expand or increase the level of authority or scope of project impact of the team.

Be willing to take manageable risks and learn from them.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Prior to making a decision, create a list of probable outcomes – assess the likelihood of individual scenarios/outcomes.

Before making a decision, ask yourself, “what is the worst thing that could happen if I made a decision without more information?”

Evaluate previous “effective”/“ineffective” decisions you have made. Identify processes you used that impacted the result.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Everyone can be a leader. Review chapter 4 (starting on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) on leadership and journal the type of leader you are or would like to become.

Different leadership goals will lead to different development paths.

Get feedback from family, friends and colleagues on the leadership traits they see in you.

Leadership skills are learned. Note examples of times when you observed effective and ineffective styles of leadership.

Identify someone you consider to be a good leader. Ask to shadow him/her for a day, observe and record his/her actions, words, behavior and leadership techniques. Ask others about their perceptions about what makes this person a good leader.

Volunteer to lead a staff or group meeting. Prepare an agenda and work to keep the meeting on track.

Read biographies on individuals whose leadership style you value. Identify the values, attitudes, behavior and actions that made him/her successful.

Take a college or extension course on supervisory skills, leadership, organizational behavior, decision-making and negotiation techniques.

Seek out opportunities to study the future. Attend conferences and conference sessions that are future-focused. Read books, magazines and reports published by think tanks like “Institute for the Future” (Menlo Park, CA).

Read international journals and/or join international associations to keep current on international trends affecting your industry.*

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Analysis/Problem Solving – Skill Development Activities



Analytical

Ability to identify and define problems and solutions.

Analyze

Research

Solve Problems

*“Nothing is particularly hard,
if you divide it into small jobs.”*

Henry Ford

Practical Application Ideas

Analyze a problem in depth and from multiple perspectives. Aim to uncover the real reasons or precise question that you are trying to answer.

Differentiate between “discussing and thinking hard” about a problem and “analyzing” it.

Distinguish between facts and beliefs – assess the credibility of the information against your own reasoning as well as others’.

Turn a problem upside down by picking a solution first and working backwards.

Team up with a co-worker on a challenging work project. Break the project down into its component parts. Negotiate for tasks that will stretch your analytical and research abilities into new areas.

On large work projects, break down the project into manageable tasks and prepare an outline of tasks requiring completion by a specific date. List the specific resources you will need for each task in the project.

Identify and utilize a variety of sources when researching information. Rank the sources based on credibility of the data, methodology or other criteria relevant to your goal.

Conduct research into a subject by using the internet or other online sources to identify new resources and knowledge.

Examine the data you collect from multiple perspectives. Double check for biases. Ask knowledgeable colleagues about their interpretations of the data. If appropriate, discuss potential implications and recommendations based on a synthesis of the data and the presenting problem.

Using a specific problem statement, articulate your underlying assumptions and elicit the underlying assumptions of others. Different underlying assumptions will lead to different solution paths. Verify all assumptions before beginning any research or solution-generating process.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

At work, ask for challenging work projects that require research, analysis and problem-solving tasks.

Evaluate the pros and cons of each idea or possible solution. After ranking your pros and cons, select and implement the optimum idea/solution.

Establish a group brainstorming process to analyze a problem to be solved, and generate a variety of alternative outcomes and solutions.

Reframe a problem in a number of ways. Play devil’s advocate. Select the problem statement that best captures the essence of the problem.

Create a list of probable outcomes – assess the likelihood of individual scenarios/outcomes.

Apply weighted ranking to choose and compare among alternative solutions.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Take university, extension or company-sponsored courses in such areas as library research, finance, accounting, statistics, economics, modeling and anthropology.

Practice developing skills of observation by paying attention to details, people, behavior and changes in your environment.

Live with a problem, make it part of your life and think about it frequently. The more you understand the essence of a problem, the more likely you will identify a solution.

Read mystery books or engage in other activities that require you to put together clues and see patterns in unrelated bits of information.

Imagine yourself as each one of the stakeholders in a problem and step into each of their perspectives one at a time. Within each perspective, how do you see the problem? What are your preferred outcomes? What obstacles do you see?

Read books on critical thinking, decision-making, business research and online research tools.*

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Information/Data Management – Skill Development Activities



Analytical

Skillful in compiling, organizing and using data to enhance planning and effectiveness.

Categorize/Classify

Evaluate

Manage Records

“Man is still the most extraordinary computer of all.”

John F. Kennedy

Practical Application Ideas

Understand the current system already in place. Determine what information is kept, for what purpose and for how long. Identify inefficient practices and constraints.

Look at the interrelationships of data and how they are used so that you can categorize data more effectively and efficiently.

Familiarize yourself with data and information management software.

Make a map or outline to see how information is connected together (i.e. prepare an information flow chart). Consider color-coding like groups for easier identification on hard copy and to enhance pattern recognition.

Categorize data and files. Put them in chronological, alphabetical, departmental or some other order based on usage patterns.

When in meetings, listen for how information is used. Is it used to find solutions? Support decisions already made? Usage will determine the most appropriate sources of data and most appropriate classification process.

Clarify a problem or an inefficient practice to be solved by determining the user requirements, identifying the system to be used and developing an implementation plan.

Listen for what information is requested or “wished for” but not currently available. Often the data is available but its whereabouts are simply unknown.

Note any seasonal or other periodic pattern in the demand for information. Take these patterns into account when designing a classification structure.

Study record systems and practices from other departments or disciplines. Adopt useful ideas for your needs.

Condense files and databases by combining things or discarding duplicates/irrelevant materials.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Classify books, periodicals and other documents into a cataloging or cross-reference system.

Index materials; classify and label data; identify primary and subordinate terms for cross-referencing.

Look for ways to improve the speed, accuracy and actual operation of computer equipment and the processing of data.

Compare data management software products and evaluate which is the best for your needs.

Back up important data on disks and archive old data.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Experiment with the best way to categorize your personal financial records and belongings for your needs. Notice what approaches lend themselves to the greatest effectiveness and efficiency.

Read books on personal and business organization principles. Extract ideas that you can apply to your work and home life.

Take university or extension classes on records management, database management, intranet applications or groupware tools.

Review software technical manuals to identify new or improved ways for storing, organizing, retrieving and reporting data and information.

Seek volunteer opportunities to gain additional skills and experience in designing useful information systems, including efficient storage and effective retrieval.*

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Computational/Quantitative – Skill Development Activities



Analytical

Skillful in performing numerical and statistical calculations to provide useful information.

Budget

Compute

Estimate

Forecast

“A billion here, a billion there – pretty soon it adds up to real money.”

Everett Dirksen, speaking to fellow Senators on government spending

Practical Application Ideas

Evaluate numbers with a critical eye to assess accuracy. Develop a household or personal budget. Keep records of expenses and monitor against your budget and your short-term and long-term financial goals. Compute actual expenses and compare them to the expenses of similar households. Estimate your expenses for the upcoming month and forecast your expenditures in different categories for a whole year. Track your accuracy on a monthly basis.

Prepare a project-oriented budget. Seek to determine how much money will be needed to complete the project.

Conduct an audit; analyze records or documents to gather information on budgets, costs, expenditures, etc.

Using numerical market research data, determine the potential demand for your company’s product or service in a given market area.

Draw from a variety of research methods to calculate statistics: censuses, surveys, questionnaires, samples, focus groups, panels, observations, experiments, tests, etc.

Estimate or come up with an approximate or rounded figure regarding a business’s potential or volume numbers using numerical data.

Follow an interest or an industry-specific trend. Look for overall themes and patterns in the information. List your criteria for what you think will happen next and why. Forecast the direction and magnitude of change. As new data becomes available, revisit your forecast and check for accuracy or important new variables not previously taken into account.

Using data and information collected from the past, look for similarities between things, such as trends, recurring cycles or processes. Summarize the key trends and predict likely outcomes in the future.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Use computer programs and spreadsheets to track changes in data. Proactively apprise key individuals of changes.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Explore the more advanced functions of your spreadsheet software. Begin with the basic graph and charts and proceed to “what if?” scenarios and more complex mathematical and statistical modeling.

Read books on the visual display of information. Edward Tufte, a noted expert in this area, has written several books on the topic and explains the reasons for selecting the type of display by audience and goal.

Practice working with raw numbers: fractions, percentages, averages, probabilities, etc., not just to come up with answers but to get a feel for the underlying concepts. This will help you think in terms of mathematical relationships and variables.

Take courses in algebra, geometry, statistics, and business mathematics at a college, extension program or online.

Take a course in accounting or financial analysis for managers at a local college or extension program.

Volunteer to handle financial responsibilities for your church, club or community organization.

For your favorite volunteer organization, get in on the ground floor of a fundraising event. Estimate and budget the costs of hosting the event (after reviewing comparable events) and forecast what funds are likely to be raised. Compute the return on investment.

Join an investment club to improve your understanding of investments and provide practical applications for using math in evaluating stocks and other investments.

Ask a colleague or friend to explain the annual report of your own and one other organization.*

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Intuitive – Skill Development Activities



Creative

Ability to act upon insights and perceptions gained from outside the realm of reason.

Brainstorm

Demonstrate Foresight

Use Intuition

“It’s that flash of insight that lets you see things in a new light, that unites two seemingly disparate thoughts into a new concept.”

Anonymous

Practical Application Ideas

Stretch the imagination: think conceptually, metaphorically, crazily, foolishly, paradoxically, visually, and symbolically. Focus first on generating questions more than finding answers. Look for more than one right answer to a question.

Pay attention to when and where inspiration strikes you. Buy tools (e.g., pen-based tape recorder, 5" by 8" colored index cards) that allow you to immediately capture ideas and then retrieve them easily later.

When you think of an idea or have an intuitive flash, be sure to write it down, or create a mind map. Start from the center of a page and branch out by the individual ideas. The central or main idea becomes more clearly defined. Prioritize ideas.

To fuel creative ideas in solving a problem, seek external sources of information such as reading newspapers, magazines, talking to others for interesting and relevant ideas, articles and pictures.

Build in time to reflect on a question and be receptive to receiving insight or answers in novel or unexpected ways.

Review your files regularly; an old idea can be a perfect solution to a new problem.

In trying to solve a particular problem, change your question. Different wording leads your thinking in different directions.

Amass a lot of information on a given idea, concept or problem. Intuitive thinking requires thorough work on a problem. Basic facts and information must be gleaned before intuitive processes can take over.

Arrange a group brainstorming process to generate new ideas and possible solutions to a problem.

Practice switching gears or approaches in your way of thinking about a problem to expand your frame of reference and approach a problem from a totally different perspective.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

When you feel strongly about an insight or intuition it is important to put the idea into action to test its merits – seek opportunities to test your idea and evaluate the results.

Keep a record of intuitive flashes, hunches and insights that come to mind spontaneously. Track how your intuition worked out. Learn to distinguish between genuine intuitive hunches and those which are simply a product of wishful thinking or anxiety.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Take acting, improvisation, creative writing, photography, crafts and fine art classes.

Volunteer on a committee, a task force or work group seeking solutions to specific problems.

Listen to calming and meditative music to reduce inner tension and create a relaxed internal state.

Read books on intuition and creative thinking to enhance your knowledge and understanding of these concepts.

Recognize your facility for intuitive experiences (creative problem solving, inspiration in art, perception of patterns and possibilities, feelings of attraction and aversion, picking up “vibes,” hunches, knowing or perceiving through the body or rational mind, etc.). If you know your particular intuitive style, it will increase your awareness of when your intuition is sending you a message.

To develop intuitive problem solving abilities – first, be aware of what you are doing. Notice when you close off possibilities, act on a wild guess and refrain from acting on a hunch. Be aware of your own internal process.

Build in time to relax and clear your mind. Intuition flourishes in silence.

Read fiction, to stimulate your imagination.*

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Inventive – Skill Development Activities



Adept at forming structures, patterns and connections from information, ideas and images.

Conceptualize
Synthesize/Integrate

Design
Visualize

*“An idea synthesizes
the complex into the
startlingly simple.”*

Anonymous

Practical Application Ideas

Look for key ideas, patterns and recurring principles in information, data or pictures.

Consider possibilities to put ideas and information together in different ways. A new idea, “a synthesis,” often comes from connecting areas of knowledge in unlikely ways.

After reading in depth about a subject, play with how you would diagram the information into a framework or symbolic representation.

Use “free association” and/or develop metaphors as a means for capturing the big picture of a problem/issue.

After collecting data for a project, take an aerial view of exactly how the information and detail are laid out, how they are connected, and identify key connections.

Keep “idea” files, including quotes, pictures, insights, tips, etc. Review often to get inspiration for your projects.

Amass a large quantity of ideas and data on a subject by writing down all ideas that stem from the original idea (mind map). Look for connections between the information to see if you get new insights or ideas on how to restructure the ideas to be more useful for your purpose.

Combine disparate perspectives on an issue to create a new perspective.

Look for all assumptions in a viewpoint. Find support and exceptions for all assumptions.

In developing a new product (program, service or system), use “what if” questions as stepping stones for projecting new features, benefits and solutions while reducing unnecessary aspects.

Conduct research on external opportunities and threats that influence your organization/industry – look for critical themes to track, monitor and extrapolate to identify future trends.

Observe the company’s internal strengths and weaknesses in the face of opportunities and threats. Look for patterns in the company’s success stories.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Develop scenarios in your area of interest that reflect the range of possible threats and opportunities that may be presented by different future developments.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Take a Jungian-based assessment such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Instrument or the Keirsey Temperament Sorter® (available on line at www.keirsey.com) to learn about your preferred learning/perceiving style. This will help you to determine if your natural inclination is more toward dealing with possibilities and patterns or with facts and details.

Read international journals and/or join international associations to keep current on international trends affecting your industry.

Read futurist magazines and join futurist associations to see what others predict for the future.

Get online. Participate in a List Serve or discussion group to learn about emerging needs/problems and exchange information in your area of interest.

Learn about the process of mind-mapping as a tool for structuring information and ideas. Refer to books such as *Use Both Sides of Your Brain* by Tony Buzan or clustering concepts in *Writing the Natural Way* by Gabriele Lusser Rico.

Take classes in art, sculpture, design and music to develop the right hemisphere thinking which is the side of the brain that sees patterns and relationships.

Take a course in cultural anthropology or philosophy to expand the boundaries of what is possible.

Audit classes at a local college or extension program that are completely outside the realm of your expertise. Look for patterns that you can transfer and apply to your work situation.*

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Artistic/Aesthetic – Skill Development Activities



Creative

Ability to express an inner ideal into an artistic, creative or aesthetic form.

Author/Compose

Create Images

Perform

“Every act of creation, is first an act of destruction.”

Pablo Picasso

Practical Application Ideas

Perform a commonplace activity in front of a group. (A difficult task focuses your attention more than an easy one.) Focus on movement, voice, projection, presence, rhythm, humor, diction and feelings.

Deliver a presentation or a briefing to a large group (auditorium, convention, youth group, etc.). Facilitate workshops.

Organize a benefit program and make suggestions on themes, visuals, etc.

Serve as a Toastmaster/Master of Ceremony at events.

Participate in a choir; sing or play an instrument.

Take photographs actively. Monitor and solve problems related to exposure, movement and distance. Plan a composition, choose depth of focus, lighting angles, etc., and convert the scene into a photograph.

Write down your ideas and inventions. Invest time and resources in turning your ideas into a reality. Arrange a showing or display of your work at your office, library, church, bookstore or coffeehouse.

Use special events and parties to showcase your creative talents (food display, sculpture, photography, etc.).

Develop a portfolio of your artistic work (stories, designs, and photographs) to demonstrate your creative talent. Keep a collection of your creative work in your desk and in your car.

Imagine things in your mind’s eye. Develop visual-spatial sense by visualizing a detailed actual scene, the space, lighting, colors, props and people.

Come up with occasion-specific themes for parties or special events. Display decorations, balloons and floral bouquets in aesthetic arrangements.

Create logos, invitations and personalized cards, etc., using visual structure designs such as grids and layers to organize the composition.

Practice the art of arranging everyday office and household objects into creative displays.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Generate design elements such as text, photos, illustrations, type and font style for a brochure or banner. Arrange copy and design layout.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Practice telling stories using tonal differences, humor and drama. Volunteer to tell stories at a school, library, church or hospital, etc.

Practice emotional memory recall. The ability to stimulate and project emotion in oneself is an important technique.

Participate in non-verbal play: drawing, music, movement, sculpture, etc., in the spirit of play, rather than for the purpose of goal-oriented achievement. Practice careless abandon.

Take art, acting, music or movement courses at a college, extension program, community center or art/music/movement school.

Join a local theater or improvisation group. Focus on memorizing parts, character interpretation or voice projection.

Volunteer to help in a theater production: designing and building props, painting scenes, coordinating activities or designing costumes.

Read biographies about great inventors, composers, etc. to gain insight on their creative processes.

Take culinary arts classes at a local community college, adult school or private culinary school. Host theme parties to showcase your skills.

Take computer courses in PageMaker, Illustrator or other graphic software programs.

Develop creative ways to encourage customers to visit your booth at a tradeshow/conference or present your product/service.*

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Visual/Motor – Skill Development Activities



Physical/Technical

Skillful in using eyes, hands and the body with precision and power in the physical world.

Body Coordination

Hand Dexterity

Observe

“When I train biceps, I picture huge mountains. You have to do the same to the mind. It’s all mind over matter.”

Arnold Schwarzenegger

Practical Application Ideas

Observe experts operating equipment and making repairs in your area of interest.

Seek coaching from someone on basic safety and prevention and proper lifting techniques.

Make and operate small models of planes, boats, cars, etc., to gain an understanding of the machinery and parts and develop hand dexterity.

Initiate a job rotation program so that you get exposure to different types of equipment and gain experience in repairing them.

Fully read and study product or instruction manuals prior to using new tools or equipment to insure proper safety and functioning.

Actively take on home repair and improvement projects to expand your knowledge of tools, techniques and test your physical abilities in new ways.

Pursue diverse opportunities outdoors where you can use your body coordination skills.

To increase your powers of observation, study and observe the events around you. Practice recalling the context and the details you observed.

Troubleshoot – find the causes of operating errors and make decisions on how to handle them.

Monitor gauges and dials of machines to make sure they are functioning properly.

Become a coach or referee to hone your observation and decision-making skills.

Become sensitive to the political environment around you. Understand union laws and practice good safety.

Search safety issues on the internet. Refer to OSHA’s website. Understand that there are expectations and regulatory laws regarding on-road safety, dangerous goods, international and national safety conditions.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Personal Development and Training Activities

Test your observation skills by predicting the next set of actions likely to happen in various scenarios.

Take the role of observer at a meeting or event and pay attention to the non-verbal cues of people, physical surroundings and location of objects.

Time yourself when completing projects, being mindful of speed and accuracy.

Take risks physically and emotionally – outdoor activities such as survival training programs, parachuting, hang-gliding, sailing, whitewater rafting, etc., can all be explored in a spirit of challenge and adventure.

Get in shape; work out and use weights. Commit yourself to giving your best effort.

Be comfortable with all types of equipment used in your field, from hand and power tools used in skilled trades, to kitchen and other household tools and the wide variety of tools and machines found in an office.

Have a good understanding of measurements as well as basic arithmetic, trigonometry and geometry.

Join different leagues and play sports. Volunteer to teach, referee or coach.

Take Yoga, Karate or Tai Chi classes at your local community center.

Participate in rope courses, rock climbing and rappelling clubs to learn by doing and build trust in yourself and others.

Participate in competitions, such as triathlons, the Iron Man, etc., that require physical strength, endurance, agility and character.

Participate in a formal training or apprenticeship program through a community college or technical school in your interest area.*

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Build/Structure – Skill Development Activities



Physical/Technical

Proficient in assembling a product, building or physical object or returning something to its original state.

Build/Construct

Restore/Renovate

Sketch/Draw

“All that we do is done with an eye to something else.”

Aristotle

Practical Application Ideas

Take an extra step before building anything, read instructions carefully and imagine how things will look assembled.

Purchase and read books on “how to” projects for the home, e.g., furniture refinishing, minor electrical and plumbing repair, etc.

Take on construction projects at home or help out friends and family members with theirs.

Use cardboard and other inexpensive recyclable materials to build a mock-up before you actually build an object.

Become aware of the price of materials and parts and the funds needed to complete a job.

Learn the government’s minimum standards and codes.

Build and construct models of buildings, homes, etc., to get a comprehensive understanding of the use of space, different styles and materials.

Get involved with project planning teams to learn/observe how time, money and resources are allocated.

Initiate a job rotation program so you can acquire new skills in different areas on the job.

Understand and practice good safety and prevention techniques.

Trade labor with a colleague in a different skilled trade.

Work with a draftsman and operate Computer Aided Drafting (CAD), as well as blueprint equipment.

Enter building and design competitions in the community.

Personal Development and Training Activities

Acknowledge how you learn best – books, videos, observing a master craftsman or a trusted friend, and create your development plan accordingly.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Increase your knowledge and understanding of different trades, i.e. surveying, building, carpentry, etc. Read books, magazines and manuals.

Be comfortable and respectful with all types of equipment. Read manuals before using any new equipment. Have a strong working knowledge of first-aid practices you can self-administer.

Gain a general understanding of measurements as well as basic arithmetic, trigonometry and geometry.

Carefully examine preserved buildings, antique cars and furniture for architectural details and design elements.

Seek a part-time job with a construction company, body shop, furniture store, home-remodeling company or antique dealer.

Shadow experts who are performing the construction or restoration of a building in your interest area.

Take classes or seek out an apprenticeship in your interest area.

Study for a contractor’s license.

Learn how to read the different types of working drawings or blueprints.

Volunteer on community projects such as Habitat for Humanity where you can assist on home repair and building projects.

Visit models or concept homes to see how information gets translated from the mind’s eye to the physical world.

Experiment with freeware, shareware and off-the-shelf software to help you design gardens, furniture or children’s toys.

Volunteer with a local museum, historic society or park on historic preservation, renovation or design projects.*

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Equipment/Technology – Skill Development Activities



Physical/Technical

Skillful in proper use of tools, hardware, software and equipment to insure optimal functioning.

Inspect
Operate Equipment

Install
Repair

*“Man is a tool using animal...
without tools he is nothing,
with tools he is all.”*

Thomas Carlyle

Practical Application Ideas

Take an extra step before and after repairing anything, read instructions carefully and test equipment thoroughly.

Purchase and read books on “how to” projects for the home; installation of appliances, electrical/plumbing repair, etc.

Take on installation and repair projects at home or help out friends and family members with theirs.

Become aware of the price of materials and parts and the funds needed to install and repair equipment.

Shadow and observe a repair technician or safety inspector.

Assemble a stereo, repair a bike, clock or other appliance.

Identify faulty or problematic equipment, determine how to fix it and do so.

Take apart and rebuild equipment, computers, etc., to understand how they function.

Learn the government’s/state’s minimum standards and codes for inspection.

Understand and practice good safety and prevention techniques.

Become sensitive to the political environment around you; understand union laws and safety regulations.

Search safety issues on the internet. Refer to OSHA’s website. Understand that there are expectations and regulatory laws regarding on-road safety, dangerous goods, international and national safety conditions, etc.

Initiate a job rotation so that you get exposure to different types of equipment and machinery as well as experience in repairing them.

Practical Application Ideas Continued

Personal Development and Training Activities

Increase your knowledge and understanding of what tools and equipment can do and how to operate them most effectively. Read books, magazines and manuals.

Install, program and operate equipment, including televisions, VCRs, telephone systems, computers and fax machines.

Seek coaching from someone on proper installation, operation and repair techniques.

Observe experts operating equipment and making repairs in your area of interest.

Ask questions and seek advice from experts in the field.

Make and operate models of planes, boats, cars, etc., to gain a clear understanding of the machinery, parts and functioning.

Take a part-time job in a garage, machine shop or construction site.

Seek out an apprenticeship. Have a supervisor accompany you on a regular basis to inspect and adjust equipment, replace parts, etc.

Seek volunteer work with agencies like CompuMentor and gain computer hardware support skills.

Get a part-time job with a large computer store where you can assemble new computers, install system software and troubleshoot problems.

Enroll in “PC” troubleshooting and repair courses offered by training vendors and vocational schools.

Watch television programs on installation and home repair, and practice what you have learned.*

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