

# DEVELOPING A POSITIVE WORK ETHIC

---



## AGENDA

- Starter
- Passes
- Learning the Rules
- Following the Rules
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

### Objectives

Students will discover the importance of learning the rules of the workplace.

Students will learn the types of rules they are likely to encounter in the workplace.

Students will identify and define a positive work ethic.

Students will practice following company rules and having a positive work ethic.

### Materials Needed

- Two pens for each circle of students (Part I)

---

**Starter (3 minutes)**

Ask a student what they like to be called. After the student responds, say, “I think I’ll just call you Herman (or another incorrect name).” Ask the student to explain how that makes them feel. Explain that most people would feel annoyed, surprised, and even angry to be intentionally called by the wrong name.

Ask the class, “Why is the way you are addressed so important?” Suggest that it is about respect. We want people to call us the name with which we are comfortable. If someone doesn’t, it feels as though they don’t respect us enough to use our name correctly.

Point out that the same is true in the workplace, especially with a supervisor. It is important to find out what your supervisor and coworkers like to be called. Do they prefer titles like Mr. or Ms.? Do they want to be called by their first names? Explain that this is one of the rules of the workplace that students need to know. In this lesson, the class will learn about other rules that are important to follow if they want to be successful.

---

**Part I Passes (15 minutes)**

Purpose: Students discover the importance of learning the rules of the workplace and identify the types of rules they are likely to encounter.

**1. Students participate in a game to learn the importance of knowing the rules of the workplace.**

Ask students to sit in a circle. You should also sit in the circle. If the class is large, form smaller circles and explain the game to a student leader. Each circle of students will need two pens.

Explain the game:

- The goal is to figure out how to pass the two pens around the circle correctly.
- Explain that you are going to pass the pens in the proper manner. Tell students to pay attention to what you do because they have to copy it exactly in order to pass the pens correctly.
- Emphasize that no one, except for you, is to communicate with anyone in any way during the game. Tell students that they must concentrate on identifying the proper way to pass the pens.

Pass the pens to a person in the circle. When you pass them, be sure that your legs are crossed in some manner. Do not call attention to this.

Each time a student passes the pens, say whether the pass was correct or not. If students cross their legs in the same manner as you while they pass the pens, they have completed the pass correctly. If a student does not cross their legs when passing the pens, the pass is incorrect.

After five minutes, stop the game and ask students to name the rule that defined a correct pass. If students have not recognized that their legs must be crossed when passing the pens, tell them.

Ask the class to describe how it felt when they were trying to figure out how to pass the pens. Was it frustrating? Allow students to respond.

Lead students to the understanding that it is important to know the rules of a game if they are going to play it well. The same idea is true in the workplace. If they don't know the rules or what their employer expects from them, they might not behave or work properly. Explain that they need to find out the rules and procedures of their job before they break them by mistake.

## **2. Students brainstorm the types of rules they might encounter in the workplace.**

Ask students to list the kinds of workplace rules they might need to learn. Write student responses on the board. (Students might respond: vacation and holiday policies; time allowed for lunch; personal use of telephones and computers; break times; where to put coats and bags; whether personal pictures, mementos, and plants are allowed.)

## **3. Students discover how to find out the rules of the workplace.**

Ask students to suggest ways to find the answers to these kinds of issues. Lead students to the understanding that they should ask their supervisor and coworkers or obtain a copy of the company's policies and rules.

---

## **Part II Learning the Rules (10 minutes)**

Purpose: Students learn about having a positive work ethic.

### **1. Students recognize that ethical behavior in the workplace includes punctuality.**

Explain to students that in addition to the rules they discussed, there are more general rules for the workplace that everyone should follow in order to be a good employee.

Ask students to imagine that they're throwing a surprise party and have asked their guests to come at a specific time. Instead, the guests all arrive at different times. Ask, "Why is their lateness a problem?" (Students should respond that the surprise aspect of the party would be ruined.) Direct students to the understanding that being on time is important.

Point out that just as it's important for everyone to arrive at a surprise party on time, we arrive at our jobs on time so that the business operates smoothly. Lead students to identify punctuality as an important rule.

Explain to students that being on time shows they understand that it's important to fulfill their responsibilities and that they want to help keep things running smoothly. It also shows respect for company policy and for coworkers.

## **2. Students recognize that telling their employers when they are sick is important.**

Ask students to imagine that they plan to meet a friend at the movies, but the friend never shows up. The friend calls two days later, saying she was sick. Ask students to consider how they would feel and what they would think about their friend.

Lead students to understand that they would feel like the friend didn't think they were important enough to call. Explain that the same is true for times when they're sick and can't go to work. If they don't call in, their boss will think that the job isn't important to them.

## **3. Students recognize that taking company property is stealing.**

Tell students to imagine that a friend visits their home and, after the friend leaves, they realize that their headphones are missing. Ask students to share what they would think. (Student responses should mention stealing and that they'd probably be angry.)

Point out that the same is true on the job. Taking supplies home from the job for personal use or making personal phone calls is stealing because the company has to pay for those things. Point out to students that if they need to make a phone call in an emergency, they should explain the situation to a supervisor and ask to make a brief call. Otherwise, making phone calls or taking supplies home can cause difficulties on the job.

---

## **Part III Following the Rules (20 minutes)**

Purpose: Students practice following company rules and having a positive work ethic.

### **1. Students recognize that decision making is part of ethical workplace behavior.**

Explain to students that sometimes it's hard to follow the rules, especially when other people are breaking them and it seems okay to disobey them, too. Point out that students need to consider whether they are willing to jeopardize their job and risk being fired. Explain that they have to weigh the options and decide whether what they get from breaking a rule is more important than having their job. Remind them that another potential consequence is incurring the disapproval of their boss or other coworkers.

Tell students that this situation calls for decision making. Point out that if having the job is more important, then it's not worth breaking the rules.

### **2. Students role-play workplace situations in which they must decide whether to break a company rule.**

Divide students into pairs. Explain to students that, with their partners, they will role-play a scenario in which they have to decide whether to break one of the company rules. Remind students to follow the steps of the decision making process.

Ask students to use one of the following scenarios or create their own:

- You're working at an ice cream parlor, and everyone else takes home a pint of ice cream when they leave. Your coworker is taking some and asks if you want a pint.
- You're at work, and you want to call your friend who lives in a different area code. Your coworker tells you about a time that he made a long-distance call on the phone at work and didn't get caught.
- A friend's family has invited you to go to the mountains with them for the weekend. However, the people who invited you are leaving today, and you have no other means of transportation. You're supposed to work tonight. Your friend tells you to call in sick. You know that there will be little coverage at work tonight.

Remind students about peer pressure and how to reject peer pressure while maintaining respect for themselves and their peers.

Have students perform their role plays for the class.

### **3. Students analyze their scenarios.**

When students have finished performing, ask them the following questions:

- Was it difficult to decide what to do in these situations? Why or why not?
- How would you respond to your coworker if they were encouraging you to break a rule?

Discuss the variety of responses with the class.

---

### Conclusion (2 minutes)

Close this session by reminding students that when they have worked hard to get a job, following the rules will help them keep the job. Following the rules can also get them noticed by supervisors and result in a promotion. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Learn the rules of the company and follow them.
- Good employees also follow unwritten rules of personal conduct.
- It may be tempting to break the rules, especially when other people are doing so, but following the rules shows self-respect and respect for the company.

### Student Assessment

---

1. Define “positive work ethic” and explain why having one is important.
2. List five types of rules you might encounter in the workplace.
3. Why is it important to learn workplace rules?

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

### Using Quotations

---

“Our labour preserves us from three great evils—weariness, vice, and want.” —Voltaire, French writer

Tell students that a full-time workweek generally consists of 40 hours over five days. Ask, “Is 40 hours long enough or too long? What would be better: 10-hour days over four days or eight-hour days over five days? How can having a full-time job benefit you?”

### Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

---

Have students describe a time when they were treated poorly by an employee who should have been assisting them (e.g., at a store or fast-food restaurant). Have groups of students illustrate (in words, movement, or images) one of these situations.

Discuss each group’s work. Have students identify how these situations might reflect a poor work ethic. Ask, “How might having a poor work ethic affect you personally?”

### Writing in Your Journal

---

Have students write about how they feel when people break community rules, such as no littering. Ask them to think about community rules in the workplace.

Discuss how adhering to rules can affect the workplace.

### Using Technology

---

Have students visit <https://www.thebalance.com/rules-for-usingcell-phones-at-work-526258> for rules about cell phone use while on the job. Ask them to identify how breaking these rules could affect them.

## Homework

---

Tell students that the military is known for rules and discipline. Review specifics if possible.

Have students write a paragraph about how such a rigid structure would affect the workplace.

## Additional Resources

---

Have students consult etiquette books and note the different tips they offer.

Brainstorm with students as to why common courtesy is important in the workplace. It is also important to realize that different cultures have different rules of etiquette. Have students find out why some of these rules exist.