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Essentials for Success



**Competencies
Employers Seek in
College Graduates**

Career Services Network

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

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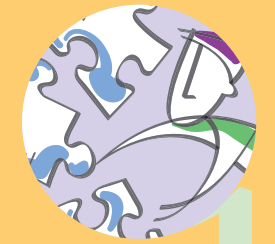
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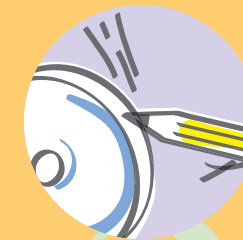


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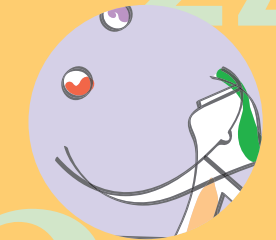


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Dear MSU Student:

Whether you're a freshman or a senior, your goal at Michigan State University is the same: preparing for life after college. We at Career Services and Placement **want to help you with that preparation.**

Some students come to us with well-formed plans and anticipate the transition to the work world with confidence. They are resourceful, have a sense of purpose, and don't give up until they secure a career opportunity that matches their interests. Others, however, get to the final stretch unprepared for the rigors of a job search, and they are surprised to learn that **getting a degree does not guarantee getting a job.**

There's much more to it. You need strong skills and a personal vision—coupled with discipline-specific knowledge—to attract the attention of employers. The most important factor in a hiring decision, company recruiters tell us, is the **ability to articulate what you've learned**, demonstrated by your accomplishments in and out of the classroom.

Career Services and Placement, with the assistance of our Employer Partners, created this guide to let you know about **expectations in the workplace** and how they are **connected to college experiences.** The competencies described here should be considered fundamental to your MSU education. Although these aren't the only skills employers seek, they appear repeatedly in entry-level job descriptions.

This guide doesn't just define these competencies. It shows—through examples from successful MSU alumni, students, faculty, and staff—how these skills fit into the workplace. It also provides suggestions on ways you can gain experience in these areas while at MSU. Developing your talents and skills takes time and effort, but the investments you make now will pay dividends for a lifetime.



Kelley Bishop
Executive Director
Career Services and Placement



Working in a * Diverse Environment

According to the 2000 Census, in the next 20–30 years, more than 80 percent of the world's population will be “nonwhite.”

Sound startling? Even though we are far beyond the days when media personalities, corporate executives, and elected officials were almost exclusively white males, our modern sense of diversity is only a few generations old. Recall that racial segregation was the norm until the late 1960s. Because changes in society have been rapid, diversity consciousness may be old news or a new reality, depending on personal experience.

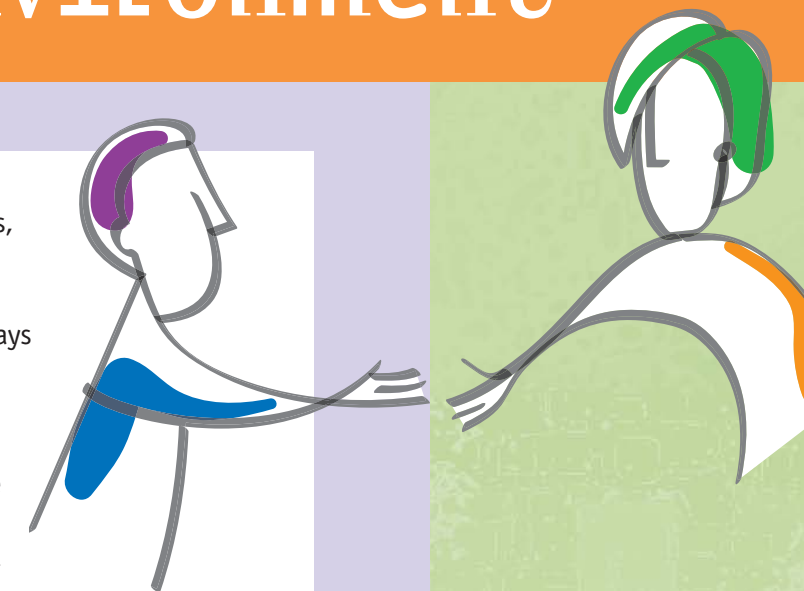
In college you meet people from all walks of life and from many different places, representing all strata of society, nationalities, ethnicities, lifestyles, and affiliations. Learning from people who are different from you—and recognizing your commonalities—is an important part of your education, as well as essential preparation for the world you will join. Working in a diverse environment means:

EMBRACING DIFFERENCE and valuing others.

UNDERSTANDING one's own **IDENTITY** development.

Admitting and **ERADICATING** personal **BIASES.**

Demonstrating commitment to diversity through **SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS.**



Developing Diversity Competence

Recognize your own uniqueness. Society has grown to appreciate differences in ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, able-bodiedness, and many other characteristics that define our individual identities. Each person represents a complex fusion of these dimensions, and no two people have the same composition. Discovering the multiple facets that shape your identity helps you see the diversity you represent.

Don't be afraid to talk about differences. Dialog is the best way to understand someone. That means hearing what others have to say, validating their perspective, and being honest about your own ignorance. It also means demonstrating a sincere desire to learn what you don't know. Through open communication, people discover mutual interests and common ground, and they often realize there are more similarities than differences.

Learn by exposure. You can learn about cultures—including your own—through courses, cultural events, the arts, involvement in student organizations, participation in seminars, or even through your living situation. Nothing substitutes for immersion. The more exposure you gain, the greater your aptitude for dealing with others.



Why Diversity Matters to Employers

The increasing pluralism of America and the emergence of a global economy make diversity a central facet of work life. It pervades relationships between employees, shapes the work environment, informs the vision of the organization, and affects the way a company interacts with customers, partners, and investors. Some of the reasons employers value diversity:

Diversity as Strength. Teams composed of members with diverse talents, backgrounds, and perspectives usually perform better. They are more capable of responding to an array of circumstances and drawing on different skills as the situation demands. They're also better at seeing the full complexity of an issue. In short, they produce a better solution.

Diversity as Smart Business. Buying power is not confined to the majority culture—if there really is a “majority culture.” It makes sense to cater to a wide range

of interests. Any business that wishes to maximize profits will necessarily design and market products with a diverse group of consumers in mind. In order to do that effectively, the people who work in the company should reflect the diversity of the customer base.

Diversity as a Core Value. Along with fundamental values such as honesty and fairness, embracing diversity embodies a humanistic principle. Everyone deserves to be appreciated—not just tolerated—for his or her uniqueness. By valuing everyone, an organization becomes a desirable workplace where people feel a sense of belonging and where they can be their most productive.

Because organizations need employees who can thrive in a diverse work setting, they seek candidates who understand diversity on a personal level, value difference, and can interact effectively with people from many backgrounds.



Diversity is part of the land-grant heritage. For Paulette Granberry Russell, MSU's very existence depends on the notion of diversity.

“The land-grant tradition originated from the belief that higher education ought to be accessible to more than just the affluent.” Accessibility refers to all characteristics of diversity—anything that may be a barrier to opportunity, explains Granberry Russell.

As senior advisor to the president for diversity and director of the Office of Affirmative Action, Compliance and Monitoring, Granberry Russell's job is removing barriers that limit anyone's ability to participate. She helps set and interpret policy in accordance with federal Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines. She also collaborates on programs that educate the campus about current diversity topics. She stays busy keeping up with legal debates around race, sexual orientation, gender and age discrimination, class privilege, and many other issues. Granberry Russell, also an MSU graduate, has witnessed substantial change from when she was a student.

“MSU has evolved in step with society's social movements, from suffrage to civil rights to the Americans with Disabilities Act. MSU's mission statement reflects our commitment to a diverse and inclusive environment. It represents a kind of contract between MSU and the community.”

Granberry Russell believes the university has a responsibility for developing cultural competence among all of its members. She recognizes three stages of diversity development: awareness, which means recognizing and respecting difference; understanding, which includes appreciating other perspectives and experiences; and action, which means doing things that improve the climate for everyone. Her goal is a campus environment in which everyone and every group fits, feels accepted, has value, and contributes. She recognizes that it isn't an easy task, but making progress—even incrementally—is the most important thing.

“We can't think about diversity as some perfect state we have to reach before we can interact. We have to accept that we're going to make mistakes. But we can't be afraid to talk about it, learn from it, and move on.”

When Houston Brown, technology advisor for Shell, addressed workplace diversity with the MSU Chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers, he surprised members with his candor. “How many of you knew that I was a member of a group called ‘white males?’ ” Everyone raised a hand. “Well, I just realized not long ago that I was a member of that group.” Everyone laughed.

It may sound humorous, says Brown, but it's true: Many white males don't think of themselves as belonging to a racial or gender group. “But if you're not a white male, you recognize certain behaviors and mindsets that characterize it as a group, just as clearly as any other racial or ethnic group has an identity. The difference is, for too many years we've had the luxury of not being aware.”

Brown considers that he's been on a journey of diversity understanding most of his life. Coming to Michigan State from California in 1974, he instantly noticed a different social dynamic. “On the West Coast, we were in a different place socially because there was more visible diversity. My best friends had very different backgrounds from mine. I had to adjust when I got here, because I crossed lines that in those days one didn't cross.”

But it wasn't until his first job after MSU that he became painfully aware of the stratifications that separated people by color, gender, creed, socio-economic status, country of origin, age, and even by job title. “There was an unspoken assumption that I wanted to

“We realize that people come from different places, and they bring unique ideas, talents, and perspectives. If there is no diversity, the opportunity to learn from others is gone.”



belong to the privileged set. Some were confused by my tendency to build relationships with people not in the set. When I began to feel pressure to associate only with my own group, I knew I had to leave.”

What Brown found at his next employer changed him. “At Shell they had taken the bold step of talking about prejudices and, more importantly, how to value differences.” According to Brown, Shell could not exist as a global company if it did not embrace diversity as a core value. “We realize that people come from different places, and they bring unique ideas, talents, and perspectives. If there is no diversity, the opportunity to learn from others is gone.”

Like his employer, Brown feels a strong commitment to embrace diversity in all its forms. “Everyone harbors prejudices—sometimes hidden from consciousness—and we never reach a state of perfect understanding. That's because it is a journey, not a destination. Some people have been on the journey longer than others.”

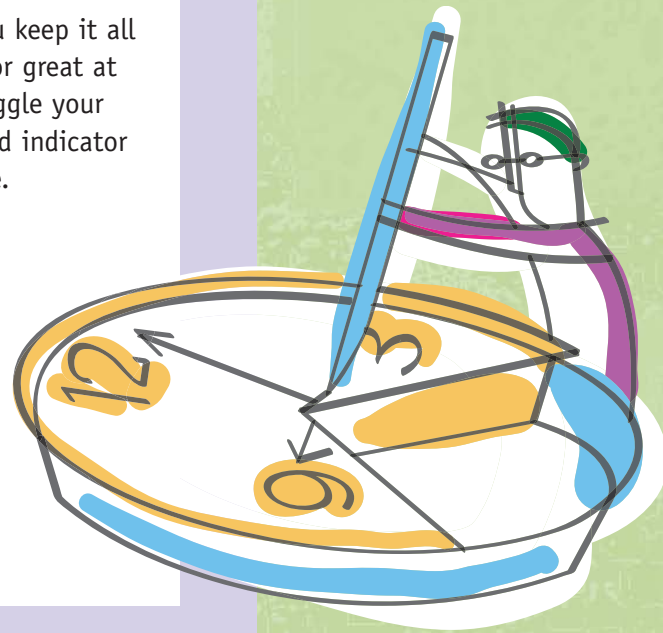
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Managing Time * and Priorities

You have a lot going on in your life. How do you keep it all straight? Whether you're lost without your PDA or great at remembering it all in your head, the way you juggle your classes and other responsibilities is a pretty good indicator of how you'll manage your time in the workplace.

Managing your time and priorities is more than just being a slave to your planner. Get a handle on it and you'll be able to:

- Break large projects down into more **MANAGEABLE** tasks.
- **DEVELOP** a logical plan for tackling the job.
- Decide what's **IMPORTANT** and what can wait.
- Stay **ON TASK** and avoid distractions.
- **ADJUST** to changes in the plan.



Making It WORK at Work

Getting It RIGHT Now

* **In the workplace, your time and priorities affect others.** If you get behind, it becomes a problem for your team, co-workers, boss, and anyone reporting to you. Similarly, if you misread a priority, it may create havoc for the rest of the team.

* **Become disciplined with your time.** Make to-do lists, carry a PDA—whatever works for you. Once you find a system, stick with it. Be involved with intensive activities that require discipline and concentrated effort, such as intramural sports or playing with a band.

* **Multitasking is expected.** Forget about getting to concentrate on one thing at a time. Most jobs require managing several assignments simultaneously. The trick is intertwining complementary tasks while keeping other projects going when you can't focus on them directly.

* **Learn to perform under pressure.** Take on a leadership role in an organization, lead your next group project, work for a campus publication, organize an event, or enroll in classes that have routine homework assignments. You'll learn to set priorities, juggle multiple responsibilities, and complete tasks on time—others are counting on you!

Are You Busy?

Perform a keyword search for "time management" on an online bookstore Web site and it will likely return over 1,500 titles. We are a culture passionate about (some would say obsessed with) time and productivity.

Time management gained popularity in the 1980s, when every executive owned a Franklin Planner. The following decade, consultant Stephen Covey promoted **priority management** as the most important organizing principle, just before cell phones and PDAs made paper planners obsolete. Nowadays, both concepts are inseparable. The hyper-connected nature of daily life—endless streams of e-mail, phone calls at any time or place, news 24/7 from around the globe—assures that unguarded time or unattended priorities will be quickly co-opted by others' agendas.

When your workday is packed with meetings, special projects, and the occasional "need-it-now" assignment—interlaced with more than 60 e-mail and voice mail messages that need a response—it helps to have a time management plan, says Teresa Latimer, the North American marketing leadership program manager at Ford Motor Company in Dearborn.

"Time management is really the art of knowing what's important and what can wait," Latimer says. "Learning what has to be done and prioritizing responsibilities is the most crucial skill of all. It requires savvy and creativity."

Latimer, a 1985 finance graduate in MSU's Eli Broad College of Business, has been with Ford since 1985. Through her management experience, she says, she has learned to establish objectives and set firm deadlines for each component of a project.

"You have to be able to focus your attention on a project, use your time and resources wisely, and be flexible when the unexpected arises," she says.

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"I look at my calendar for a two-week period, identify the main parts of a project, and break my assignments into manageable pieces."

Latimer, who worked while earning her MSU degree, says that in addition to focusing on academics, she also found time to serve as an officer in her college's finance association and assist one of her professors.

"Time management comes with on-the-job training and from the life experiences you acquire in college," she says. "It's also a matter of having a personal push to succeed."



Christina Kothari, '05, has a lot of insight to offer college students on managing their time and prioritizing. As an advertising major with a specialization in public relations, she suggests that students be involved and use their activities to keep focused and organized. She should know—in her first three years of college, she has maintained a high GPA, studied abroad, assumed leadership roles in student organizations, worked, made great friends, and obtained a highly sought-after internship for the summer.

The first thing to nail down is academic excellence. "Maintaining a good GPA in your freshman year will set you up for a successful college career that is much less stressful," says Kothari. So, it is vitally important to establish regular study habits.

It's essential to set up your daily schedule to fit class, work, organizations, downtime, and studying. Often student organizations and work help students become more organized and improve academically. "Having a job makes me prioritize my school work much more," says Kothari. "I have a filing cabinet and a daily planner to keep me on task. You have to work to get ahead of yourself so you have a little extra time to relax and have fun."

And, if you start to feel overwhelmed, "set time aside to evaluate what is important to you," she advises. "Your quality of life is very important. Use your time doing

things you truly enjoy. Get an early start to the day and study hard, but also make time for yourself and your friends. Nothing in college is impossible to accomplish if you tell yourself you can do it—you just need to take measured steps to make sure you get there."

"Nothing in college is impossible to accomplish if you tell yourself you can do it—you just need to take measured steps to make sure you get there."



Acquiring Knowledge



Acquiring knowledge is what college is all about. But learning how to learn is just as important as the knowledge itself. No matter what your future holds, it's a sure bet that you'll continue to learn every day of your life.

Knowledge isn't just about getting good grades. It's also:

- **ABSORBING** ideas and facts in all types of situations.
- Finding and **VALIDATING** information, including sorting the good from the bad.
- **CONNECTING** related information and seeing the links between ideas.
- Striking a **BALANCE** between understanding a large concept and mastering the nuances.
- Keeping an open, **ACTIVE** mind.



When June Youatt talks about the skill of acquiring knowledge, she challenges the notion of learning as a passive exercise.

"We expect students to be not just consumers of information but also producers of knowledge," says the assistant provost and dean of Undergraduate Studies. "That's why Michigan State offers so many opportunities to apply classroom learning to real-life issues."

Youatt points to courses like WRA 135/Writing: Public Life in America, in which students link their service-learning experiences with writing instruction. "It's a lesson in the power of knowledge to make a difference," says Youatt. Students see firsthand what MSU's land-grant heritage really means: How do we take what we know is useful to the community and to the world?

The same theme is evident in Alternative Spring Break and the College of Engineering's Design Day—students apply knowledge through projects that benefit the society, the economy, and the world.

According to Youatt, the MSU experience provides breadth and depth, because both dimensions are essential for acquiring knowledge. "General education requirements encourage students to tackle issues from different angles, link what they know in one area with facts in another, and communicate across a range of disciplines. Their disciplinary major gives them the ability to approach a problem with content-knowledge expertise and bring something to it. You can extend knowledge only if you know your discipline well."



Making It WORK at Work

Getting It RIGHT Now

* **Almost every job field has a professional organization.** Professional organizations give people in specific job types an opportunity to learn from each other. They exist to increase the cohesion and prominence of their field. These organizations often regulate professional standards and sanction specialized trainings for members who wish to advance. Annual conferences create forums for discussion and continual learning.

* **Consider joining a professional organization as a student. Most offer student memberships at minimal rates.** You'll get access to news, trends, and useful information that can't be found anywhere else. It will also connect you to a powerful network of people who can assist you in advancement.

* **Smart executives allow a significant portion of time for personal and professional interest reading.** It may include industry journals, regional and national newspapers, Web sites, popular magazines, fiction, and nonfiction books. More than just keeping up with what's happening, broad-based reading increases your store of knowledge, triggers new ideas, and hones your learning skills.

* **Make reading a daily habit—not just textbooks, but anything that piques your interest.** If you have a hobby, such as mountain biking or pottery making, delve into it like a scholar: learn about its history, the people who have influenced it, different styles, special techniques, and the science or technology that's advancing it. Employers are always impressed when you know a lot about the things that interest you.

Investing in Smarts

According to the American Society for Training and Development:

- Companies annually spend \$826 and 28 hours per employee for training.
- The largest percentages of training are in technical processes and procedures, managerial/supervisory skills, and information technology.
- The percentage of training delivered via technology is increasing; training delivered in classrooms is decreasing.
- Company revenue and profitability has been positively correlated with training expenditures.

What it means: You're going to have to learn new skills on the job. The training you receive is likely to be specific to your job, since your employer will assume you've mastered the basics. You're likely to do at least some of this learning on your own, not in a classroom.

Source: *ASTD 2003 State of the Industry Report*

When faced with a problem, Mike McDonald, the supply chain leader for New Business Development of The Dow Chemical Company, uses an approach he learned while earning his chemical engineering degree from Michigan State University—Go in, ask questions, and try to learn something.

"Learning is synonymous with going to college," says McDonald.

"Your college career is as much about learning how to learn as it is actually acquiring



knowledge. You extract what's important from each experience, because you will build upon that knowledge in the future."

Even after his many years at Dow, McDonald is still learning.

Continually acquiring knowledge provides a more interesting career and gives you the satisfaction of moving forward. "You have to be specialized enough to do your work well," he says. "But the more you learn about other people's roles, the better you can relate to them and the more successful you will be."

McDonald, who travels overseas for work, says that the knowledge gained from this type of experience allows him to be a better business person.

In appreciating what other people value, he says, he has learned how to interact and approach business dealings in numerous ways.

"Today's business environment is competency- and skills-based," he says. "But constant learning and acquiring different experiences keep you and your career fresh while strengthening your skills and marketability in such an environment."

"The more you learn about other people's roles, the better you can relate to them and the more successful you will be."

Thinking Critically



As information becomes a larger part of the world we live in, critical thinking has become an essential skill for making sense of the world. But what exactly is critical thinking? It's more than just having an opinion on something. It includes:

- **GATHERING** all the pertinent data and identifying the important elements.
- Sorting information by **RELEVANCE**—what matters the most for the task at hand.
- **EVALUATING** information to detect trends or patterns.
- Making **SENSE** of disparate or conflicting information.
- Recognizing the **ASSUMPTIONS** inherent in the data.
- Anticipating the **CONSEQUENCES** of a course of action.



“Writing is a way to interrogate your thinking,” says Janet Swenson, director of MSU’s Writing Center. “When you write out your thoughts, you have an opportunity to examine the logic and the clarity behind them.”

Consultants in the Writing Center assist hundreds of students each semester with brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing writing assignments. But not just so they can get better grades, emphasizes Swenson. The writing process—and understanding how to do it well—engages students in active learning and enriches the quality of their literacy.

“Courses give students a chance to express their own thinking, which demands that they evaluate sources of information, identify assumptions, learn new principles and vocabularies, and imagine the implications of the stance they decide to take.” The act of writing, according to Swenson, completes the loop because it forces students to review what they have been thinking.

“We ask students to write, not always for the purpose of measuring their learning about a particular subject, but sometimes to improve the quality of their thinking.”

When approaching an assignment, Swenson encourages students to practice what she calls the “deep gaze”—critical thinking that takes you below the surface of a subject. She advises responding to basic thinking prompts:

- What are you attempting to accomplish?
- What question are you attempting to address?
- What has influenced your current point of view?
- Can you articulate a response that is relevant, clear, precise, and accurate?
- Can you seek out the response of someone capable of questioning your thinking?

For Swenson, a profound relationship exists between writing and learning. “I have a favorite quote from Anne Morrow Lindbergh. She observed, ‘Writing is thinking. It is more than living, for it is being conscious of living.’”

Think Faster

“The fundamental characteristic of the world students now enter is ever-accelerating change, a world in which information is multiplying even as it is swiftly becoming obsolete and out-of-date, a world in which ideas are continually restructured, retested, and rethought, where one cannot survive with simply one way of thinking, where one must continually adapt one’s thinking to the thinking of others; and, where one must respect the need for accuracy and precision and meticulousness, a world in which job skills must continually be upgraded and perfected—even transformed.

“We have never had to face such a world before.

Education has never before had to prepare students for such dynamic flux, unpredictability, and complexity, for such ferment, tumult, and disarray.”

Source: *Critical Thinking: Basic Questions and Answers*. Interview with Richard Paul of the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction. Retrieved 6/26/2004 from <http://www.criticalthinking.org/University/questions.html>



“Our company links critical thinking with the ability to solve

problems,” says Jacquetta Beane, a college recruiter for Progressive Insurance Company. “It’s a key skill for most positions, and we interview for it.”

How does a candidate demonstrate critical thinking ability? “Most of it comes from the way they describe their most challenging experiences,” Beane explains. She points out four things her interviewers look for:

- Ability to look at each piece of a problem, as well as the big picture.
- Understanding what holds the pieces together and how tinkering with one piece may impact others or the whole system.
- Ability to model the problem in abstract terms.
- Awareness of one’s own thinking processes.

Beane emphasizes that behavioral interviewing is an exercise in critical thinking. “In the interview, you are making sense of the actions you took, describing the thinking behind it. The interview itself simulates the behaviors used in the job.”

“The interview itself simulates the behaviors used in the job.”

Progressive’s claims analysts, for example, analyze accident report data and physical evidence, interview witnesses, consult

insurance guidelines, and review policy terms to negotiate a settlement. Like other investigative jobs, the work relies on logical thought processes.

“A good portion of critical thinking skills comes from your courses,” Beane adds. “But I recommend students also gain experience in leadership positions. The responsibilities that come with a leader role require you to think and act strategically.”

Making It WORK at Work

Getting It RIGHT Now

* **Employees are often expected to think critically** and make decisions about their work, not just to follow a supervisor’s instructions. Having solid critical-thinking skills means you’ll be more confident in your ability to handle autonomy.

✿ **Take classes that stress critical thinking**—such as PHL 130/Logic and Reasoning. Many departments offer similar courses related to specific majors.

* **You can help your employer make sound decisions** by having the tools to recognize false, poorly reasoned, or improbable information. Are facts and figures distorted or taken out of context? Can claims be verified by another source?

✿ **Be a critical learner.** When in doubt, ask questions. Challenging someone else’s thinking, if done properly, isn’t confrontational or aggressive. There are respectful ways to ask instructors and classmates further questions, seek alternatives, ask for clarity, clear up misunderstandings or assumptions, and offer solutions.

* **Employers value the ability to analyze a situation rationally** and see all points of view because it helps head off or manage potential conflict. By communicating well and avoiding unnecessary conflict, you and your colleagues can spend time and energy productively.

✿ **Look beneath the surface.** What is the context of what you’re learning? Can you explain it to someone unfamiliar with the subject? How can you apply what you’re learning in one class to another class or situation? Part of critical thinking is making connections between things that initially seem unrelated.

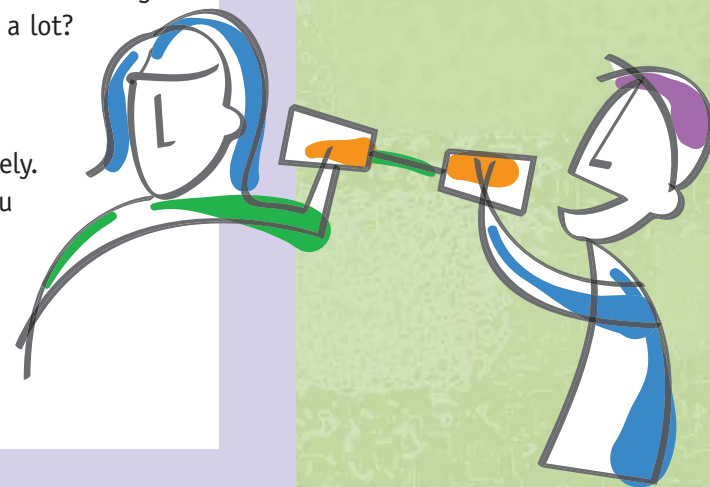
Communicating Effectively



You've probably heard that "communicating effectively" is important to your future success. But what *is* communicating effectively? Is it just for people who like to talk a lot? How is that going to help you?

Communicating effectively means:

- **WRITING** and **SPEAKING** clearly and persuasively.
- **LISTENING** well—and **INTERPRETING** what you hear accurately.
- **DELIVERING** the right message to your audience.
- **PRESENTING** yourself and your message in a compelling manner.



More than Just Words

Surveys show that public speaking is people's #1 fear. Fear of dying is #6. Source: *The Book of Lists*.

"Communication experts estimate that only 10 percent of our communication is represented by the words we say. Another 30 percent is represented by our sounds and 60 percent by our body language." Source: Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*



Parag Humbad, '04, wanted to develop more confidence speaking in front of people. So one summer, while on an internship in Minneapolis, he joined a local chapter of Toastmasters, an organization that helps people improve public speaking skills.

Humbad describes Toastmasters as a kind of support group. Each week, different members prepare and deliver brief presentations to the club members, seeking feedback and advice. "It is an extremely friendly environment. People always give constructive criticism that helps tremendously."

Does it work? At the end of his internship, he had to give a 15-minute presentation to the CEO about what he'd learned. "Because of the discipline I gained in Toastmasters, I nailed the presentation." He scripted the content and practiced in front of the mirror—an absolute must, according to Humbad, if you want a smooth

delivery. "It is a lot easier to speak on a subject you know about than to speak about something you don't know." Humbad found the Toastmasters experience so helpful, he founded a chapter at MSU known as SpeakSmart.

"If you can't communicate your arsenal of information effectively, you fail."

Making it WORK at Work

Getting It RIGHT Now

* **Communicating effectively in the workplace means understanding work assignments.** It's crucial to know the audience and their expectations as well as the best way to present the material. Your "grade" will not come as much from the content as from how well the audience receives what you present.

* **Go to your instructor or TA's office hours** to clarify any points you didn't fully understand in class. This offers an opportunity to find out how well you interpret what's presented to you. It also gives you practice in digging beneath the basic instructions. Bring your notes as a reference—you'll be better able to pinpoint where you missed key ideas.

* **Taking notes in meetings is different than taking notes in class.** You won't be expected to "regurgitate" phrases verbatim on an exam. Your focus should be grasping the main points that relate to your area and translating those into actions you'll take next. It's important to write down questions that need to be answered before you can proceed—don't leave the meeting before you've asked them.

* **Learn to make notes work for you.** A workshop on study skills can help you with listening, interpreting, and understanding—skills that are just as important as writing and speaking.

* **Workplace communication follows the rules of professionalism.** It should be objective, thoughtful, balanced, and considerate. In a group discussion, for example, it's polite to validate input from fellow members even though your remarks may disagree with theirs. The same guidelines apply to casual conversation at work. What you do and say—and write—is a reflection upon your maturity.

* **Become more conscious of your speech habits.** Think about the "polite conversation" that people use on certain occasions. Try practicing that kind of communication in class discussions and see if you notice a different reaction from classmates.



Mark Dickinson knows a lot about communicating effectively.

In 2001, his company, Eaton Corporation, launched a strategic change designed to synchronize processes across the organization. Over the next three years, Eaton grew to 51,000 employees and \$8.1 billion in sales.

Communication during this phase was essential. "Some managers imagine communication as a top-down

"Some managers imagine communication as a top-down exercise. But that's not enough to get buy-in from the people who will execute the plan."

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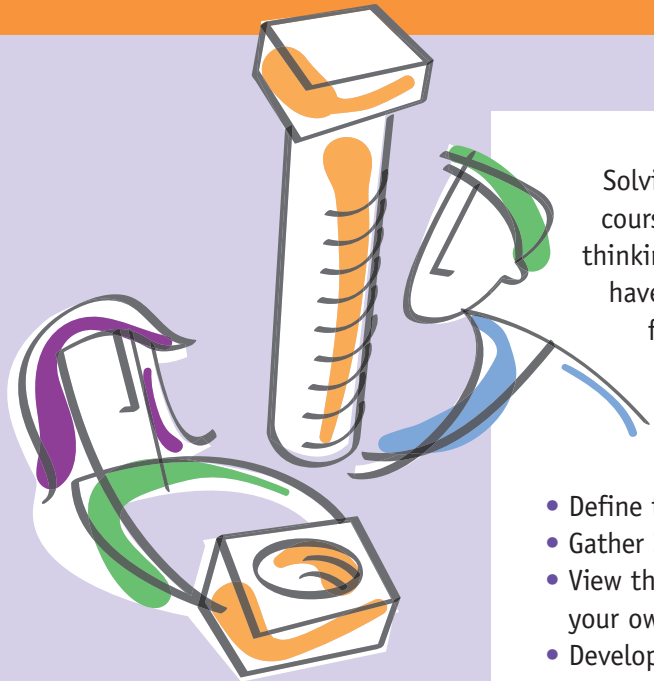
Dickinson believes it's important to let people deal emotionally with change. "You need to listen well and know what questions to ask." So he fostered dialog that helped employees form their own language about the new vision.

"They began to feel ownership when they heard their words integrated into the process."

Dickinson's background in psychology proved an asset. "My classes reinforced the notion that businesses are made up of people." More than just verbal or writing skills, he credits emotional intelligence as the reason he's an effective communicator.

"How you communicate says a lot about how you deal with relationships."

Solving Problems



Solving problems is something we do naturally in the course of everyday living, so you may not be used to thinking about how exactly you do this. You may only have thought about problem-solving when you're faced with a crisis. Understand the process and mind-set of successful problem-solving and you'll more easily handle the bigger challenges that come your way:

- Define the **CONTEXT** of the problem.
- Gather **INFORMATION** from reliable sources.
- View the problem from **MULTIPLE** perspectives, not just your own.
- Develop and **TEST** hypotheses.
- Approach the situation with a **POSITIVE** attitude.
- **COLLABORATE** with others to develop well-rounded solutions.
- Envision a successful **RESOLUTION**.



To Doug Estry, associate dean of the College of Natural Science, scientific study is problem-solving in its most refined form.

"Science originated out of a need to solve problems—to understand natural phenomena and the basic mechanisms that govern them, and to harness that knowledge in ways that enhance the quality of life and our fundamental understanding of the world we live in."

The science curriculum offers multiple ways to gain problem-solving skills, explains Estry. Exposure to scientific principles helps students develop a methodology for solving problems. Work in the labs forces them to put theory into practice, testing its validity and recording what actually happened versus what was predicted.

This kind of discipline is useful whether a student pursues a career in science or another field.

What can a person with a strong grounding in science do? Quite a lot, says Estry. A good problem solver should be able to:

- Recognize when a problem exists and define its dimensions.
- Delineate the various components of the problem and explore options.
- Generate plans, solutions, or testable alternatives.
- Implement plans and collect data.
- Carefully and thoughtfully analyze the evidence.

"That last skill deserves more attention," says Estry. "Perhaps the most important lesson from science is appreciating the fragile balance between what we do and do not know. Data are seldom definitive, and maintaining a healthy skepticism—so long as it doesn't negate progress—can be a good thing."

Carl Sagan's Baloney Detection Kit

Based on the book *The Demon Haunted World* by Carl Sagan.

The following are suggested as tools for testing arguments and detecting fallacious or fraudulent arguments:

- Wherever possible there must be independent confirmation of the facts.
- Try not to get overly attached to a hypothesis just because it's yours.
- Arguments from authority carry little weight. (In science there are no "authorities.")
- Spin more than one hypothesis—don't simply run with the first idea that caught your fancy.
- Quantify wherever possible.

Working Smart

New hires are encouraged to cultivate multiple sources of information within their jobs, companies, and industries. The perspective of someone who is not close to the problem may offer new insights. Of course, you should always respect your employer's confidentiality when talking with others about professional matters.

You will be expected to collaborate with others to solve problems. Getting a situation taken care of is more important than being a hero and getting credit for taking care of it all yourself. Also, get help when you need it, especially if health, safety, and/or legality are at issue. A good supervisor will not take it as a sign of weakness if you ask for help when it is genuinely needed.

Document the steps you take to resolve a problem. Sometimes it's required. Documentation requires you to retrace your train of thought, which adds to the record of solutions that have already been tried. If the problem you're facing becomes a legal matter, documentation will support your case.



"The title on my business card reads, 'Urban Marketing Specialist,'" says Rosalyn Jones of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. "But it might as well say, 'PROBLEM SOLVER,' because that's what I do." Jones takes projects from conceptual stage to reality. Most of the work, she explains, isn't creating the marketing media the public sees. It's the rethinking that occurs before a project sees the light of day. "I've learned that problem-solving has two crucial elements: how you define the problem, and who will be affected by how it's defined."

A case in point: A few years ago the MEDC launched an initiative to attract technical professionals to Michigan-based companies. "We saw a need to retain science and IT grads at the college level, so we looked for a way to help Michigan companies compete with multi-national Fortune 500 firms in on-campus recruiting." Then the economy did an about-face, and so did the job market.

" . . . problem-solving has two crucial elements: how you define the problem, and who will be affected by how it's defined."

Jones continued to investigate the problem from a variety of sources—recruiters, university career centers, small employers, and job seekers. She discovered that the most pressing need for many companies wasn't entry-level talent, but highly specialized experienced talent. "If they couldn't get that, they might not be able to sustain growth long enough to cultivate college hires."

Each group gave Jones a different perspective. The problem became more complex as each of the consulted parties developed an investment in the outcome. "This is where diplomacy counts. We didn't want to disappoint any constituencies, but wanted to ensure that whatever course of action we took, there would be success. That meant getting each group to buy in to a new solution."

Her research indicated that a strong Web effort would yield the greatest results. What eventually emerged was a Web site and online newsletter: *MiCareer*. "This approach had the added benefit of serving both experienced and entry-level job seekers." Although it wasn't the goal when they started, it turned out to be the right solution to the problem.

Contributing to a Team *

The word “team” conjures up images from sports. We think of athletes in uniforms battling for points or ball possession. But teams in the workplace are more about cooperation than competition. What they have in common with their sports counterparts are complementary roles, agreed upon ground rules, and mutual goals.

Recent college grads often report that the toughest challenge in their new job was adjusting to group work. They describe feeling unprepared for the pressures of team dynamics and uncertain about the role they should play. Because much of one’s education is an individual endeavor, it’s understandable that teamwork may feel unfamiliar. Working in a team means:

- Defining **COMMON GOALS** and **BUILDING CONSENSUS**.
- Knowing **YOUR ROLE** and how it connects with those of your **TEAMMATES**.
- **LEVERAGING** the **STRENGTHS** of each member to the team’s advantage.
- **LEADING** and **SUPPORTING** as the situation demands.



Katrina Grantham, '07, knows what it means to be a team player. Through her experience as a student-athlete, she can apply what she learned on the court to real-life situations at school, with family and friends, and at work.

Grantham believes the skills she is acquiring as a student-athlete will be a great asset to her in the workforce. “I learned how to step outside of my comfort zone, become more patient, and appreciate people’s differences.

“Being a part of a team requires balance, you have to know when to lead and when to follow,” she says. Grantham’s freshman year really opened her eyes regarding how a team works together. In high school, she was used to being a leader of her team. However, once she came to college she quickly learned that when you are the new person you have to “pay your dues” until you learn the ropes. She had to follow, learn the team dynamics, and earn the trust and respect of her teammates first. “You can’t lead if no one is willing to follow,” she says.

Grantham learned that communication is essential for good teamwork and that when problems arise you have to be very direct with fellow teammates. “You can’t let a problem fester. You have to work with your teammates every day and your frustration will grow unless the issue is resolved. The only way to resolve a problem or accomplish a goal is to talk about it.”

She also discovered that working as a team means taking the leadership role sometimes and letting someone else become a leader at other times. “It’s all about identifying and capitalizing on people’s strengths and areas of interest. Not everyone can be a leader at all times. At some point, everyone has a bad day.

“Being a part of a team is bigger than you; it is about the team as a whole not the individual.”

Secrets of Winning Teams

- **Identify mutual goals.** Clarifying what each member hopes to achieve and where common interests lie may be the hardest part of forming a group. Teams that fail usually find that false assumptions were made about each member’s motivations. Skilled team players recognize common elements among individual interests and can define team goals in ways that are inclusive.
- **Set norms.** Teams must decide how they will function, such as the frequency of meetings, expectations around deadlines, insistence upon honest and open communication, and respect for each person’s opinion. They also have to agree on how decisions will be made—by consensus, by majority vote, or by the leader. A smart team member knows that norms must be addressed early and revisited periodically in order to maintain team harmony.
- **Harness individual abilities.** Each team member has something unique and valuable to contribute. The ability to recognize individual members’ strengths—including your own—and how they complement each other means the difference between a group that simply meets and a high-performing team that makes progress.

Do You Like to Work on a Team?

In his book, *10 Things Employers Want You To Learn In College*, William D. Coplín observes that many of the students he’s interviewed don’t like working in teams. It’s not surprising, he says, because our society praises individualism and competition, and we naturally prefer situations where we have control. Students tend to view team-based projects as “one gigantic pebble in their shoe.”

We asked Coplín:

What’s the best way for college students to get over their aversion to working in teams?

“Aversion to working in teams is an *attitude* and the only way to change attitudes is to act first rather than think first. If you are down in the dumps but you act happy, you will become happy. I know this from personal experience. So if you do enough team activities, you will have some good and some bad experiences. Given the fact that you have no choice but to be a team player, the activities will slowly change your attitudes. So just do it.”



Successful teams often share leadership, says Dan Johnson, sourcing leader for General Electric Healthcare in Salt Lake City, Utah.

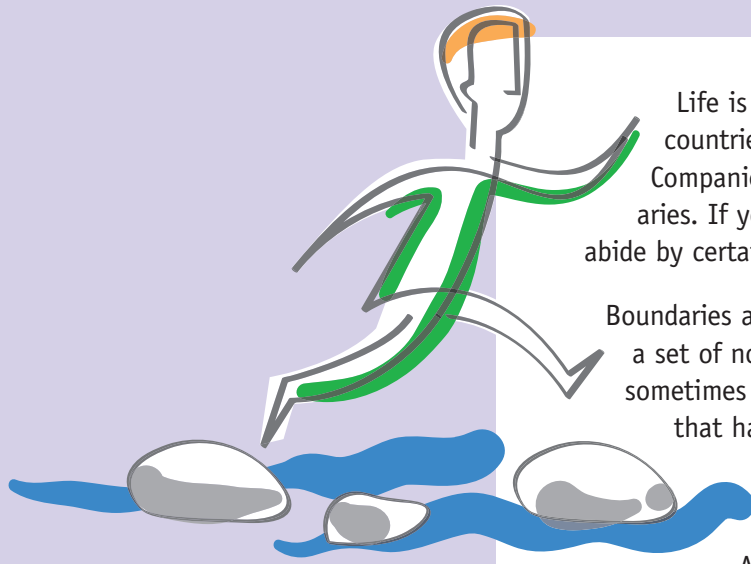
“Great team leaders know when to let others take the wheel. They encourage ideas and seek opinions. The key is motivating each

other to think outside the box. Each person brings something unique, but everyone drives toward a common goal.” This kind of flexibility paid off for Johnson at GE. Charged with improving the efficiency of a CT Scanner assembly line, Johnson had to first get the workers to think like a team. “I wasn’t their supervisor, so I had to prove that I valued their expertise and that I had something to offer.” His ability to take the lead—and yield it—generated momentum for the team, resulting in several new tools that shortened assembly time.

Johnson, who worked part-time during college and skied competitively, believes MSU taught him a lot about doing things collaboratively. “Sometimes giving up a little leadership produces tremendous results. When you let teammates have a chance to lead, you give them an opportunity to contribute much more.”

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Navigating * Across Boundaries



Life is filled with boundaries. Neighborhoods, cities, states, and countries have boundaries to differentiate one place from another. Companies organized around distinct functions have internal boundaries. If you belong to a club, a church, or a team, you've chosen to abide by certain boundaries. Even a language can be a kind of boundary.

Boundaries aren't bad. They serve many good purposes, such as defining a set of norms, common values, or rules to govern behavior. But sometimes boundaries also serve as barriers—real and imaginary—that hamper the ability to collaborate with other people. They may create obstacles to innovation, communication, and personal growth.

An educated person has the ability to move past barriers when necessary. Navigating across boundaries means to:

- **Venture** beyond your own confines, discover new places, perspectives, or ideas.
- **Adjust** quickly to unfamiliar environments and adopt appropriate behaviors.
- **Recognize** connections and mutual interests between different groups.
- **Gain respect** from people outside of your group by showing respect for them.
- **Know how to partner, collaborate, and compromise** to achieve a goal.

The ability to navigate across boundaries calls for the synthesis of many other career competencies. Steve Esquith, chairperson of the Department of Philosophy, sees class discussions as one way that students can practice integrating and applying these skills.

A successful argument isn't just about winning; it draws upon elements of teamwork, critical thinking, communication, and

other skills. "It's about trying to understand. You have to put yourself in the other's shoes. You have to know what the other is arguing all the way down, not just how to knock it down."

Understanding any idea calls for balancing the parts in relationship to the whole. "You need to figure out what the main idea is, not just by getting a sound bite but understanding the concept that ties all the smaller ideas together," Esquith says. It's possible to get so caught up in understanding the separate issue that you lose sight of the big picture. "You need to see the forest as well as the trees." Answering a common question in philosophy classes—"What's the main idea?"—calls for the same kind of skills that we're asked to use every day as we assimilate information from a variety of sources.

Esquith encourages students to get in the habit of always asking questions; situations in real life are often ambiguous and lack clear-cut rules. In a recent study abroad program in Mali, Esquith's students discussed how different economic and social development appears when you actually study it within the boundaries of a developing country. "There are no rules that can tell you whether genetically modified crops should or should not be planted, pure and simple. There are competing considerations, different risks for different groups, and a need to understand issues like this from more than the most familiar or comfortable point of view."

Esquith encourages his students to make strong arguments based on solid reasoning so they won't be forced to adhere blindly to a set of rules. As he points out, "Rules only get you so far."



"It's about trying to understand. . . . You have to know what the other is arguing all the way down, not just how to knock it down."

Making It WORK at Work

Getting It RIGHT Now

* Workplaces are divided into departments, offices, or divisions. For work to get done, all parts need to operate collaboratively. **People who can traverse the separate divisions act as the "glue" of an organization.** They ensure that outcomes occur and are often given greater responsibility.

* **Do you work part-time on campus? Ask for time to gain experience in each part of the office.** Talk with the office head to get an overview of the operation and the roles people play—learn the "big picture."

* Poor communication causes most workplace problems. An employee in one area doesn't grasp the needs or priorities of an employee in another. **Settling disputes begins with understanding how the other side views things.** People who listen with an open mind help create an environment of trust. They improve communication and diffuse problems before they start.

* **Go on a study abroad program or take a course out of your comfort zone.** You'll be forced to learn a new language and a new way of thinking.

* Organization charts today resemble spider webs or circuit boards instead of pyramids. **Employees work with colleagues across divisions and ranks, make independent decisions, and form alliances that cut across reporting lines.** They perform in multidisciplinary teams. Boundaries still exist, but the walls are porous. If you don't like navigating across boundaries, you won't thrive in this kind of company.

* **Encourage your student organization to jointly plan an event with another student organization.** Successfully coordinating with peers from other groups shows collaborative ability.



John Webb's ability to navigate across boundaries has been key to his success.

Recently, his team at Aetna, Inc. created a new product, Spectrum, that integrates medical, dental, and life insurance plans through a single point of contact. The coordination is a major breakthrough.

"Working out the details required a willingness to share information and compromise. We wouldn't have gotten very far with a territorial approach."

Webb doesn't have the typical background one imagines for the role of head of Select Accounts. He began in the aerospace industry, but throughout his pro-

fessional life he's demonstrated a penchant for getting people on the same page—even when they bring competing agendas to the table. Underlying this ability is a capacity to understand issues from several angles, find shared interests, and move the process forward.

As a student in MSU's College of Engineering, Webb gained valuable experience working in teams, which instilled the value of collaboration. "We solved complex problems by drawing on different perspectives and rallying around a common cause."

This same skill of navigating across boundaries enabled Webb to convert a successful engineering career at Rockwell International into one of the highest executive roles at Aetna, Inc.

"Once you learn to step beyond the boundaries, the possibilities are endless."

"Once you learn to step beyond the boundaries, the possibilities are endless."

Performing with * Integrity



What does it mean to perform with integrity? Some ethical decisions are pretty straightforward. Other times, you may not even think of something as an “ethical” matter, or won’t have an easy time knowing the best thing to do.

Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary defines integrity as “moral soundness; honesty.” Performing with integrity means:

- Accepting **RESPONSIBILITY** for your actions, including your mistakes.
- Keeping your **WORD** and following through.
- Making **PRINCIPLED** decisions based on personal and professional **ETHICS**.
- Following the **GOLDEN RULE**—treating others as you would like to be treated.
- Acting **CONSISTENTLY** and transparently in all your dealings.

Lee N. June has an ideal position to observe how a university fosters integrity. Now vice president for student affairs and assistant provost for retention and racial/ethnic affairs, June has spent more than 30 years at MSU in roles that include faculty member and director of the Counseling Center. He’s seen many students struggle to reconcile personal values with those of society.

“Just as individuals have a set of ethical standards, so do organizations,” says June. “College may be first time students face a situation where their personal standards are at odds with the group’s or the organization’s. Conflict often brings such differences to the surface. They become aware of what defines their sense integrity for the first time.”

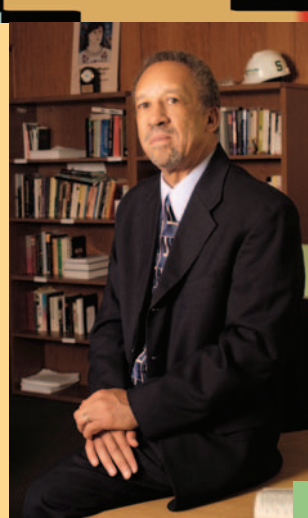
If the environment is both stimulating and supportive, June notes, it can be a great opportunity for personal growth. “College is a prime time for examining values. Each of us ultimately forms a kind of ‘world view.’ The question is whether we’re conscious of it. Educated people will be conscious and know from where their personal beliefs emanate.”

When students face a challenge to their personal values, June recommends they ask themselves several questions: What influences my particular views on some issues? How do I treat others, and how should I relate to others? What kind of society would I like to live in? What personal issues do I have that might interfere with attaining my goals?

“If you are in a position of authority—as a student leader, an instructor, or an administrator—how you answer these questions matters. If you’re not perceived as having integrity, your ability to lead is diminished.”

June believes students today have more challenges in developing their own values than previous generations. He cites easy access to multiple sources of information, from television to the Internet, that compete with more traditional influences like families and tight-knit communities. “We don’t give young people enough time to discuss these things, and there’s not as much attention given to teaching young people about ethics and moral values.” In addition, scandals involving public figures have contributed to a national cynicism about integrity.

June relates one bit of advice about ethical decision-making that’s stuck with him. “Someone once told me, ‘Any decision you make, imagine it on the front page of *The State News* tomorrow. If you’re still OK with it, proceed.’ It’s a reminder that integrity is really about reputation.”



Practicing Integrity at Work

Develop a reputation for honesty and consistency. One instance of dishonesty can ruin a professional relationship, even one that’s been positive for many years. Knowing you can be counted on to keep your word and behave in certain ways makes all your relationships easier, from your classmates to your roommates.

Follow through when you say you’ll do something. If you volunteer to take on a task and later realize you can’t do it or don’t have the time, let your team know. Offer to help as much as you can. Don’t wait until the last minute and screw up someone else’s schedule.

Don’t be tempted to stray from your personal ethics, even if everyone else is doing it, (e.g., taking an extra 15 minutes for lunch, checking personal e-mail at work, surfing, making long-distance phone calls, etc.) Behave in such a way that you would not be ashamed to be found out. This includes your conversations—don’t talk about someone in a way that you wouldn’t if they were in the room.

Admit it when you make mistakes. An outward sign of maturity is the ability to accept responsibility. You can offset the magnitude of the error by admitting it early, admitting the full scope, and coming up with suggestions for ways to fix it.

Is Ethical Reasoning Innate or a Developed Skill That Requires Education?

We posed this question to Randy Cohen, author of the weekly column “The Ethicist” that appears in *The New York Times Magazine* (www.nytimes.com). In the column, Cohen responds to questions from readers about real, everyday ethical dilemmas.

Cohen replies:

The important question isn’t whether ethical reasoning is innate or learned (except to a researcher hoping for a grant) but **how we can create communities in which we are apt to behave honorably.**

Ethics cannot be understood by examining solitary individuals; it is a social act. There is a kind of ecology of ethics: No matter how much you hector them, most Athenians will act like Athenians, most Spartans like Spartans, and most of us will be neither entirely saintly nor thoroughly villainous. We will behave about as well as our neighbors. And so, if ethics will flourish only in a just society, it becomes a moral obligation to strive to build a just society.

When Sam Singh makes a decision, his team, staff members, and investors know him to be upfront, honest, and consistent. As president and CEO of the Michigan Nonprofit



Association, he works from a set of values that distinguishes him as a leader with integrity.

“Transparency is key,” shares Singh. “We want to ensure that our employees and the community have an understanding of where we’re coming from and where the organization is moving. It only takes one bad instance to destroy years of good faith and good relationships.”

Singh has cultivated integrity throughout his life, particularly in his managerial roles. “Great leaders have developed a code of ethics and principles from which they work. They are the types of people employees want to work for, who motivate others, and who expand their work environment.”

As a 1994 bachelor of arts graduate in history, Singh remembers historical figures who acted upon strong values. “The writings of Robert Kennedy motivated me to fight for things that

“It only takes one bad instance to destroy years of good faith and good relationships.”

weren’t always popular. I remember class conversations about the decisions that (Winston) Churchill and FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt) made. We

discussed whether they were the right decisions for the long term or just the short term, and how their personal experiences were weaved into those decisions.”

As an undergraduate student, Singh gained leadership experiences through Associated Students of MSU, his job as a resident advisor, and the “Into the Streets” program that he founded with the Service-Learning Center.

Singh encourages individuals to get involved on campus. “It’s an ideal training ground for looking at your own ethics. You create expectations for yourself and your colleagues to be more engaged as citizens.”

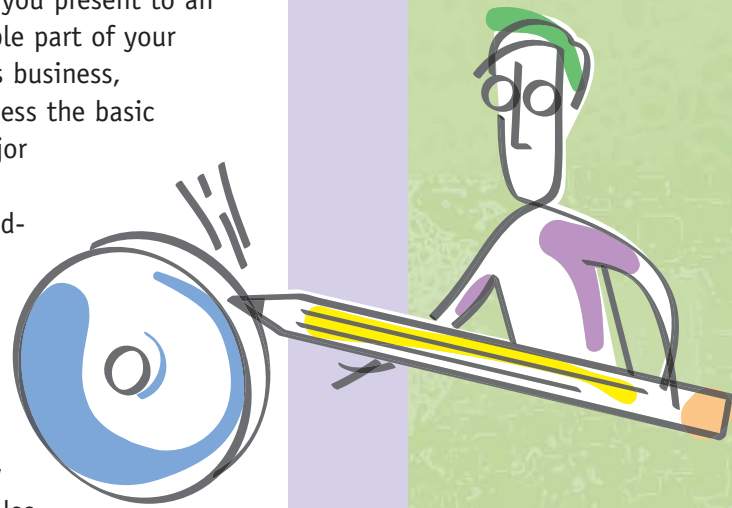
Developing Professional Competencies



Professional competencies are the tangible abilities you present to an employer. At entry-level, they are the most noticeable part of your resume. Completing a pre-professional major such as business, engineering, or communication shows that you possess the basic *content knowledge* of a profession. A liberal arts major indicates that you have *transferable knowledge*—for example, rules of effective writing, analytical methodology, an understanding of human behavior—that forms the cornerstone of a profession.

Content and transferable knowledge are synonymous with *skills*—think of skills as applied knowledge—but they must be developed to build a career. The end of college is the beginning of a new education. Learning is a lifelong commitment that also applies to your professional life. Developing professional competencies means:

- **MASTERING** the tools and techniques of one's craft.
- **ACQUIRING** formal training; respecting professional and technical **STANDARDS**.
- Knowing the **POTENTIAL** and the **LIMITS** of a method or practice, as well as its best applications.
- Continually **UPGRADING** skills and keeping abreast of new competencies.



Skills That Stand Out

Every college course imparts skills. Those that resonate with your interests contribute to your core skills, around which your career identity develops. As you perfect core skills, you develop a professional "signature": a set of highly sought-after competencies that establishes your reputation. Below is a sampling of content and transferable knowledge that may be learned directly from classes. How might these convert to skills on your resume?

- | | |
|--|--|
| Analyzing and synthesizing data | Estimating labor and construction costs |
| Preparing and writing technical reports | Manipulating graphics to enhance messages |
| Studying historical factors that contribute to current attitudes | Applying consumer research to reach target audiences |
| Familiarity with regional land-use issues | Understanding the impact of cultural values on voting habits |
| Experience with different surveying and sampling methods | Using scientific observation to measure natural phenomena |
| Examining artifacts to generate hypotheses | Researching library materials for relevant information |
| Conducting field studies to determine sustainability | Developing renewable energy systems from biomass sources |
| Using computer modeling to identify structural weaknesses | Upgrading telecommunication systems for an office |
| Constructing graphs to chart performance | Evaluating debate strategies of political candidates |
| Knowledge of packaging suitable for perishable items | Ability to speak foreign languages |
| Mastery of advanced laboratory techniques | Designing a user interface for a Web site |
| Applying statistics to detect trends | |



Shelia Roberts is proof that professional competency isn't strictly a matter of certifications. The independent human resources consultant has collected over 20 years of experience in payroll, benefits, compensation, training, and other areas of human resources.

"Many people in my field don't come from an HR degree program. They're generalists with backgrounds in psychology, political science, or other humanities majors. They advanced because of the expertise they acquired through hands-on exposure. What's most important is building a strong set of related skills and knowledge that are applicable to a profession."

Roberts' own career path followed a similar course. She graduated with a business degree and was recruited for a sales role with a

brand-name company. "At the time, the training program was considered one of the best in the country. I knew it would be excellent for whatever I ultimately pursued," says Roberts. "It was rigorous and demanding, but it really gave me a framework for everything that came later."

Her experience in the training program grounded her organizational, interpersonal, and goal-setting abilities. It also taught her how to use systems and tools to get things done.

Roberts says recruiters look for basic professional competencies in the candidates they interview. "You can tell a lot about someone's professionalism just from the resume. Proper grammar, punctuation, appropriate language—all of these are part of forming a professional impression. We expect what's on the resume to relate to the job, and in the interview we want evidence that you've done your homework: Do you know our products? Do you know our competitors? Are you familiar with our leadership, mission, and values? These aren't hard to get, but not everyone takes the time."

How candidates present themselves in the interview also matters. That includes attire, grooming, nonverbals, and a sense of confidence. "You demonstrate professional competency by showing that you care about the impression you make."

"What's most important is building a strong set of related skills and knowledge that are applicable to a profession."

"Students always ask about special techniques and tricks," says Robert Albers, senior video specialist and director of Undergraduate Studies for the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. "It's understandable, because mastering technical skills is very important to getting a job."

Albers' achievements as a documentary filmmaker—in roles that include producer, director, writer, editor, and cameraperson—reflect a commitment to professional competency. But he values his technical abilities primarily for what he can do with them. From his research, Albers cites two important factors in producing quality work: technology (what the instrument will do) and technique (how to use the technology). "A camera is like any instrument: the technical skills are just a means to an end. It's the content that really matters."

Because his own career has spanned several waves of technological advancements, Albers is familiar with the necessity of upgrading skills and collaborating. "You have to dedicate yourself to lifelong learning. Because practically nothing is done solo, at least knowing the language enables you to solicit someone else's expertise."

Ultimately, Albers says, it boils down to this: You can't just plug content into a technology. "Artistry happens when form and content come together. So while it's true that you need technical ability to get hired, you still have to be educated, sensitive, and aware beyond simply possessing the skills."



Balancing Work * and Life

Jared English, '04, has great advice to offer students on managing their time. Get involved. Select activities that you like. Give each commitment 100 percent of your effort. Most importantly, structure your day around school, events, activities, and relaxation time.

But, how did he learn to do this? "It was all trial and error," says English. As a freshman, he got involved in several different activities and soon found that he was overcommitted and needed to organize his time. But he wasn't a big organizer and was uncomfortable using a planner. "I preferred writing notes on Post-its and on my hand. But when you reach into your pocket and pull out eight sticky notes and have 10 things written on your hand, you know it's time to change. Now I have a few different calendars and a digital organizer," he says.

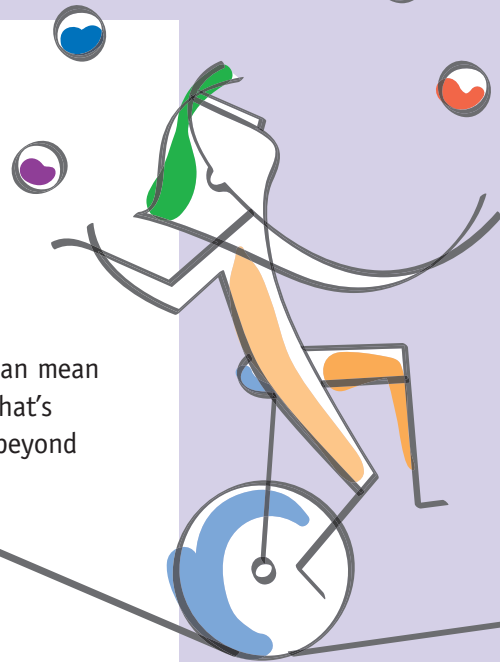
And he needed them. English selected a few activities that highlighted his interests and strengths, and gave them his full commitment. Quality over quantity is his mantra. He also realized that he needed to make the most of his time. He learned to build in gaps between activities and to create time-lines for projects. He also scheduled time for himself. "Although I have a lot going on, I build two or three hours of relaxation into my schedule every day.

"You need to strike a balance between studying, events, and fun."

Twenty-four hours in a day. Seven days in a week. Fifty-two weeks in a year. You've got a lot to accomplish in limited time. How do you get it all done and still stay sane? The key is maintaining balance between the different parts of your life.

Employers know that work demands can push the limits of their employees. Not managing stressors can mean the difference between productivity and burnout. That's why employers look for people who have interests beyond the confines of work. Maintaining balance means:

- Giving **TIME** to each of the important aspects of your life, instead of focusing on only one or two.
- Developing realistic **EXPECTATIONS** of what you can achieve in any given amount of time.
- Staying **FLEXIBLE** when one area of your life needs more attention.
- Taking proper **CARE** of yourself and helping others around you to do the same.



To Be or Not To Be Stressed Out

- One-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives (Northwestern National Life). Healthcare expenditures are nearly 50 percent greater for workers who report high levels of stress (*Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*).

Source: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

- Workers who must take time off because of stress, anxiety, and related disorders will be off the job for about 20 days.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

- Recent studies suggest that those who regularly attend religious services may live longer, healthier lives. Other studies have shown health-related benefits from such activities as owning a pet, taking vacations, maintaining long-term friendships, and exercising regularly.

Source: preventdisease.com

Making It WORK at Work

Getting It RIGHT Now

* **Employers expect that new hires will need time to adjust** to the work environment. That includes time to learn your job. Rookies aren't expected to know everything right away. What employers do expect, however, is a reasonable effort. According to some surveys, more than 65 percent of the reason new hires get fired is not showing up to work.

* **Keep in touch with family and friends outside of school.** This helps make the adjustment less abrupt. Sometimes talking to someone outside your usual social circle can help put problems in perspective and reminds you of the other important aspects of your life.

* **In some organizations, overtime is the norm.** It's very important to maintain balance in this type of an environment. While workers may have to make some short-term sacrifices, sleep, food, exercise, and fun are essential for anyone to be productive at work in the long run. Learning to leave work at work extends your ability to handle long days at the office.

* **Get some exercise.** Walk to classes, play an intramural sport, use the workout facilities on campus—anything you enjoy that keeps you active. Find a workout buddy and keep each other motivated. Developing good exercise habits now will pay off for a lifetime.

* **Many employers emphasize community involvement.** They may organize formal efforts such as fund-raising drives, charity events, or support for a specific community agency. These activities remind everyone that they are also part of the community. Employers know that individual participation contributes to the well-being of their employees.

* **Keep up your hobbies and interests.** Engaging in things that you love to do re-energizes you. If you're new to an area, join a club, community organization, sports team, church, or any other organization that will help you meet people and get settled in.



Regularly working 80 hours a week probably means you are over-stretched and need to re-evaluate priorities, says Sheryl Brunken, senior technology leader at General Mills.

"It's not a skill so much as it is a mindset—a physical, mental, and spiritual balance of your well-being across all aspects of what you do."

Brunken, who graduated from MSU's School of Packaging in 1981, has worked at General Mills for 20 years. Throughout the course of her career, she has remained physically fit and active within her community, using creative outlets to help maintain a healthy work/life balance.

Her co-worker, Paul Engler, a senior packaging engineer, agrees. "Maintaining

"I found that when I'm happy in my personal life, I'm more effective at work."

balance between work and something that gets you excited outside of work—family, friends, hobbies, whatever true passions you have—allows you to be effective and efficient in both work and your personal life."

Engler found his creative outlet in music. Also a packaging major, Engler was involved with the MSU Marching Band, Spartan Discords, and the glee club. "It kept me sane. I found that when I'm happy in my personal life, I'm more effective at work."

"At the end of the day, what you get is a more well-rounded, more productive, and more satisfied individual," says Brunken, "and that's the goal."

Embracing Change *



Just about every aspect of life is in a constant state of change. Sometimes it may seem that no sooner do you get caught up than you have to start all over again. Some people find this frustrating; some find it exciting. No matter how you feel about change, you have to learn to deal with it, which includes:

- Accepting change as **INEVITABLE** and **PERSISTENT**—there's no avoiding it.
- Recognizing that change is **CYCLICAL** in nature.
- Seeing change as an **OPPORTUNITY** instead of a setback.
- **UNDERSTANDING** how other people respond to change.
- Helping others move **FORWARD** in times of change.

“When working at our best as teachers, we place students in complex situations that demand they embrace change,” says Jeff Grabill, associate professor of writing, rhetoric and American cultures, and director of MSU’s Professional Writing Program.

From Grabill’s perspective, a student’s education is fairly scripted up until college. The content, exams, and writing assignments follow a predictable set of rules. “That’s not what they’ll see in the workplace. If we don’t shake up their routine, the transition from college to work will be a tough one.”

Change, says Grabill, is an inescapable part of work. To manage it, one must learn to manage projects as they evolve. That means dealing with shifting deadlines, unknowns, and setbacks. It also means providing solutions even when the problem is poorly defined.

Grabill notes that the Professional Writing Program is grounded in rhetorical theory. “Recognizing and understanding changing situations, circumstances, and audiences is fundamental to the art of rhetoric.” The Professional Writing Program exposes students to these realities of change by giving them real problems to work on: service-learning engagements, client-based projects, or research assignments with faculty. The approach positively disrupts routine ways of learning and writing, and creates a demand for the knowledge embedded in the curriculum.

Grabill admits that some students struggle at first. “It isn’t that they don’t have the skills; they just don’t understand that the rules have changed.” But struggling with the problem brings the skills to the surface, and they realize a capability to perform under a different set of circumstances. “Good writers have the habits of mind necessary to learn, grow, and manage change. They have the art of rhetoric,” says Grabill. “By learning to adapt, we hope students will be better able intellectually to manage the changes they will face in life.”



When pharmaceutical giant Pfizer acquired Michigan-based G.D. Searle, Mark Heston had a decision to make. If he wanted a job in the new company, Heston would have to interview for it.

“Some people would consider the situation bleak,” says

Heston. “But I’m not one who sees the glass as half empty. I see it as three-quarters full.” Heston spent the next weeks learning everything about Pfizer he could. He then aligned his skills with Pfizer’s needs. “I had to view the change as an opportunity,” Heston continues. “So I wrote down all the ways it could advance me toward my goals.”

“Studying history and political systems, it’s clear that if you don’t embrace change, it will destroy you. Those who adapt, thrive. I took those lessons to heart.”

Four interviews later, Heston was named district sales manager, the only one of his former sales group to cross over. “I know it had everything to do with my positive attitude,” he adds.

Heston’s ability to adapt to new situations has been a theme throughout his career. A James Madison grad who started in banking, Heston actually likes change, which is perfect for his job. “In pharmaceutical sales, everyday is different. One moment you’re having lunch with a doctor and the next you’re on a plane to Cleveland. I love it!”

MSU taught him about change before he experienced it first hand. “Studying history and political systems, it’s clear that if you don’t embrace change, it will destroy you. Those who adapt, thrive. I took those lessons to heart.”

Making It WORK at Work

Getting It RIGHT Now

* **Workplaces may undergo unforeseen changes** due to economic troubles, management restructuring, new/different clients, a new mission statement, or any of a number of other reasons. Such changes may open new opportunities. Understanding your role, the roles of others, and what to expect can help relieve some of the anxiety.

* **Understand your work/stress coping style.** How do you react to change? Knowing what to expect from yourself can help you deal with the unexpected from others.

* **It’s OK to set boundaries at work.** If tasks are disrupted because someone else is managing their workload or time poorly, speak up for yourself. Offering to help manage a big task or setting standards for taking on extra projects will make you appear helpful, not hostile, and will also make sure that you are covering your own responsibilities before taking on extra work.

* **Keep organized.** Learn to impose your own structure when it doesn’t already exist. For example, if you’re assigned a task with no particular guidelines, create your own and check with your boss to see if they’re OK. Become less dependent on authority figures for instructions.

* **Learn from past mistakes.** To anticipate possible changes in the future, it’s important to understand the changes that occurred in the past. Forward-thinking professionals talk to others who were around for the last round of changes and find out how they dealt with it then. Who advanced during the last change and who didn’t? What could have been done differently?

* **Remember that change may be out of your control.** Even if you’ve done everything you were supposed to, you may still have to deal with change. Stop second-guessing yourself, take a deep breath, and move ahead.

Putting Your Talents to Work

Realizing your talents and deciding how to apply them can be a challenge. For some, it represents a lifelong journey of discovery. But you don't have to go it alone. MSU's **Career Services Network** offers resources and programs that help students:

- Develop an understanding of their skills, interests, and values.
- Explore career pathways and options.
- Learn strategies and techniques for navigating a search.
- Acquire experience that builds abilities and tests options.
- Gain direct access to opportunities of choice.

We assist students through each stage of the career development process and specialize in the transition from college to work. Learn about the full range of services through the Web addresses listed or e-mail the field career consultant in your college.

Career Services and Placement provides professional assistance with student employment, on-campus interviewing, career development information, advising, and resources for all majors, for both undergraduate and graduate students.

www.csp.msu.edu

The Lear Corporation Career Services Center provides personalized services for undergraduate students preparing for business careers.

www.bus.msu.edu/learcenter

Field career consultants are located in the following colleges to provide customized career services for specific majors and career fields.

Agriculture and Natural Resources	Jill Cords	jcords@msu.edu
Arts and Letters	Courtney Chapin	chapinco@msu.edu
Communication Arts and Sciences	Lisa Hinkley	hinkleyL@msu.edu
Engineering	Jim Novak	novakja@msu.edu
James Madison	Chris Foley	foleych2@msu.edu
Natural Science	Gwen Pearson	pearso78@msu.edu
Social Science	Gina Engler	engler@msu.edu

The **MSU Alumni Association** provides career support to association members.

www.msualumni.com

Advancing Knowledge.
Transforming Lives.

