Being Effective at Work
Essential Traits and Skills

Are you as effective, efficient and productive as you could be?

Do you consider yourself to be effective at work? Although many of us like to think that we're 100 percent effective, the truth is that most of us have strengths and weaknesses that impact our effectiveness.

Many of us could benefit from tweaking at least a few of our skills, in order to become even more effective. For instance, perhaps you've always excelled at time management. But how much time do you put into learning new skills, or staying on top of industry trends?

Or, maybe you're adept at managing the considerable demands you face day-to-day. But, when things get really hectic, your communication skills start to suffer as stress levels begin to rise.

Being truly effective at work can pay off now and throughout our careers. Effective workers get exciting projects, win important clients, and are well respected by their colleagues and bosses. But how can you become more effective, and make sure that you don't miss out on these great opportunities? And what should you focus on?

This is what we'll be exploring in this article. We'll look at the skills you can develop in order to become more effective at work, and we'll review strategies and resources that you can use to increase your effectiveness.

Step 1: Identify Priorities

If someone asked you what your job was truly about, would you have a good answer?

One of the most crucial steps in becoming fully effective is to know your purpose at work. After all, if you don't know what your job is there to achieve, how can you set appropriate priorities? (If you don't set priorities, you'll be forever buried under a mountain of work, unable to tell the difference between what's important, and what isn't.)

To identify your job's true purpose and define what you need to achieve in your current position, perform a **job analysis** . This will help you uncover your most important objectives, so that you can start prioritizing tasks effectively.

Step 2: Adopt a Good Attitude

Effective workers have a "good attitude." But what does this really mean?

People with a good attitude take the initiative whenever they can. They willingly help a colleague in need, they pick up the slack when someone is off sick, and they make sure that their work is done to the highest standards. "Good enough" is never quite good enough for them!

A good attitude at work will do more than just earn you respect: setting standards for your work and your behavior means that you're taking responsibility for yourself. This admirable trait is hard to find in many organizations. But demonstrating ethical decision-making and **integrity** could open many doors for you in the future.
So, focus on adopting a good attitude at work, and make decisions that intuitively "ring true." At the very least, you'll sleep easier at night!

Step 3: Build Essential Skills

Chances are that you have a lot of competing demands on your time. One of the best ways of becoming more effective at work is to learn how to manage your time more efficiently. Other key areas include learning how to manage stress, improving your communication skills, and taking action on career development. All of these can have a major impact on your effectiveness at work.

Let's look at each skill in greater detail.

Time Management/Productivity

Probably the most crucial thing that you can do to become more effective at work is to learn how to manage your time. Without this skill, your days will feel like a frantic race, with every project, email, and phone call competing for your attention.

Start by looking at your daily schedule. Do you know how you spend your time every day? If not, the answer might surprise you! Use an **Activity Log** to analyze how much time you're devoting to your various tasks, like meetings, checking email, and making phone calls. It can be an eye-opening experience to look at this objectively, especially if you discover that you're spending lots of time on tasks that don't help you meet your objectives.

Once you know how much time you're devoting to different tasks, you need to learn **how to prioritize** them. If you know which jobs are important, and which can be rescheduled or delegated, you'll be able to focus on the work that brings the most value. To keep track of it all, use an organizing tool like a **To-Do List** or (better still) an **Action Program** , to make sure you don't forget vital tasks and commitments.

Being effective at work means you use time to your advantage. Schedule your highest value work for the times of day when you're feeling the most energetic. This increases the likelihood that you'll **resist distractions** and enter a state of **flow** when working. Our article, **Is This a Morning Task?** , helps you identify your peak energy time, so that you can schedule work accordingly; and our **Are you a Procrastinator?** self-test will help you deal with a serious, effectiveness-killing habit.

Goal setting is another important element in working productively. Once you've done a Job Analysis (see step 1), you should have a clear sense of what your role is all about. Use this information to set short and long-term goals. The advantage of doing this is that your goals act as a roadmap – after all, you'll never get anywhere if you don't know where you're going! **Good organization** is also important for working effectively and productively. If you're disorganized, you can waste a huge amount of time just looking for lost items. So learn **how to file** properly, and find out **how to create an effective schedule** .

Communication Skills

Think about just how often we communicate every day. We make phone calls, attend meetings, write emails, give presentations, talk to customers, and so on. We can seem to spend all day communicating with the people around us. This is why good **communication skills** are essential, especially when your goal is to work more effectively.
Start by developing your **active listening** skills. This means that you're making a concerted effort to really hear and understand what other people are saying to you.
Don't let yourself become distracted by what's going on around you, and don't plan out what you're going to say next, while the other person is talking. Instead, just listen to what they're saying. You may well be surprised at how much miscommunication can be avoided simply by listening actively.

Next, look at your **writing skills** . How well do you communicate in writing? Start with your emails. Most of us write dozens of emails every day. But there are many techniques that we can use to make sure we **write effective emails** – ones that actually get read!
For instance, always keep to one main topic when writing an email. Putting several important topics in one message will make it difficult for your colleague to prioritize and sort the information. If you do need to bring up several different points, then number them sequentially, or split them into separate messages, with relevant subject headings.

Of course, we do a lot more writing than just email. We write through **IM** , we **write reports** , and we **create presentations** .

You'll be more effective in your role if you learn how to communicate better across all these media, and your boss and colleagues are bound to appreciate your skills, since they'll be the main beneficiaries!

Tip:

If you'd like to learn more about how to become a better writer, our Bite-Sized Training session on **Written Communications** will help.

Stress

A little bit of pressure can be a good thing. But when pressure exceeds your ability to cope with it effectively, your productivity goes down, and your mood suffers. You also lose your ability to make solid, rational decisions; and excessive stress can cause health problems, both in the short and long term.

No matter what you do, you'll likely experience stress numerous times throughout your career, perhaps even on a regular basis. This is why learning how to **manage stress** is a key factor in becoming more effective at work.
Try to **get a good night's sleep** every night, and do your best to avoid taking work home with you. It's also important to relax when you get home in the evening.
If you're not sure what triggers your stress, keep a **stress diary** for a week or two. This helps you to identify the events that cause you stress, and understand the degree to which you experience it. When you're feeling calm, you can then analyze these triggers and come up with effective strategies for managing them.

Career Development/Learning

No matter what your field is, it's important that you keep learning and developing your skills. To begin with, carry out a **Personal SWOT Analysis** to identify the areas that you need to work on.
In addition to the technical skills required to do your job, you also need to focus on **soft skills** . These include areas such

as **leadership skills**, **problem solving techniques**, **emotional intelligence skills** , and **creative thinking** . Anything you can do to enhance these skills will pay off in the workplace. Also, consider if there are any qualifications that you don't have that a reasonable person would consider appropriate for your field. If so, could this be holding you back from an advancement or promotion? For instance, would it be useful to have a particular degree or other certification if you want to apply for a management position? Are you lacking any specific skills?

In some roles, **keeping up-to-date** with developments in your industry helps you stay relevant. It will help you do your job better, especially as you climb the ranks.

Key Points

When we're truly effective at work, we manage our time well, we communicate clearly, and we have a good attitude.

Effective workers are often the most respected and the most productive in their workplaces, and they're often the first to be considered for a promotion. So it's definitely worth the effort to enhance your skills here!

Start by doing a job analysis to discover what your role is really about. Next, learn how to manage your time better, communicate more effectively, and control any stress.

Also, make sure that you devote time towards further learning and career development. You never know how or when those new skills will pay off!