

JobStart Part 1: Getting to Know Yourself¹

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Introduction

JobStart is a series of publications that contain information about the skills and attitudes needed to find and maintain employment. This is the first publication in the eight-part series outlining the steps required to achieve these goals. The series includes the following.

What Is a Personal Inventory and Why Is It Necessary?

Every person who is seeking a job is similar to a salesperson. The product they are trying to sell is themselves, and their customer is their potential employers. Good salespeople always know their products. For instance, a successful car salesperson knows all the details about the cars for sale on the lot and their prices. If you go to a car salesperson and ask questions about a certain car, and you do not get any solid answers, you would probably think that salesperson was hiding something and you wouldn't buy the car. The same is true of potential employers. They have many specific questions, and they want to know all the information before hiring a new employee.

Employers want to know about

- Your job skills
- The successes you have had in previous jobs
- Every type of job experience you have ever had
- Your education or training experiences
- If you respond well to supervision
- Why you left your last job
- Why they should hire you

There are many other questions that a potential employer might ask you. To prepare for getting the job that is just right for you, a personal inventory is required. Such a personal inventory will help you prepare for these questions. It is essential that you are prepared with answers for the questions in your personal inventory. Many people do not take the time to sit down and think about all their experiences and education. Further, they need to consider the skills, talents, and accomplishments that are important to an employer. A complete and thorough listing of your background and skills is the first step in finding the right job. A personal inventory is just

what the name implies, an inventory or listing that describes you in great detail. Your personal inventory will be like none other since you are a unique and special person. The time you spend on taking a close look at yourself will pay off in every aspect of job hunting and resume preparation.

How Will a Personal Inventory Help Me?

The preparation you make in developing your personal inventory will pay off many times during the job search. Your personal inventory will help you in putting the right information on your resume, as well as answering questions during the job interview. For example, in the interview you might be asked:

1. What is your one characteristic that would help you succeed on the job?
2. What is your most successful accomplishment on a job?
3. What is your main motivation for going to work each day? Is it money or some other satisfaction you get from work?
4. Do you think you would make a good supervisor of other employees and, if so, why?
5. What extracurricular activities did you participate in when you were in school?

These are questions that take time and thought to give the best response. Remember, the important thing is not that you are able to answer these questions in an interview, but how you would answer these questions if they were asked. There is no one correct answer to these questions. Each person is unique, and responses will vary. The thing to keep in mind is that a well-prepared response to a specific question in an interview may be the deciding factor of whether a person is hired for a job.

A personal inventory will help you answer these questions because you will have identified your characteristics, accomplishments, motivation for working, skills and interests. The time you spend preparing a thorough personal inventory will be useful in many ways during the job search and afterward.

Use the individual skills checklist (Table 1) and the transferable skills checklist (Table 2) to help you prepare the personal inventory.

How to Turn a Weakness into a Strength

Everyone has what might be called weaknesses and strengths in terms of capabilities for a certain job. For example, you might not know how to operate a word processor, or know the latest software programs, or have the required number of years of experience the job notice calls for. These are weaknesses. On the other hand, you might have just the right kind of experience called for in the job notice, the appropriate experience and all the required capabilities for the job. These are strengths. The task is to take a weakness and turn it into a strength for the purpose of presenting yourself in the most favorable way for a job application or interview.

Often employers will ask a job candidate to identify a weakness they have and how it might affect their performance on the job. It is best to be equipped for this type of question with a well-prepared response. No one is perfect, and if you tell the potential employer that you are perfect, you might come across as either hiding something or being arrogant.

One way to handle this type of question is to turn that weakness into a strength. For example, let's say that your weakness is that you get irritated with other co-workers easily when they make mistakes on the job. This could be bad for the morale of workers around you, especially if you are verbal with your dissatisfaction with their performance. Most employers would rather the supervisor handle poor performance among workers instead of a fellow worker criticizing them.

One thing you could say about this weakness is that you get irritated easily because you hold yourself to such a high standard that you expect others around you to do the same; when they do not it irritates you. You should also say that you have realized this weakness in the past and have made conscious efforts to improve yourself by helping other co-workers with their mistakes instead of criticizing them. This way you come across to the potential employer as someone with high standards who is willing to work as a team member to help other workers who might have problems.

Another example of a weakness might be consistent lateness to work, appointments, or inability to stay on a schedule. In the workplace this translates to not being able to get to work on time. In fact, you got fired from your last job because of consistent lateness. Turn this negative experience into a positive by listing the steps you have taken (or are willing to take) to break this bad habit. You might want to read about time management, take a course

at the local community college on time management, or set personal goals for yourself and say how you met (or plan to meet) them. The important thing is to know which of your work habits need correcting and how you plan to do so. Better still, how you have eliminated the weaknesses.

The thing to remember is that any weakness you tell the potential employer is one that you have been aware of for a while and that you have made efforts to improve yourself in this area. The first step is to identify those areas you think a potential employer would see as a weakness. What is the one weakness that gives you the most trouble? What weakness do you have that would keep you from being successful at work? Think carefully about your weaknesses and how you would turn them into strengths. List your strengths and weaknesses and then write out a plan on how you propose to turn a weakness into a strength.

What Are Your Strengths and Weaknesses?

Corwen (1995) identified attributes that contribute to success on the job. These are listed and defined below. Assess the strength of these attributes for yourself. If you feel that you have a weakness in some of these attributes, plan a strategy for strengthening them.

Do you feel that you are

1. **Ambitious?** Are you career oriented with a strong desire to attain personal and financial success?
2. **Articulate?** Are you able to communicate ideas and opinions clearly and forcefully?
3. **Cheerful?** Are you pleasant? Able to smile easily?
4. **Confident?** Do you have a high level of self-esteem? Are you self-assured?
5. **Conscientious?** Do you have good work habits? Are you able to take on unpleasant tasks? Are you punctual?
6. **Cooperative?** Are you helpful? A good team worker?
7. **Dependable?** Are you steady? Do you keep promises? Do you have good work habits?
8. **Efficient?** Do you make good use of time? Perform high quality work?
9. **Energetic?** Do you have a high level of mental and physical endurance? Work quickly?
10. **Industrious?** Are you hard-working; eager to take on difficult tasks?
11. **Loyal?** Are you supportive of the best interests of your employer and colleagues?
12. **Organized?** Are you orderly? An efficient planner?
13. **Self-Controlled?** Are you slow to anger? Do you keep your head in tense situations?

Adapted from Corwen, Leonard. 1995. *Your Resume: Key to a Better Job*. Macmillan Publishing.

Knowing about yourself will help you choose the right job. Attitudes, values, likes and dislikes are among the personal inventory items that need close attention in preparing to look for a job.

How Do You Feel about Work?

The following statements will help you determine how you feel about work. You may have some additional feelings that are not listed here. You may want to discuss these feelings with someone whose opinion you value.

- Going to work makes me nervous.
- I like working more than playing.
- Looking for a job scares me stiff.
- I'm fired up to look for a job.
- I'm only looking for work because I have to.
- My job is the most important thing in my life.
- I always wish it were Friday.
- I don't want to keep any one job more than a year or two.
- Work really fulfills me.
- I wish I had more education so I could get a better job.
- I want to work more than I want to earn money.
- I want to earn money more than I want to work.
- I will take any job I can get.
- I can't wait to start work.

Why Do You Want to Work?

There are many personal needs for people who want to work. These needs vary from person to person dependent upon personalities, desires, and lifestyles. Some of these needs are listed here, but there may be others that fit your situation. Which of these needs are really important to you?

Economic Needs

- I want to save for long-term goals (home, car, trips, and education).
- I want to keep my family together during a crisis (illness, divorce, unemployment).
- I want to save money.
- I want fringe benefits (medical and life insurance).

Social Needs

- I want to meet people and make friends.
- I want to be with people who share my interests.
- I want to raise my social status.
- I want to help others.

Personal Needs

- I want to feel a sense of achievement.
- I want to increase my self-confidence and self-esteem.
- I want to feel secure.
- I want to be a part of a purpose or a group of people.
- I want to use my skills, knowledge, and education.
- I want to be recognized and valued by others.

What Are Your Job Needs?

Just as personal needs vary for individuals who want to work, there are also job needs. It is important for you to know how to place priorities on these job needs because they have a direct bearing on the type of job you will want to focus on. Which needs from the list below are the most important to you?

- Length of vacation.
- Amount of sick leave.
- Number of hours worked per day.
- Amount of money earned.
- Amount of status in the job.
- Advancement.
- How you feel doing the job.
- Location.
- People you work with.
- Working indoors or outdoors.
- Amount of medical insurance.
- When you work: days, nights, swing shift.
- Amount of responsibility.
- Retirement age.
- Long-term security of job.
- Amount of travel.

Adapted by: Elizabeth Bolton, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences; University of Florida; Gainesville Florida. Adapted from: Shaw, C. & Wolford N. 1992. *The Fact Workbook*. Ohio State University.

Why Are Values Important in the Workplace?

What is a value? How do values affect who we are and what we do?

All of us are influenced daily by our values. We are aware of some values, but others have been learned at such an early age that we do not recognize we are behaving in accord with them. When working with others, it is important to be aware of their values as well as our own. It is the first step toward making a decision that will reflect well on oneself and also be right for the other person.

Generally speaking, values are something that is measured in importance, worth, or desirability. They are abstract concepts of what we think is good. It is the primary influence on the many decisions we make throughout the day. We are all influenced daily by our values. They guide the way we act and feel about certain things, situations, and people. Tolerance for the value systems of others is an important attitude in human relationships. It increases understanding and makes working relationships easier.

A value is not in itself either good or bad. Values can and do change. This is easy to see when we consider how the standards for male and female behavior have changed over

time. When we travel to other areas, we can see that other people look at the world differently, interpret what they see in other ways, and have feelings about situations that are different from ours.

Values also affect job satisfaction. If the job you have does not meet your values, you may leave and seek work elsewhere. What is it that you value most in a job? Pay, work hours, location, working with people, prestige, solving problems?

Would the values of a nurse be different from a stock broker?

Would the values of a construction worker be different from a nursery school attendant?

Our values affect every decision that we make. That is why it is so important to understand our values when choosing a job or career. It could have a great impact on how happy we are in that job.

Can I Use Values at Work?

What values do people want in co-workers or supervisors?

Seth Godin (1995) conducted a survey of business virtues dealing with habits, attitudes, and skills that employers look for in an employee. He asserts that the top ten virtues turned out to be

- Ethics
- Teamwork
- Honesty
- Curiosity
- Hard work
- Intelligence
- Self-motivation
- Sense of Humor
- Initiative
- Creativity

Godin notes that these virtues are not easy habits. Rather they are skills that have to be learned.

How do you feel about these business virtues? Do they reflect any of your values? How might these virtues/values make you more successful in the workplace?

Work Values

Listed below are some work values that affect job satisfaction. Which of these are important to you?

- **Challenge:** I want to solve problems on the job.
- **Competence:** I want a job that I am able to do well.
- **Collegiality:** I want to work in a place where my colleagues are friendly to everyone
- **Creativity:** I want to use my own ideas.
- **Enjoyment:** I want a job that is fun.

- **Environment:** I want clean, healthy working conditions.
- **Fame:** I want people to know about me and my work.
- **Independence:** I want to work without close supervision.
- **Job Security:** I want a steady job I can count on.
- **Knowledge:** I want a job where I can learn new things.
- **Money:** I want to earn more money.
- **People:** I want to work with people.
- **Personal Satisfaction:** I want to feel worthwhile.
- **Physical Mobility:** I want to move around; not sit.
- **Power:** I want to make decisions and be the boss.
- **Relationships:** I want to know and like people at work.
- **Respect:** I want people to look up to me.
- **Service to Others:** I want to help others.
- **Social:** I want to visit with people at work.
- **Solitude:** I want to be by myself at work.
- **Time:** I want a job with no overtime.
- **Understood Tasks:** I want to be told what to do.
- **Variety:** I want to do many different activities.

Preparing Your Personal Inventory

When you prepare your personal inventory, consider all your experiences relevant to work: your skills, your reason for working, how you feel about work, your job needs, and your values. The failure to prepare a personal inventory will mean that you are not fully prepared for developing your resume or for a personal interview. Getting to know yourself will help build your confidence for the interview. The hardest questions you will have to answer are those about yourself. Your personal inventory should include all the information that is listed here.

Education

- School name, address, phone
- Years attended
- Major studies
- GPA/class rank
- Honors
- In which school or college courses did you excel?
- In which courses did you do poorly?
- Which subjects did you enjoy most?
- Are you willing to continue your studies in order to increase your knowledge of the field you have chosen?
- Any schooling you have had aside from your formal education.
- Any extracurricular activities you have participated in with a description of your accomplishments.

Employment

- Employer name, address, phone
- Dates of employment
- Hours per week
- Salary/pay

- Supervisor's name and title
- Duties
- Skills utilized
- Accomplishments/awards
- Other important information: a) If you have ever been fired from a job; if it was your fault (give an explanation), b) Duties in which you excelled, c) Any part-time jobs you had while in school or after graduation with a description of your duties

Volunteer Activities

- Organization name, address, phone
- Dates of employment
- Hours per week
- Supervisor's name and title
- Duties
- Skills utilized
- Accomplishments/awards
- Other important information

Activities, Aptitudes

- Club/activity
- Offices held
- Description of participation
- Duties/responsibilities
- Job specific skills (typing, computer operation, painting, cooking, masonry, etc.)
- Hobbies or personal interests
- Organizations you have been or are now associated with

Achievements

- Your main achievements (in school, job, personal)
- Promotion and salary record for each job you have held
- Community outreach activities, such as fund-raising, organizing, or social work

Military Service

- Branch
- Rank (at discharge)
- Dates of service
- Duties and responsibilities
- Special training and/or school attended
- Citations, awards
- Specific accomplishments

Language

- Language(s): read-write and/or converse
- Background (number of years studied, travel, etc.)

Miscellaneous

- The kind of work would you prefer to do (all your preferences, no matter how unrelated to your education or experience)
- Whether or not salary is your primary consideration
- Willingness to sacrifice income to do the kind of work you most enjoy (explanation)

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Table 1. Individual Skills Checklist. When it comes to skills that employers look for, it is best to divide them into different categories. They are individual skills and transferable skills. The following is a list of individual skills that are important to employers. Read the list carefully and decide which of these skills apply to you.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Good attendance Get along with supervisor Hardworking, productive Able to coordinate Assertive | Follow instructions Ambitious Helpful Cheerful Independent | Sense of humor Friendly Good natured |
| Humble Competent Complete assignments Creative Intuitive | Conscientious Intelligent Discreet Loyal Energetic | Capable Imaginative Industrious Informal Dependable |
| Eager Mature Enthusiastic Motivated Formal | Modest Flexible Open-minded Original Spontaneous | Learn quickly Efficient Methodical Expressive Natural |
| Sincere Patient Steady Practice new skills Tenacious | Physically strong Take pride in work Resourceful Trustworthy Sense of humor | Optimistic Solve problems Persistent Tactful Reliable |
| Responsible Honest Get along with co-workers | Arrive on time Meet deadlines | Thrifty Self-confident Well organized |
| Adapted by: Elizabeth Bolton, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences; University of Florida; Gainesville, Florida. Adapted from: Shaw, C. & Wolford N. (1992). <i>The Fact Workbook</i> . Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University. | | |

Table 2. Transferable Skills. The following is a list of transferable skills that are important to employers. A transferable skill is one that can be used in a variety of jobs, like good communication skills or organizational skills. Read the list carefully and decide which of these skills apply to you.

| Column A | Column B | Column C |
|--|---|---|
| Meet deadlines Plan Accept responsibility Manage money Organize projects | Synthesize Administer to people Persuade Control budgets Increase sales or efficiency | Motivate people Delegate Self-motivated Music appreciation Counsel people |

| Column A | Column B | Column C |
|--|---|--|
| Assemble things Repair things Investigate Calculate or compute Detail oriented | Solve problems Negotiate Use my hands Operate tools or machinery Analyze data | Sociable Listen Inventive Competitive Direct others |
| Take inventory Care for people Speak in public Supervise others Instruct others | Keep financial records Research Evaluation Patient Confront others | Take risks Expressive Sensitive Diplomatic Tolerant |
| Meet the public Written communications Build things Use complex equipment Audit records Classify data | Pleasant Demonstrate Insightful Tough Articulate | Outgoing Logical Decisive Self-controlled Artistic Perform or act |

Adapted by: Elizabeth Bolton, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences; University of Florida; Gainesville, Florida. Adapted from: Shaw, C. & Woford N. (1992). *The Fact Workbook*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University.

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