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## Soft Skills to Know: Being Courteous

**I**t's been said that courtesy is a quiet power. Having a door held open while carrying an armful of packages is a welcomed common courtesy. Extended courtesies are even more powerful because they are not expected. They show extra effort you expend to please someone like a customer, causing that person to feel valued and special. Extended courtesies to customers are also powerful because they benefit your employer's reputation. The more unexpected a courtesy, the more impact it has on the recipient. A handwritten thank-you note in the age of email is an example. A phone call to a customer after the purchase of a product is another. Cultivate a repertoire of courteous acts and use them to make the right impression. You will elevate your organization, and very likely your career.



## How to Inspire Others

**I**nspiration is a tool for motivating others to accept and



act on shared goals. To become inspirational, think consciously in conversations with others about how you are making a positive impact on them. This doesn't mean agreeing with everything they say, but instead means practicing genuine praise for their accomplishments, listening, caring, recognizing their value, encouraging them, and asking for their contribution to projects and ideas. Numerous positive interactions are what build inspirational capacity. Be passionate and practice what you preach, and you have the right formula for inspiring others when you present your ideas.

## Family Dinners: Do They Make a Difference?

**R**egular family dinners can be tough to come by, but many research studies show that a family sit-down dinner a few days a week can have huge payoffs in reducing the risk of substance abuse among teens. This benefit appears to result from an increase in trust, willingness for teens to bring problems to parents, improved communication skills such as learning to bring up delicate topics, the ability to identify changes in a child's behavior, resource sharing, and many other life skills.



## Real Power in a Smile

**I**f you are on the front line of customer service, you've heard it a thousand times—"Smile!" What you may not know is the effect of smiling. Smiling is not just about looking inviting to customers. It is also a tool to help influence their attitude to produce a state of agreeability. Customer service is about pleasing the customers, of course, but engaging them in an atmosphere of positivity reduces your stress, minimizes risk of conflict, improves the bottom line, transforms your attitude, and allows you to go home at the end of the day more satisfied with your job. That's a lot of power from a smile.



Source: <http://www.centeronaddiction.org> (Search on "family dinner drug abuse")

## So Much to Do, Too Little Time

**N**umerous distractions interfere with everyday work. Constant emails, to-dos, and competing needs of those with whom we must communicate grab at our attention. If you continually end the day having only skimmed the surface of what had to be accomplished, you may be a victim of a work habit called “reactionary workflow.” Reactionary workflow is responding to what’s constantly in front of you and demanding your attention. The result is only skimming the surface of your to-do list and barely touching the most important work. Reactionary workflow is a problem of the modern workplace. Technology keeps a conveyor belt of information, issues, problems, and needs coming at us full speed—both personal and business related—24/7. To reduce reactionary workflow, practice four intervention steps: 1) Make a list of absolute-must-get-done items with the time needed to complete them each day. 2) Schedule them. 3) Open your “notepad” or WordPad tool on your computer and paste incoming urgent items to this list. 4) Spend the last hour of your day responding to this list of items. This system is not a cure-all, but with practice, it can help turn the table on reactionary workflow.



Source: Statista.com

## Hidden Opportunities for Managing Stress

**M**any factors can contribute to workplace stress. Some may be out of your awareness. Discover them with a guided approach. Consider working with a counselor or an employee assistance program to find interventions in the following areas: Your workload, capabilities, need for resources, techniques, or approaches to the job; discovery of more meaning in the work; finding inspiration; your need to be creative; your role and its modification; being given more responsibility; required time/frequency of work; quantity of work; time pressure; participation in decisions; having more choices in actions taken at work; improved communication with boss/coworkers; improved social interactions; resolution of disputes/coping with others; opportunities for leadership; and examination of work-life balance. Modifying any of these factors could lead to the relief you seek from overwhelming job stress.



## Up Your Self-Discipline

**I**mprove self-discipline by practicing empowering behaviors that become reflexes to drive you in a more rapid pursuit of your goals. 1) Start with avoiding criticism for falling short of your ideal self. 2) Recognize self-discipline is a learned skill, not a personality trait. 3) Practice improving self-discipline at multiple points during the day, from completing a chore to starting a new large project you have postponed. 4) Find the big “why” to stir your motivation. 5) Identify steps to the end result, and act immediately. Take the first one, and then the next. 6) Maintain work-life balance. Procrastination or distraction can be your mind’s way of avoiding burn-out. Lack of balance therefore undermines self-discipline. 7) Set deadlines, and link them to undesirable consequences that are external, not self-punishing. For example, commit to others when goals will be achieved. 8) Your body has peak performance periods during the day. Leverage these periods to supercharge self-discipline.



## Develop a Stress Management Plan

**D**evelop a personal stress management plan by monitoring for a week what causes you stress. Keep a diary. Then experiment with stress management techniques. A jog around the block that you normally take may offer relief from the aftermath of a distasteful conflict at work today, but would a discussion with a good friend be better? There are many techniques for managing stress—physical exercise, leisure pursuits, creative writing, a massage, or even new beliefs about the nature of a problem that give you a more resilient attitude about it. Find a practical list of strategies online or at the following resource.

