

WORK • LIFE • EXCEL

Work • Life Tips

- ▶ Do you have your Social Security number neatly tucked away in your wallet? Get it out of there! Store it somewhere else. If it falls into the wrong hands, it can be used to create fraudulent accounts. Also, avoid using your Social Security number as an identifier even when requested by trusted sources. Ask for another option that is less likely to result in identity theft if the information is compromised.
- ▶ Alcohol-free beer can be 0.05 percent or higher in alcohol content and still be labeled "alcohol-free." If a recovering alcoholic drinks 'alcohol-free' beer, has the person relapsed? Yes, since abstinence from alcohol consumption is essential to recovery. Additionally, self-help groups generally do not condone 'alcohol-free' beer. The recovering person drinking 'alcohol-free' beer will typically shun these important resources. The result is increased isolation and risk of a full-blown relapse, along with continuing life problems.
- ▶ Letting future employers know about your successes and achievements is only one aspect of keeping a journal. Over time, you will gain appreciation of where your strengths are and how they can better serve your position. This enables you to spot opportunities within your organization that you can quickly seize the chance to accept because you know your skills and abilities are ideally suited for handling the assignment or completing the project or task.
- ▶ Getting along with the "other" generation: If you are an older worker and feel isolated from your younger peers, ask a question instead of offering advice. If you are a younger worker and an older worker does something that you don't approve of, try not to immediately blame it on the age difference. Try to understand things from the older person's perspective. Rather than criticize, consider offering help. A false belief fuels much workplace conflict between generations: *Each one thinks they know more than the other!*

Be an Idea "Entrepreneur" for Your Employer

If you have an entrepreneurial spirit that seeks expression, try looking for ways to bring new ideas and suggestions to your job. Start with small projects and tasks first, and outline your ideas in writing. Be sure to identify all the arguments for or against a proposal or a suggestion. There is no guarantee that your employer will accept your initial idea or suggestion, but know this: The missing aspect of most proposals and ideas offered by employees is details. Getting an idea or suggestion on the table often leads to teaming up with others who can help bring your idea to life. This improves the likelihood your idea might be accepted as a contribution to the organization. Don't let an initial "no" kill your entrepreneurial spirit. Be willing to give it another shot. Remember, commitment to innovation is a state of mind. Think how you can add value to your organization's mission. This is called "enhancement," and people and organizations are drawn to those who know how to consistently offer it.



Putting the SQUEEZE on Work: Parkinson's Law



Have you ever experienced taking too much time to do an unpleasant work task and then wondered why it dragged on so long? You may have been a victim of a phenomenon referred to as Parkinson's Law. Parkinson's Law states: "Work expands to fill the time available to do it." The phenomenon combines procrastination and busywork (or distractions) to avoid an unpleasant task until a deadline forces you to finally complete it. The more time you have, the more likely it is that you will substitute unimportant and sometimes unnecessary tasks for those that are undesirable. A few suggested steps to overcome Parkinson's Law include: 1) Tackle unpleasant work first. 2) Compress time by promising others completion of tasks sooner. 3) Use a kitchen timer and break tasks down into 45 minutes segments. Work intensely and then break for 15 minutes. Repeat with 45-minute work segments and breaks until finished.

Nap Time for "Left Brainers"

Studies show that a short 20-minute snooze or rest can stimulate or "turn on" the right side of your brain. This is the creative, emotion-centered, and abstract thinking part of your brain. This can be a great way to kick-start outside-the-box thinking and innovative brainstorming, especially for those of us who are more left-brain dominant. Are you a "left brainer"? Left-brain dominant people tend to be more analytical, structured, mathematically inclined, linear in their thinking, and are likely to view things sequentially in order to understand the whole (or bigger) picture. Periodically resting the brain can actually help stimulate its creative side.



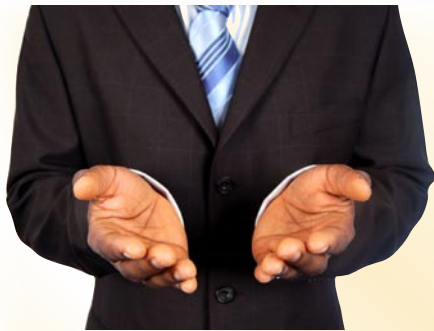


Tapping Your Creativity—It Might Be Easier Than You Think

Creativity is the ability to imagine new ideas, possibilities, and solutions. Put simply, it's the ability to think and act in new ways. If you don't think that you are naturally creative, you may not be giving yourself permission to be inventive. Try these easy ways of turning on your inner innovator: 1) Daydream: Your teacher may have scolded you for it, but letting your mind wander freely will allow it to leave the beaten path and explore new territory. 2) Brainstorm: Take an idea and bounce it around with several coworkers or friends. Don't worry about getting off topic. Have fun and relax. 3) Play: Toss a ball around; grab some LEGO bricks and build a castle; doodle. 4) Sit quietly and try meditation. Reflect and contemplate the problem needing a creative solution in total silence—remember that the creative right brain can be ignited with a little rest and relaxation.

Couples Counseling: Getting Started with One

In marriage, as in any relationship, it takes two to tango, but when problems within the relationship require professional counseling, don't be afraid to go solo if your spouse initially chooses to sit out. Attending marital counseling alone doesn't mean admitting that you're "the problem." Even without your spouse, an employee assistance professional, a marital therapist, or other professional counselor can provide tools and strategies that you can use within your relationship. Counseling can also provide an opportunity for you to discover your own inner workings and learn more about what is important to you in your relationship. Just because your partner balks at counseling today doesn't mean he or she won't join you in the future. In the meantime, why not take some positive steps now?



Negotiation Skills for Everyone

The ability to negotiate is an important life skill, but you may be surprised to learn that you don't have to be aggressive or pushy to be good at it. Effective negotiation leaves both parties feeling satisfied with the result. Try your hand at negotiating with a simple technique called "reframing." Reframing involves two people placing their focus on the needs of each person rather than the position (the demand) each one makes. For example, let's say that a spouse wants her husband to stay home for the evening, but her husband wants to spend time playing cards with his friends. These positions tell you nothing about the true source of the conflict between the two. Reframing the issue may reveal that the wife needs to talk about a pressing problem that she has encountered at work, while the husband may feel the need for some downtime to reconnect with some friends that he hasn't seen for awhile. By addressing the needs instead of the positions, a new range of solutions becomes possible. When you are faced with conflict, try zeroing in on the other person's needs by asking effective questions. Listen carefully without interruption, and restate the answer to the other person to make sure that you understand correctly. By reframing, you can more readily shift from being combatants invested in your respective "positions" to being partners in finding a solution that considers and satisfies both your needs.

Mastering Open-Ended Job Interview Questions

Count on being asked open-ended questions at job interviews to evaluate your skills, and to provide insight into your future behavior, abilities, and most important whether you're a "fit" with the work culture of a prospective employer. An open-ended question has no definite answer. An example might be, "Can you please describe a situation when you took a risk in your profession and what the outcome was?" It's not easy to prepare for open-ended questions, but you can know about the subjects of open-ended questions most important to interviewers. Most open-ended questions seek to measure:

- willingness to take risks;
- ability to persuade;
- team skills;
- ability to learn from mistakes, respect for budgets and deadlines,
- communication skills,
- ability to identify and acknowledge strengths and weaknesses,
- conflict resolution skills,
- creativity and innovation,
- handling stress,
- ability to define goals,
- ability to confront obstacles and overcome challenges,
- work ethic,
- and ability to balance work and life.

