Career: Labor You Love



"You can consciously begin now to choose the career you want."

There's an old saying that goes, "Since you're going to be working for the rest of your life, you might as well do something you really enjoy." Ideally, you'd like to find work you love to do and that pays you enough to live comfortably. Sadly, many working adults find themselves doing work that is not challenging and doesn't pay well.

The good news is, with the right career choices, you don't have to follow that unhappy pattern. You can consciously begin now to choose the career you want. You have the advantage of time and the opportunity to choose. After high school you might go directly into a job, enter a training program, or go to college. Your future is just beginning to unfold, and the choices about work are yours to make.

Some of the questions you will be able to answer by the end of this unit are:

- How does the career you choose affect your income?
- What employee characteristics are important to an employer?
- How do education and training affect your salary?
- What is an entrepreneur?
- What are employee benefits?

Overview: Work and Money

One of your single greatest assets is the earning power from your chosen career and/or your talents and skills. Many people think a house is the most valuable thing they'll ever own, but a lifetime of earnings is usually worth much more than a house.

How much you earn in a lifetime can be affected by your choices about education, training, where you live, and for whom you work. We'll look at all of these factors in this unit, and then give you some ideas about how to make the most of your working life.

Your Career

What is the difference between a job and a career? It usually comes down to attitude. A **job** is relatively short-term work that "pays the bills." A **career** is usually a long-term chosen profession or occupation that provides an income. Often there is a planned sequence of jobs as you build a career.

Think of it this way: in high school your "career" is being a student. In just four years of school, you take a lot of different classes (jobs). Some of these classes you love, some you endure. But ultimately you achieve your career goal as a student and graduate.



Can You Believe?

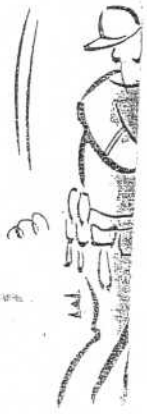
With a partner, fill in the following:

_____% of teenagers worked full time last summer (35 hours or more per week), while _____% worked part-time (20–35 hours).

Teenagers most typically have jobs that involve manual labor (_____%) or food service (_____%).

On average, teenagers with jobs work about _____ hours per week and earn $5.70 per hour (more than the minimum wage of $5.15).

The average American changes jobs _____ times and careers _____ times during a working lifetime.



Now think about the work you do as a teenager. You might be working at a fast-food restaurant to earn some spending money. But your long-term career goal might be to become a doctor. Your fast-food job is helping you on the way to achieving your career goal of becoming a doctor.

Does that mean you should just "endure" the fast-food job and do as little as possible to get by? Not at all. Any job can help you gain skills, even though it's not going to be your career. In fact, you'll discover that the lessons and habits you form now working at seemingly "unimportant" jobs will translate directly into success (or failure) in your future career.

The secret to being happy and successful in most jobs is very often your attitude. A good attitude leads to job satisfaction, which means you enjoy the work you do. Employers pick up on good attitudes and often reward their employees accordingly with better pay, better benefits, more challenging work, etc. So, what do employers look for in an employee?

What Employers Want

The United States Government conducted a study to identify the basic skills and abilities that teenagers and young adults would need to obtain "high-skill, high-wage employment" in a high-performance economy. Take a look at Figure 2.1 to see what these skills and abilities are.



Figure 2.1: Key Employee Skills

Skill/Ability	Description
Basic skills	Reads, writes, performs basic math computations, listens well, and speaks clearly
Thinking skills	Creates new ideas, makes decisions, solves problems, organizes information, learns efficiently, and can reason things out
Personal skills	Goal driven, positive self-image, sociable, realistic self-assessment, and demonstrates honesty
Resource management	Makes good use of time, money, materials and employee resources
Interpersonal	Team player, able to teach and lead other employees with diverse backgrounds, meets customer expectations, and negotiates well
Information management	Acquires and organizes information, and has solid computer skills
Systems	Works well in a system (organizational and technological), can monitor and correct performance, and suggests improvements to the system
Technology	Selects, sets up and operates tools and equipment (including computers), and maintains and troubleshoots equipment

Did you notice that one of the personal skills in Figure 2.1 is the ability to assess yourself accurately? Take some time now to review how well you stack up in each category. Think in terms of a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. In which areas are you strong? Weak? How can you improve your weak areas?

Using Assignment 2.1 as a model, on a separate piece of paper list the skills you feel are your strongest. Next, list the weakest. Then write down some specific things you can do to make more use of your strongest skill. How about a plan to improve your weakest skill?

Assignment 2.1:

My Skill Assessment

My strongest skill is:

I can put this skill to even better use today by:

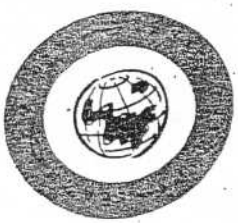
My weakest skill is:

I can improve this skill today by:

Fundamental Workplace Skills Assessment

Take some time to make an honest evaluation of your current workplace skills. For each skill/ability listed. Place a checkmark in the box that describes your current feelings about that skill/ability.

Skill/Ability	Not yet	Novice	Advanced	Expert
Basic Skills				
Reading				
Writing				
Mathematics				
Listening				
Speaking				
Thinking Skills				
Creative Thinking				
Decision Making				
Problem Solving				
Seeing Things in the Mind's Eye				
Knowing How to Learn				
Reasoning				
Personal Qualities				
Responsibility				
Self-Esteem				
Sociability				
Self-Management				
Integrity/Honesty				



Workplace Competencies Assessment

Take some time to make an honest evaluation of your current workplace skills. For each competency listed, place a checkmark in the box that describes your current feelings about that competency.

Skill/Ability	Not yet	Novice	Advanced	Expert
Resources: Identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources				
Time				
Money				
Material and Facilities				
Human Resources				
Interpersonal: Works with others				
Participates as a Member of a Team				
Teaches Others New Skills				
Serves Clients/Customers				
Exercises Leadership				
Negotiates				
Works with Diversity				
Information: Acquires and uses information				
Acquires and Evaluates Information				
Organizes and Maintains Information				
Interprets and Communicates Information				
Uses Computers to Process Information				
Systems: Understands complex inter-relationships				
Understands Systems				
Monitors and Corrects Performance				
Improves or Designs Systems				
Technology: Works with a variety of technologies				
Selects Technology				
Applies Technology to Task				
Maintains and Troubleshoots Equipment				