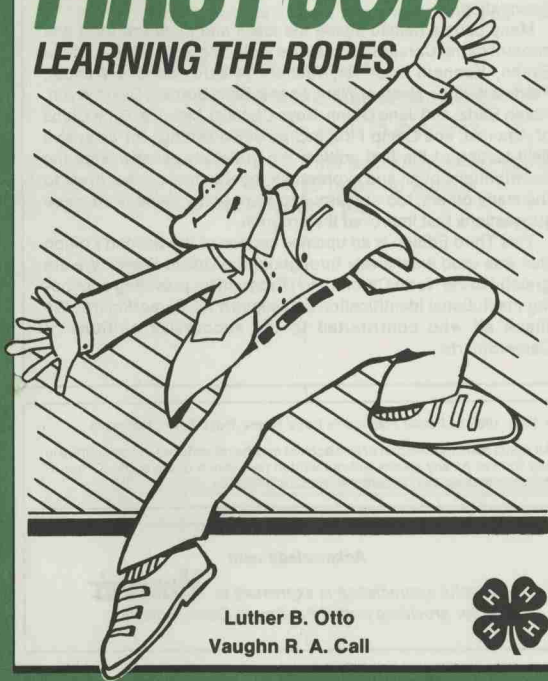


Career Smarts

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YOUR FIRST JOB

LEARNING THE ROPES



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CareerSmarts

Preface and Acknowledgments (Third Edition)

CareerSmarts is a collaborative effort between the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work and the Department of 4-H and Youth Development, of the Agricultural Extension Service at North Carolina State University. The authors developed earlier editions of *CareerSmarts* while at Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, Boys Town, Nebraska, with support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

Many people helped shape the ideas and mold the form and content of the *CareerSmarts* series including Peter Ellis, Cynthia Evahn, Kenneth Spenner, Richard Millard, Sandra Wendel, Patricia Wallace, Heather Ware, Fannie Belle Burnett, David Wynn, Karen Bartz, and Jane Quinn. Boys Clubs of America, Girls Clubs of America, and Camp Fire, Inc. provided settings for extensive field testing of the first edition. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all and express our indebtedness collectively to the many others, too numerous to mention by name, who made suggestions that improved the program.

This Third Edition is an updated version of the Second Edition that was used extensively throughout the United States. We are grateful to the North Carolina 4-H Program for providing continuing institutional identification and support for *CareerSmarts*. We thank all who contributed to the successive editions of *CareerSmarts*.

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Acknowledgment

Grateful appreciation is expressed to

Hardee's

for providing partial funding to *CareerSmarts*.

YOUR FIRST JOB: LEARNING THE ROPES

“You’re hired!”

It’s your first job—money, car, new clothes, and fun times are just around the corner. Right?

But for some the good life lasts only a short time before they say, “I quit” or the boss says, “You’re fired!” The good life turns into a bad dream.

More people get fired because they have poor work habits than because they can’t do the work. This booklet explains how to keep a new job.

WHAT IS A JOB?

A job is an agreement between you and an employer. You agree to do certain things, and the employer agrees to pay you money to do those things. Your biggest responsibility is to do what you were hired to do—in the way and at the time the employer wants it done.

Employers expect workers to take responsibility for the work they do—to show interest in what they do—to do their best—and to ask questions if they don’t understand what they’re supposed to do.

Workers and employers need each other:

- Workers need employers if they want to earn money.
- Employers need workers to make products or provide services that other people buy.



GETTING A GOOD START

It takes time to “learn the ropes,” but you can speed it up by learning what employers expect from you.

Your first few months on the job may be a probationary period. During that time your employer watches your work habits and how well you work. Employers do not want people who just get by—goof off—aren't interested in their job—try to wiggle out of work—get angry when they're given work to do—can't get along with other people—or try to pass the buck for their mistakes.

Usually your employer evaluates your work at the end of the probationary period and decides if you get to keep the job.

Let's go over ten things employers expect of you and figure out what you can do to become a good employee.

The “To Do” List—or What Good Employees Do

- 1. Get to work on time and be there regularly.*
- 2. Follow company rules.*
- 3. Do what the boss says.*
- 4. Try to do a good job all the time.*
- 5. Keep busy.*
- 6. Listen more, talk less.*
- 7. Don't mix drugs, alcohol, and work.*
- 8. Be honest.*
- 9. Be friendly.*
- 10. Be neat.*

1. GET TO WORK ON TIME AND BE THERE REGULARLY

Showing up late for work sends a message to your boss. The message is that you think other things are more important than your job.

If you are going to be late:

- ☑ telephone your boss
- ☑ explain the situation
- ☑ get to work as soon as you can

The boss will usually allow a good excuse for being late—once in a while. But regular “emergencies” make the boss wonder. Workers who don’t show up because they don’t feel like working—or had a hard time getting out of bed—have poor reasons for not showing up.

Be dependable. That means going to work every day—and showing up on time! It also means coming back on time from lunch and coffee breaks. If your 30-minute lunch break starts at noon, leave at noon and be back at 12:30. That’s being dependable.



2. FOLLOW COMPANY RULES

Many companies give a handbook of company rules to new workers. The handbook explains the way to do things in the company. It pays to follow the rules. If you break the rules or ask for changes in the rules, others may see you as a troublemaker—and who wants to work with a troublemaker?

Two important rules are **work schedules** and **work quotas**.

A **work schedule** tells you when to work. Follow it closely. Your boss doesn't care whether your friends planned a party. You have to be at work when you are scheduled. Or, if work rules permit, find someone who can change work hours with you.

A **work quota** is how much work your employer expects you to do over a certain amount of time. In some jobs if you don't keep up, you slow down other workers. You may have to work quickly.

There are also some unwritten rules that workers follow. If other workers wear shirts and dress trousers, don't wear a grubby T-shirt and sweat pants. Follow the unwritten rules.

What are "unwritten rules"?

Name some "unwritten rules" in school.

What are some "unwritten rules" where you live?

3. DO WHAT THE BOSS SAYS

Someone supervises your work—a foreman, manager, or supervisor. This person is important to you because he or she tells you how to do your job and reports back to the company about how well you do. That person is your boss.

When the boss gives you work and tells you to do it a certain way, do it that way. When you do, you will be thought of as a good worker—one who follows directions. If you do not understand what to do, ask your boss.

4. TRY TO DO A GOOD JOB ALL THE TIME

Remember, a job is an agreement between you and your employer. You agreed to do certain things in return for wages.

Do your job well if you want to keep it. Take an interest in your work and show it by doing the best you can. If you do a job right the first time, it is done. If you don't do it right, you make more work for yourself—because you'll have to do it over again. Who likes to be “chewed out” by the boss?

Another way to do your job well is to be consistent. Being consistent means doing your job well every day. Workers who slack off for a while and then hurry up to get their work done risk getting fired. They don't keep up their end of the employment agreement.

Workers who aren't consistent cause another problem: when they don't finish their work, other workers have to do more to get the job done. Is that fair?

Take pride in doing your job well.

Do it well.
Do it right.
Do it on time.



5. KEEP BUSY

During work hours, your employer expects you to work. Most employers will not keep workers who waste time—spend a lot of time talking to other workers—read newspapers or magazines—use a lot of time going to the bathroom—or find other ways to goof off.

If you finish your work early, help another worker or begin a new task—a sure way to success!

6. LISTEN MORE, TALK LESS

You can learn a lot by listening to others.

Accept helpful suggestions. Employers do not expect that new workers will do everything right the first time, but employers do expect workers to catch on fast and to learn from their mistakes. When the boss shows you what you did wrong and how to do it right, listen—and do it the way your boss shows you.

Other workers may also make suggestions about how to do a job. Instead of telling them to “butt out,” listen to them. You can learn from other workers, too.

Employers do not like people who gossip about other workers, treat other workers or customers rudely, or let their feelings about others interfere with their work. Keep personal matters to yourself—out of the work place.

7. DON'T MIX DRUGS, ALCOHOL, AND WORK

Using drugs and alcohol on the job is not smart. What you do off the job is up to you, but your boss has something to say about what you do on the job; and every boss will say **NO DRUGS OR ALCOHOL ON THE JOB! NONE!**

Drugs and alcohol have different effects, but these are common:

- getting hotheaded and bad tempered
- misjudging distances or running into things
- not being able to put parts together quickly or correctly
- being spaced out
- losing your ability to think clearly—add, subtract, or figure out problems
- forgetting things

Any of these may get you fired. If you feel you need drugs or alcohol to work, then get some help. Talk to a drug and alcohol center counselor. Look in the telephone directory under “drug abuse and treatment” for a place to go.



8. BE HONEST

How would you like it if your boss took \$50 out of your paycheck? Upset? Would you complain?

If you take things from work or cheat on your time, that is stealing from the company. It isn't fair. You would not want your boss to do that to you.

Companies have ways of checking up:

- Inventory checks show items missing.
- Bookkeeping shows money missing.
- Other workers who like their jobs tell the boss someone is cheating.

When people get caught, they get fired on the spot—and sometimes the law is called in. And if another employer asks about a worker who got fired, the boss will tell the truth—that the person was fired for stealing. That makes it tough to get another job.

Follow the rules and be honest. Both will make you a good worker.

9. BE FRIENDLY

Who wants to work around an old grouch?—a young grouch?—or a person who is mean and unfriendly?

It's helpful for you to:

- Be cheerful.
- Learn other workers' names.
- Be courteous and cooperative with others.
- Say "hi" when you meet people.

Being friendly shows that you think highly of yourself as well as others. Most other workers will be friendly in return.

10. BE NEAT

Come to work neat and clean. The way you dress says a lot about you.

- Bathe regularly.
- Use a deodorant.
- Comb your hair.
- Brush your teeth.
- Change your clothes daily.

If you don't know what to wear, look at successful workers around you. Follow their lead. If in doubt, ask your employer.

Remember, you have to do what your employer expects if you want to be successful.



PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH

How you treat people makes a difference in how they treat you.

THE BOSS

Everybody has an idea about what a boss is like.

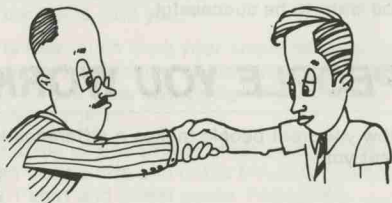
- Some think a boss is mean—a fire-eating dragon, always after you.
- Others think of the boss as a good friend—thoughtful and helpful, someone you can like.

Actually, your boss may be a little of both. When you start the job, the boss will explain what to do, how to do it, when, and where to do it. And the boss will check your work—and tell you when you make mistakes. That's because the boss is responsible for the work you do.

Keeping your job or getting a promotion depends on the work you do and how you get along with your boss. Follow the "To Do" list and your boss's suggestions will be less frequent. The boss will know you can be counted on.

Develop a good working relationship with the boss by:

- showing you are responsible to him or her
- not being late or absent without a good reason
- letting the boss know if you will be late or absent
- expecting to help out with jobs other than those you were hired to do
- going directly to the boss if you have a complaint
- giving the boss plenty of notice if you plan to quit—usually two weeks
- quitting only for a good reason



BOSS TALK

The boss will sometimes ask questions or ask you to do something instead of telling you to do it.

“May I make a suggestion?”

“You may want to think about ...”

“Have you tried doing it like this?”

Bosses usually don't like to be bossy.

You are lucky if your boss takes the time to make comments and suggest ways you can improve your work. Without help and suggestions you can mess up—even get fired. So, take what the boss says seriously.

Give the boss a chance to make suggestions. Ask:

“How should I do this?”

“Will you explain this to me?”

“Is this the way you want me to do it?”

“Is there a better way to do this?”

If the boss is busy, ask another worker for help—one with experience. Other workers usually help younger workers who ask for help.

The answers you get may not be the way you want to do the job, but try doing it their way.

Finally, don't forget: your boss is human, too—just like you. Bosses:

- make mistakes
- have bad days
- get busy with other things
- have problems of their own
- may have some weird habits
- have feelings of their own
- feel satisfied when a job is done well
- take pride in their workers

Treat the boss like you want to be treated and you will have a friend to help you—not a dragon!

THE WORK GROUP

Other workers are also important to you and your work. You will work closely with them. Here's how to get along with them:

- Don't gripe.
- Do your share of work.
- Cooperate with other workers and ask for help when you need it.
- Be friendly.
- Be willing to become part of the work group.

More people lose their jobs because they can't get along with others than because they can't do the work.

If you have a problem with another worker, go talk with that person alone and try to work it out.

Other workers are your teammates. Play fair and you all will be winners!



EMPLOYEE WORK EVALUATION

_____ TO _____, 19 _____

Name _____ Length of Service _____

PERFORMANCE RATING

JOB KNOWLEDGE

Knows how to do the work. Learns new procedures quickly. _____

QUALITY OF WORK

Does work accurately and neatly. Recognizes problems, catches errors. Finishes work on time. _____

QUANTITY OF WORK

Does his/her share of the work. Amount of work turned out. Work pace. _____

SERVICE TO OTHERS

Is courteous, sincere, and friendly. Interested in customers' needs. Leaves customers satisfied and with a good impression. _____

WORK RELATIONS

Works well with others. Gets along with others. Accepts suggestions. _____

RESPONSE TO WORK DEMANDS

Willing to switch assignments, to take more responsibility, or to do more difficult or less desirable jobs. Keeps busy. Helps other workers. _____

ADHERENCE TO COMPANY POLICY

Follows company rules regarding lunches, breaks, personal phone calls, attendance, tardiness, work hours, and safety. _____

APPEARANCE

Well-groomed, dresses and behaves properly. _____

JOB INTEREST/ATTITUDE

Shows interest in job. Seems to enjoy work. _____

PERFORMANCE RATING SCALE

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unsatisfactory	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Outstanding	Distinguished

Supervisor's Signature: _____ Date: _____

EVALUATION

An evaluation is the boss's written report to the company about how well you are doing. Making evaluations is one of the boss's jobs. That's why some people are afraid of the boss. They are afraid of being evaluated. Most companies use a form to evaluate your work.

The boss will usually discuss your job evaluation with you. It's a good way for you to learn where and how you can improve.

Suppose you were your own boss right now and you were evaluating yourself.

- How would you rate yourself?
- Where would your performance be strong?
- What areas would you need to improve?

Remember, follow the "To Do" list and know what you'll be evaluated on. These are keys to being a good employee—and a successful first job.

BE CAREERSMART!



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THE NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

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