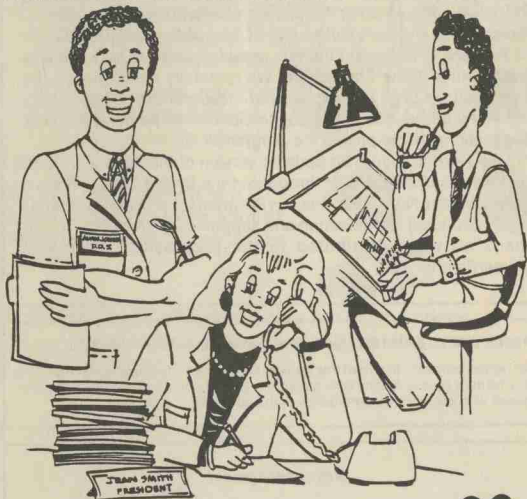


# Career Smarts

## WORKING ADULTS

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WHY THEY DO WHAT THEY DO



Luther B. Otto  
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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.

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### Acknowledgment

Grateful appreciation is expressed to

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## **WORKING ADULTS: WHY THEY DO WHAT THEY DO**

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**Do you feel you don't understand the adults around you?—or that they don't understand you?**

**Are they:**

- out of it?
- too worried about you?
- bossy?
- always after you about something?
- too much into work?

**Do they:**

- make your life miserable?
- always say "later"?
- care only when you're in trouble?
- worry too much about sex and drugs?
- get after you?

## **WHY ADULTS DO WHAT THEY DO**

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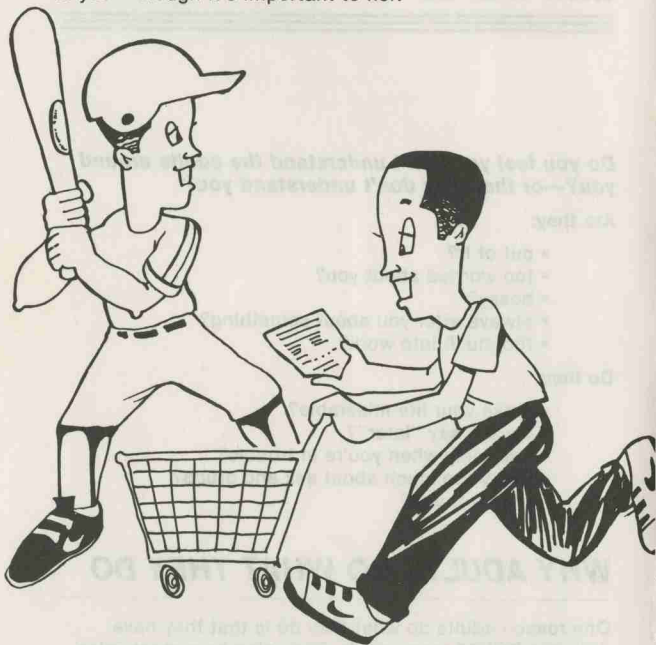
One reason adults do what they do is that they have different **ROLES** than you do. They also have more roles.

Roles are like parts played by actors in a play or TV show—examples: teacher, friendly neighbor, boss, girlfriend, or boyfriend.

**Roles:**

- tell you what to say
- show you how to look
- tell you how to act

Roles may be important or not important to you. Being pitcher on a baseball team may be important to you, but being errand runner for your mom may seem unimportant to you—though it's important to her.



Things that are important to people are called **VALUES**. Values often come from the roles people have. Here are some examples of values:

- Athletes value speed and strength and quickness.
- Music fans value hit records.
- Teachers value good grades.
- Business people value profits.



# ADULT ROLES

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Being a worker is a role. Workers are expected to do certain things:

- get to work on time
- call in if they are sick
- put in an honest day's work
- get the work done

In return, workers get a paycheck and maybe a good career. Failure in the role of worker might mean no pay raise—or even being fired from the job.

Just being an adult is a role, too.

## Adults:

- support themselves with their own money
- make their own decisions
- have certain rights such as voting—and they are expected to vote
- have responsibilities and values that come from being in the role of an adult

To have a role means that other people expect you to do certain things. The things you have to do are called **RESPONSIBILITIES**.

## Examples:

- Providing food, clothing, shelter, and love are responsibilities that go with the role of being a parent.
- Working 40 hours a week and doing the job right are responsibilities that go with the role of worker.
- Finishing tasks and doing them on time are other responsibilities that go with the role of worker.

Roles are the “parts” people play in life. As people grow older, they have more roles. You will too. You will choose some—like swimmer. Some, society gives you—like student or citizen. Some you earn—like licensed automobile operator. Some you like—like cheerleader. Some you probably don’t like—like kid sister.

Sometimes you can control what happens in your roles. For example, as a car driver you can control whether or not you get speeding tickets.

Other times there just isn’t very much you can do about a role you don’t like. For example, if you bus tables in a restaurant, part of the role is cleaning up what other people spill. There isn’t much you can do about it.



## **ROLE CONFLICT**

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Sometimes one of your roles gets in the way of another role you have—and that’s role conflict.

### **For example:**

- your boss wants you to work on Saturday, but your friends want you to go out with them.
- your mom says you have to clean your room, but you want to go swimming with your friends.
- your teacher gives you a long homework assignment that is due the next day, but your boss wants you to work late that night
- your friends want to have a party, but you have choir practice that night.

Learning how to deal with role conflicts is part of what becoming an adult is all about.

Each of your roles gives you a point of view—a way of looking at things.

- A music fan looks at a rock concert as a way to hear a favorite group.
- A musician sees a concert as a chance to play music.
- A worker sees a concert as a chance to sell tickets and earn money.

They all look at the same rock concert—but they see different things.

How you see things depends a lot on the roles you have—and adults have different roles than young people. That's why people don't all have the same point of view.

You have to live with people who have different points of view, even if you don't fully understand other viewpoints. A different point of view is not necessarily wrong. It may mean that another person is looking at something a little differently—from another point of view.

**List three roles you have:**

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**Put a plus (+) in front of the roles you like and a minus (-) in front of the ones you dislike. Put a check mark (✓) after each role that gives you a lot of role conflict.**

Which of your roles conflict?

What is the conflict?

Is the conflict with roles that you like or roles you dislike?

How do you decide what to do?



# RELATIONSHIPS

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*RELATIONSHIPS* occur when two people talk to each other, or do things together, or do things for each other.

Like roles, some relationships we choose and some we don't.

- We like some relationships and some we dislike.
- Some relationships are good and some are not so good.

Some relationships involve liking the other person. In some it doesn't matter. And in still other relationships, you may not like the other person at all.

## **Example:**

You do not have to like your boss at work, but you do have to get along with the boss.

Relationships involve roles—like boss and worker. In a relationship, you expect the other person to do and say certain things.

## **Example:**

You meet your boss and she says, "Well, let's get to work. This is what I want you to do." The boss expects you to say and do certain things—like "OK"—and you go to work—because she's the boss.

Your relationships with working adults are no different. You expect certain things from them and they expect certain things from you.

**Name three relationships you have with adults.**



Think about your relationship in each example.

- What are some things you expect the adult to do?
- What are some things the adult expects you to do?



## TWO KINDS OF CLOCKS

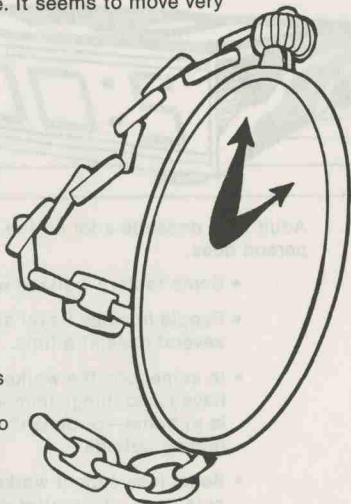
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One way to think of the different roles and responsibilities people have is to think about two different clocks—adult clocks and youth clocks.

### ADULT CLOCK

This clock tells adult time. It seems to move very S-L-O-W-L-Y! Why?

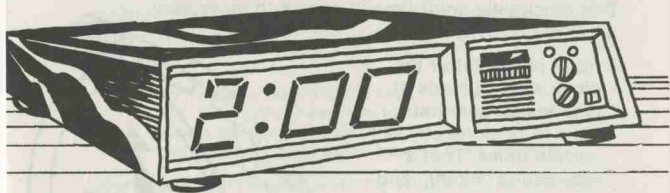
- Adult roles clutter the clock with all kinds of responsibilities that have to be done at certain times. That's why adults "worry" and "have things on their minds."
- Many adult responsibilities take a long time to finish, and some are never finished—like working at a job.
- Adult roles make adults value some things that may not be important to you—like relaxing, or peace and quiet, or going to bed early.



## YOUTH CLOCK

This clock tells youth time. It moves *FASTER!* Why?

- Your roles usually involve things that you can do in less time—like running an errand, doing the dishes, or getting your homework done before you watch TV.
- Your roles often permit you to do things on the “spur-of-the-moment”—because following your whims doesn’t create a lot of role conflict—yet!
- Your roles do not expect you to be as responsible to other people (boss, owner, manager) or for other people (husband, wife, grandparent, little children, other workers) as adults are—yet!



Adult time depends a lot on the kind of work the person does.

- Some factory workers work night shifts.
- People in sales travel away from home for several days at a time.
- In some jobs the worker is “on-call” and may have to do things immediately—even if he or she is at home—or doesn’t want to do it because it’s raining outside.
- Some jobs expect workers to work until the work gets done—no matter what time it gets to be.

When you think about it, there are good reasons why adult clocks and youth clocks run at different speeds.

**Think of an adult you know. Name three responsibilities he or she has nearly every day.**

**Name three responsibilities you have nearly every day.**

**Whose responsibilities affect more people—the adult's or yours?**

**Whose take the most time?**

**Who has the biggest chance of role conflict—you or the adult?**



## **WORKING WITH ADULTS**

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Think about adults who are important to you and feel you are important to them—parents, grandparents, teachers, youth workers, preachers, priests, Sunday school teachers, scout leaders—there are lots of them.

All of these adults and their roles have two things in common?

- Their relationship with YOU.
- Their responsibility for YOU.

**YOU** are important to them. In fact, you might say that “raising you” is one of their roles.

**But things are different in the work place.** It's not that you are no longer important, but to most adults at work, *THE JOB IS #1.*

Adults at work are different—especially the boss.

- Adults may like you, but if the JOB doesn't get done, then . . .
- Adults may want to help you, but if you mess up on the JOB and the company loses money, then . . .
- Adults may enjoy having you around, but if you keep other workers from doing their JOBS, then . . .

Get the point?

Adults in the work place may really care about you—but **YOU ARE NOT THEIR JOB.** The most important thing for adults in the work place is getting their JOB done! That's why they have a job and that's what they get paid for. If you help, do your share, and learn—that's great! But if you get in the way, slow down the work, then there are problems—for you!

## GETTING ALONG

So how do you understand adults in the work place?

*Understand the roles adults have.*

How do you understand adult roles?

*Empathy.*

Empathy means that you take the role of other people—put yourself in their shoes and think about things the way they do.

If you were in their role:

- What would you say?
- What would you do?
- How would you feel?



Empathy—taking the role of the other person—is important because it helps you realize

- why they **THINK** as they do
- why they **SPEAK** as they do
- why they **ACT** as they do
- why they **ARE** the way they are



# THINGS THAT HELP AND THINGS THAT DON'T HELP

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Many things make for good relationships with working adults, but think about these five.

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## DO

## DON'T

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**1. EMPATHY.** Put yourself in the other person's place. The most important thing for adults is getting their job done.

1. Don't ignore others and what their roles are like.

**2. PATIENCE.** Remember the clocks. Other people's clocks may run at a different speed.

2. Don't insist on your time clock all of the time.

**3. RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCE.** Differences among people occur because of their different roles. Their values and roles are as important to them as yours are to you.

3. Don't make fun of people because they are different. You may not understand what is going on.

**4. COURTESY.** "Please," "thank you," "sorry," and helping without being asked can make things a lot easier for other people—and for you!

4. Don't be rude. Other people have their problems too.

**5. GIVE AND TAKE.** Most roles and relationships require that you work things out—that you give and take. If you want help, then give help. If you want to be liked, then like others.

5. Don't ask for help yourself but refuse to give it to others.

# THE GREAT BALANCING ACT

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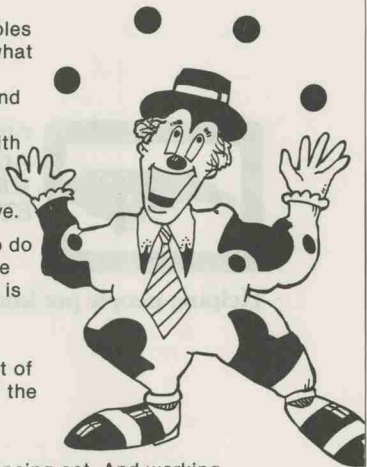
No matter who you are, or how old you are, or what you do, life involves other people and more than one role. And the older you get, the more roles and responsibilities you have.

One of life's challenges is to balance the demands roles make.

- You balance what your roles say you should do with what you think you should do.
- You balance your roles and the roles others have.
- You balance your time with the time others have.
- You balance your needs with the needs others have.

When your roles ask you to do things that conflict, balance things by trying to do what is most reasonable.

In a way, each person is a juggler who must keep a lot of things juggling in the air at the same time.



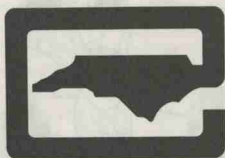
Life is like that—a big balancing act. And working adults have many roles to balance. Balancing roles is a big part of being an adult.

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**BE CAREERSMART!**



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