



Work Adjustment

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Returning from a war zone can mean major life changes that affect your career.

Deployment had clear-cut goals. But expectations at work back home may be different. For some service members, the seemingly lower stakes can lead to boredom. Others may find the demands of *determining* a personal career path stressful.

1.1.1 Difficulties With Transition

Common difficulties in transitioning back into the workplace include:

1. Discomfort with the *lack of clear structure and goals*.
2. Boredom from a sense the job is *pointless* or boring compared to combat.
3. Problems replacing *automatic survival responses* that worked in a war zone with more appropriate responses for a work setting.

1.1.2 Missing Clear Rules And Goals

Deployments involve clear rules and goals. Missions are laid out and orders are obeyed. Typically, service members think about getting the job done, protecting others, and staying alive. Roles, ranks, and responsibilities are “second nature.” Back home, goals and responsibilities may seem less critical, creating uncertainty, rules and ranks may also be more flexible, causing more confusion.



1.1.3 Boredom In The Work Environment

Returning service members sometimes report that even clear work goals seem pointless compared to their life-or-death deployment missions. After facing hazardous situations day after day, even dangerous careers can feel meaningless and dull. Service members who endured difficult deployments may feel anxious, irritable, or “on edge.” These feelings can lead to a negative outlook toward the workplace and co-workers.

1.1.4 Over-Learned Survival Strategies

Besides changes in the workplace and its mission, *you may have also changed*. During deployments, survival sometimes depends on thinking, feeling, and acting *automatically*. Automatic responses can be vital in the war zone where change and conflict are non-stop, and where service members may need lightning-quick reflexes for protection. But those automatic responses may be counterproductive back in the workplace. Also known as **over-learning**, this involves reactions learned during a deployment that form **habits**. And habits learned in high-stakes situations can be hard to unlearn.

1.1.5 The Importance of Work

Emotions, thoughts, and behaviors can negatively affect work performance. At the same time, work can have positive or negative effects on a person's mood and life. The workplace can also greatly impact the kind of success a returning service member experiences.

Successful Workplace Reintegration	Difficult Workplace Reintegration
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater self-esteem and sense of well-being.• A sense of purpose and contribution.• Improved mood through work achievements .• Income makes it easier to do enjoyable things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feelings of isolation and failure.• Increased stress, frustration, and worry.• Difficulties with memory and focus.• Problems in relationships with job peers or supervisors.

1.2 COMMON WORKPLACE PROBLEMS AFTER DEPLOYMENT

If you are uncomfortable with less structure, returning service members may feel its effects back in the workplace. In this section, you will learn about eight common problems affecting service members in the workplace.

1. Difficulty sleeping or waking
2. Anger or short fuse
3. Memory or concentration problems
4. Low self-esteem
5. Physical tension or being on "high-alert"
6. Problems with other people (responding to authority; isolating, trust issues)
7. Perfectionism
8. Problems with drugs or alcohol

1.2.1 Sleep-related Difficulties

After deployment, it's common to have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up. Your mind and body may still feel "on guard," as if you were still in a war zone. While sleeping lightly is a learned survival skill during deployment, this skill can make it hard to get a good night's rest back home.

How does this affect job performance?

Workers who aren't well rested produce less work, have difficulty focusing, and feel more stress at work.

Examples of work-related complaints associated with difficulty sleeping:

- "I'm too tired to work"
- "I can't concentrate."
- "I didn't show up for work." Or, "I couldn't finish my work."

Watch out for lack of sleep and its effects on your **job performance**.

1.2.2 Anger/Short Fuse

Anger and irritability are common among service members after deployment. In combat, anger serves to “fire up” the mind and the body to better handle danger. When people have a “fight-or-flight” response to stress or danger, the brain often interprets that surge of energy as anger. So anger can also be an over-learned survival response.

How does this affect job performance?

Angry outbursts toward supervisors or coworkers can lead to disciplinary action and, in the civilian sector, may mean job loss. Physical aggression in the workplace can result in job loss, legal action, and problems getting hired at other jobs. Prolonged anger and aggression can also lead to a loss of self-respect.

Example of complaints associated with anger problems at work:

- “My anger caused conflicts with my peers and/or bosses (COs).”
- “I feel horrible that I hurt my co-worker’s feelings.”
- “My anger resulted in disciplinary actions.”



1.2.3 Memory And Concentration Problems

Memory and concentration problems are also common after deployment. Stress and painful memories can be distracting. Some service members’ minds work “overtime” to process memories and events from their deployment. This extra mental activity can make it hard to focus on work.

How does this affect job performance?

You may forget to complete tasks or assignments. Memory and concentration problems can lead to poor work performance and lousy job evaluations. Mental focus is vital to get work done and maintain safety standards.

Examples of complaints about memory and concentration problems at work:

- “I’m having problems remembering assignments and deadlines.”
- “It’s hard for me to manage my time.”
- “I get criticized by my superiors and co-workers for dropping the ball.”

1.2.4 Low Self-Esteem

Some service members return home feeling depressed or guilty about things that happened during deployment. Self-esteem is connected to the way a person thinks. People who judge themselves negatively often suffer from low self-esteem.

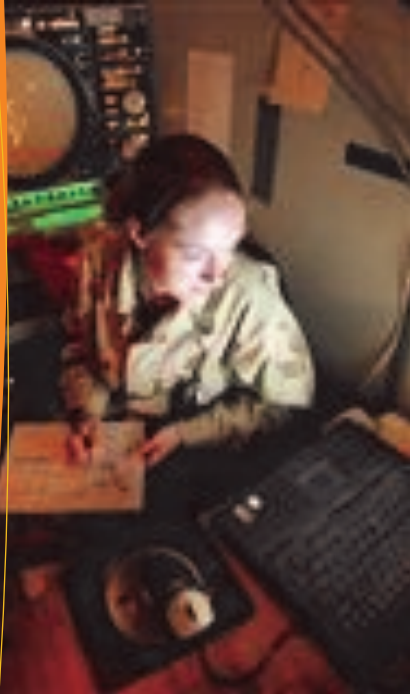
1.2.4 Low Self-Esteem (cont.)

How does this affect job performance?

People with low self-esteem tend to work slower. They have trouble concentrating and completing tasks. They may want to quit before allowing enough time on the job to find solutions.

Examples of complaints about low self-esteem at work:

- “I don’t try as hard because I don’t think I can succeed.”
- “I don’t show up for work.”
- “When I show up for work, I can’t seem to get my work done.”



1.2.5 Physical Tension or Being on “High-Alert”

You must function on mental and physical “high alert” during deployment. High alert in the war zone helped you pay attention and prepare for anything. But back home, you don’t need to be on high alert in everyday circumstances. Unfortunately, retraining yourself to come off of high alert can take time.

How does this affect job performance?

Many worksites are busy places with many people coming, going, and moving around. If you are uneasy in crowds, you may find being at work exhausting and stressful. Constantly feeling on high alert may also result in being easily startled. Busy workplace sounds may trigger embarrassing reactions like “hitting the dirt”.

Examples of complaints related to tension and being on “high alert” at work:

- “I’m distracted at work because I’m always looking for danger.”
- “I jump whenever I hear an unexpected noise.”
- “I’m irritable and tired.”

1.2.6 Problems Responding To Authority; Isolating; Trust Issues

Authority: Service members may feel they’ve been “burned” by their superiors during deployment. This feeling may influence their attitude toward command, or supervisors, in workplaces back home.

Isolation: Withdrawing socially and the desire to be alone can be reactions to stress.

Trust: Tough deployments can result in a loss of trust. You may find that you don’t trust people who have no deployment or military experience. Some service members admit they don’t really trust anyone.

1.2.6 Problems Responding To Authority; Isolating; Trust Issues (cont.)

How does this affect job performance?

- **Authority:** Bad attitudes toward superiors can result in workplace stress.
- **Isolation:** The tendency to isolate leads to a lack of workplace support and more difficulty in coping with workplace stress.
- **Trust:** Trust problems make accomplishing tasks through teamwork more difficult.

Examples of complaints associated with social interactions at work:

- “I feel different from others who haven’t been in the military.”
- “I’m not sure if I should talk about my struggles.”
- “My discomfort makes other people treat me differently.”
- “I was passed up for promotion or was demoted to a less interesting job.”

PERFECTION IS ESSENTIAL IN “LIFE OR DEATH” SITUATIONS BUT IN A CIVILIAN JOB, ABSOLUTE PERFECTION MAY BE LESS IMPORTANT THAN BEING ABLE TO COMPLETE TASKS QUICKLY AND ACCURATELY.

1.2.7 Perfectionism

Deployments and training exercises demand specific and rigorous work performance standards. In most civilian jobs, perfectionism may not be valued as highly as in your military experience.

How does this affect job performance?

You may react to on-the-job situations as if they are “life or death” situations. In reality, acting and feeling as if you’re in serious danger can create enormous stress.

Co-workers or supervisors may not share the same sense of urgency about daily tasks. Some returning service members find that they have problems completing assignments on time because they spend too much time on unimportant details.

Examples of complaints associated with perfectionism at work:

- “People don’t want to work with me because I overreact and create stress.”
- “I’m more stressed about my job than I should be.”
- “I work slowly, which affects my performance reviews and my product.”
- “Nothing I do is ever good enough.”

1.2.8 Problems With Drugs And Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol are not long-term solutions for adjusting to life back home. Even though substances can be a quick fix for stress-related problems, they usually create more problems than they solve.

How does this affect job performance?

Using drugs or alcohol away from work can affect your sleep, hygiene, concentration, and daily interaction with coworkers. Using substances to deal with mood problems can actually backfire and result in more mood swings and angry outbursts. Using during work may affect your problem-solving abilities, concentration, and moods. In the long term, it may lead to impulsive behavior, safety risks, and disciplinary action if the use is discovered.

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Complaints associated with drugs and alcohol:

- “My drinking made it hard for me to concentrate on work.”
- “I was always worried about getting in trouble or fired.”
- “Using drugs made me miss work and perform poorly.”
- “Taking extra prescription medication made me nervous and irritable.”

1.3 MANAGING DEPLOYMENT STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

In this section, you will learn ways to help you manage your stress level in the workplace. Part of managing workplace stress includes learning how to respond to criticism and handling conflict in the workplace. These skills will help you manage work relationships with your peers and supervisors. You will learn how to ask for help and how to talk about your deployment with co-workers.

1.3.1 Staying Physically Healthy

Like a car, your body is vulnerable to problems when not “maintained” properly. This can be a problem for service members after deployment because they are used to a higher level of physical activity. After returning from deployment, if you don’t “balance” or maintain your body, you may become vulnerable to negative feelings and relationship problems. Physical health problems can also affect your moods, concentration, sleep, relationships, and job performance.

If you’re having trouble maintaining your body:

- See a doctor when necessary.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- Don’t let physical illnesses or injuries go untreated.
- Don’t overeat or under-eat; instead, eat regularly throughout the day.
- Stay away from unhealthy foods (high fat, high sugar).
- Don’t use non-prescribed drugs.
- Don’t drink alcohol to excess.
- Get enough sleep at night.
- Stick to a sleep routine.
- Exercise daily.

Take timeout to relax or do enjoyable activities.



1.3.2 Managing Relationships At Work

Work relationships can be *formal*, such as those with a supervisor or commanding officer, or more *informal*, such as those with co-workers. Both types of relationships are key to successful re-entry to the workplace. Maintaining these work relationships makes your day go more smoothly, and increases the likelihood that interesting tasks and promotions come your way.



1.3.3 Informal Relationships With Co-workers and Peers

Being a good co-worker means approaching others at work in polite and friendly ways. Being known and liked builds a sense of teamwork, and increases your opportunities to get support when you need it.

1.3.4 Asking For Help And Talking About Deployment With Co-workers

Problems adjusting to life after deployment may affect your workplace relationships. You may be unsure if you should talk about your deployment's impact on your work performance. Many service members aren't aware that combat stress reactions are common, so they try to hide those reactions from others.

When considering if you should discuss your stress reactions with co-workers, look at the pros and cons.

Possible PROS of Discussing Deployment Stress with Colleagues	Possible CONS of Discussing Deployment Stress with Colleague
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They become more understanding.• They become more supportive.• They help with difficult tasks.• They have new respect for military service.• I don't feel lonely or different.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-workers may withdraw or act uncomfortable.• They might judge or stereotype.• They might think any problem is related to my deployment stress.• Some might gossip about me.

Work relationships CAN BE FORMAL OR INFORMAL.

You will need BOTH TYPES RELATIONSHIPS TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR WORK PLACE.



Tips for Approaching Co-workers for Support:

- Think of what to say and plan for the possible emotions that may result.
- Carefully choose *who* to talk to – open, friendly and understanding people.
- Check the person’s response and how that response feels.
- Share the best ways to manage problem situations. This helps relieve others from worrying about how to step in to manage the situation.
- Tell them the conversation will explain the effects of the workplace problems you’re having and how they can support you.
- Remember that people want to know about your deployment experiences. You may get some uncomfortable questions, but its best to assume that people mean well with their questions.
- Don’t assume confidentiality. What you say may be repeated. You should consider the potential risks if something you discuss privately is revealed to unintended parties.
- Keep in mind that a lot of people outside the military don’t know much about war, trauma, depression, deployment, or the military. Be patient when discussing your personal experiences.
- Be ready to handle questions and what to say:
 - About being a veteran or service member.
 - About war experiences.
 - About deployment stress, depression, substance abuse, or other problems.

Tips for Discussing Deployment at Work

Close friends who are co-workers or fellow service members may ask difficult questions about your deployment, such as:

- “What did you do over there?”
- “Did you kill anyone?”
- “Were you in firefights?”
- “Were you scared?”
- “Did you get screwed up because you were there?”

It helps to have answers ready for these kinds of questions.

- “No offense, but I don’t like to talk about my war experiences.”
- “I’m not comfortable answering those questions right now.”
- “Let’s talk about something else.”

It’s ok to give a brief answer and then change topics or ask the other person a question.

Remember:

- Discussing deployment experiences with a co-worker is *your* decision. You don’t have to reveal anything you don’t want to.
- You can say nothing, a little, or a lot. Or you can tell part of your experience, without sharing all of it.
- Strong anger or intimidation by either person in the conversation is not appropriate at work. Even if you’re provoked, you don’t have to behave in a way that gets you reprimanded or dismissed. Your best bet is to take your concerns about being provoked to your superiors.
- Choose your words carefully. Know your weak points. Identify the things that will upset you, and be ready to cope with them.

1.3.5 Formal Relationships With Supervisors or Commanding Officers (CO)

Relationships with supervisors or commanding officers are also important to job success and a successful return to the workplace. Your relationships with work authorities can affect promotions, the kind of work you do, and retention.

There are both **positive** and **negative** effects of formal relationships at work:

Positive Formal Relationships:	Negative Formal Relationships:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of contribution and worth. • Improved self-esteem. • Greater confidence. • Increased job satisfaction. • Less anxiety. • Better support from supervisors. • More information sharing. • Easier acceptance of errors. • Greater help in problem-solving. • More opportunities to network. • More trust. • More promotion possibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More pressure from supervisors. • More anxiety and stress. • Worse self-esteem. • Less support over errors. • Less information-sharing. • Limited trust. • No recognition for accomplishments. • Less chance of promotion.

1.3.6 Asking For Help From Employers Or Commanding Officers (CO)

Deployment stress, substance use, and depression add to the challenges of the workplace. Your ability to ease into the workplace back home rests in part on your willingness to communicate your struggles. Open communication will get you the support you need, especially if your recovery requires extra help at work.

But sharing personal details about your deployment with your boss or CO can be tough. Consider the pros and cons before you talk about your stress reactions with the boss or CO.

Possible Pros (My boss /CO may . . .)	Possible Cons (My boss /CO may . . .)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become more understanding and supportive. • Realize that my leaving a situation is not about avoiding work but a way to manage deployment reactions. • Better accept my irritability, withdrawal, or other symptoms. • Understand the recovery process. • Help me watch for triggers. • Find other ways to help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not support me. • Decide to end our work relationship. • Feel less inclined to promote me. • Judge or stereotype me. • Have trouble trusting my job performance.

For people working in the civilian sector: When you talk about your deployment-related issues, your civilian supervisors may not know how to respond, and they may appear uncomfortable. Most of the time, it's simply a lack of understanding of the military, war, and combat-related stress.

Tip: Don't own your boss's bad reaction. Their response is not a personal attack on you, and it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITY ACT

Civilians with PTSD or another physical or emotional disability can get protection under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) *only if* they disclose the disability. The ADA makes it unlawful to discriminate against qualified workers with disabilities. People with disabilities can't be denied work because of their disability if they can perform the essential duties of the job. Under ADA protection, you can ask your boss for "reasonable accommodation" to do your job adequately. Reasonable accommodation includes things like special work schedules that allow you to keep getting therapy.

- **Prepare what will be said ahead of time.**

DO

- **Focus.** What needs to be said? Focus on problems that affect the workplace, and the steps you will take to manage those problems.
- **Stay Positive.** Explain things in a positive way. This puts superiors at ease and reassures them. Explain to civilian bosses that war affects people in powerful and lasting ways, and that you are working to improve your coping skills.
- **Explain the purpose of the conversation.** Part of recovery means telling people about the potential effects of deployment (such as PTSD, substance abuse, depression). Telling people about ongoing counseling is your choice. But it may help with scheduling issues.
- **Problem-solve.** Discuss problems that may affect your work performance and plans for dealing with those problems.
- **Focus On Work Success.** Emphasize the importance of succeeding at work, and doing the things that will support work performance.

Tips for Approaching Employers or Commanding Officers About Issues:

- Talk with a trusted counselor, family member, or friend FIRST. The two of you can weigh the pros and cons of sharing concerns with your boss or CO.
- Choose carefully who to talk to in the workplace. Maybe just your direct supervisor needs to know. No matter who it is, make sure you have good reasons to share with them.
- Consider possible reactions. Will they understand? Will they listen? If you think they won't support you, then be prepared for that, too.
- Try a brief conversation and check the reaction. You don't have to share everything at once.

DON'T

- **Don't tell everything.** It's okay to leave some things out of the conversation. Most people just need to understand the current experience, not what happened in the past. They can be told about past events briefly and generally, ("I saw people die." or, "I almost died.") But there is no reason to go into the details. Stay focused on how problems affect the workplace. Plan ahead for details that should be kept private.



1.3.7 Responding To Criticism And Handling Conflict

Criticism and conflict can be difficult for returning service members. Some service members experience “culture shock” at work after deployment. They must learn to give up the rigid authority structure and function in a more flexible environment. Where there’s less rigid structure, there’s often more discussion and disagreement.

How to Handle Criticism and Conflict at Work:

- Listen to the other person. Put your own thoughts and feelings aside while you focus on the other person’s comments.
- Repeating what the other person said is a way to make sure you understood correctly. This buys you time to consider a response. And, if you did misunderstand, the other person can explain and clarify to avoid further conflict.
- Example: A coworker says, “You’re so tired all the time.” Instead of taking the coworker’s comment as an insult, ask for clarification. It may turn out that the person is concerned and wants to help in some way.



- Find something in the person’s comment that you agree with. Even if it’s small.
- Example: Your boss says, “We need to talk. You are late all the time.” You could respond, “You’re right, I am late today, and I apologize.” Finding some truth in what’s been said makes the other person feel heard and may reduce tension.
- If you need to, apologize! Everyone makes mistakes. Take responsibility for your actions – good and bad.
- Ask for time to think about your response. People do better when they organize their thoughts. Taking a time-out can also help everyone cool down. Time may also give you some perspective and help you think more clearly about the situation.
- Determine the desired outcome. What is the goal?
- Example: Jack has been talking about Sam to other coworkers. Sam decides that keeping his friendship with Jack is a priority. Sam might approach Jack and ask what Jack has been saying, rather than assuming the worst and refusing to talk to Jack. If Sam’s priority is to stop any rumors, he might ask Jack’s coworkers what’s been said.
- Be fair. Fairness keeps things respectful once the conflict is over, regardless of the outcome.
- Use “I” statements. Say things like, “I feel” or “I think” when expressing your opinion. Statements that begin with “We all know...” put other people on the defensive and weaken your argument. Stick with your own experience. No one can argue with how you feel.
- Don’t act out of anger. Yelling or getting physically aggressive with others is unacceptable in the workplace. If you’re upset, tell people you need time to regroup. Then do something to calm down – take a walk or get a drink of water.
- Keep at it. It may be tempting to quit at the first sign of conflict. Instead, see the problem through to some resolution by talking and problem-solving.

1.3.8 Concentrating and Completing Tasks

After being in a war zone, your mind and body may be used to being on “high alert”—prepared for anything. *Over-learning* may occur. Those same high-alert reactions become *habits*, and back home the body and the mind react as if risk and danger are still present. Maintaining a level of high alertness can wear a person down, cause fatigue, and make it tough to stay focused and productive.

Concentrating and Completing Tasks at Work:

- Professional counselors can help you focus better at work by managing your stress reactions at work.
- Keep your workspace neat and make sure you have all the tools you need to do the job.
- Maintain your physical health. Being tired, hungry, or physically worn down can make it hard to concentrate.
- Deal with persistent mood problems, such as anxiety or depression. If you’ve been prescribed medication, take it (at the prescribed dosage). If you need help from a counselor, find one. Don’t assume time is all you need to fix the problem.
- Make a “to do” list with items broken down into small tasks. If you’re working on a report, list the steps needed to finish it. Write down things like “gather materials,” or “research on website,” and “write first section.” Track your progress by checking off each item you complete.
- If you can’t stay focused, write your thoughts in a notebook or journal. Include important projects and appointments. For example, if you’re worried about forgetting to call the cable company, jot a note in your notebook. Then go back to work, knowing you’ll check your notebook and make the call later.
- Get interested in your job. The more you take an interest in your work, the less you will be distracted by other things.



1.3.9 Dealing With Anger, Stress, and Moods



Tips to Deal with Anger, Stress, and Moods at Work:

- Write about stressful situations at work and your thoughts about them. Review those written thoughts for any flaws in logic. For example, if Jane’s boss offers someone else a promotion, Jane might think, “My boss doesn’t respect me.” Jane should look for *evidence* that this thought is true, then she should argue *against* her point of view. It could be that Jane’s boss respects her but didn’t know Jane wanted the position. Consider whether you’re thinking in extreme, “all-or-nothing” terms, or assuming the worst.
- Take breaks when needed. When you feel overwhelmed, find time to deal with difficult emotions. Go for a walk or practice deep breathing for a few minutes.
- Develop a support network. You can include work friends, but you need friends or family you can count on. People with more support in their life have better physical health, and are less vulnerable to the negative effects of anger, sadness, fear, shame, and guilt. The more you interact with your “network,” the less likely you are to act out bad feelings.
- Look for solutions. Emotions love themselves: depression creates more depression, anger creates more anger, and stress creates more stress. To stop your downward spiral, look for ways to fix the situation.

1.4 SUCCEEDING AT WORK LONG-TERM

People often think succeeding at work means doing well on a day-to-day basis. But success at work is also about a job that fulfills you and supports you financially in the long term. The key to long-term success is to live by your personal values and to set goals that match those values.



1.4.1 Accessing Your Personal Values

Identifying and defining your “personal values” is like setting a compass to direct your life’s path. Values, principles, and standards shape people and their choices. When you experience something stressful like deployment, life may feel more complicated. Answers may seem less clear-cut. And values may conflict with each other.

Reassessing your personal values can be helpful—it can guide you toward work that matches your goals. People who work in environments that match their values are more likely to find their work satisfying. They are less likely to be stressed and frustrated by work. Most people are also more comfortable with coworkers who share similar values. So you should look for work that matches your personal values.

THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP YOU DEFINE PERSONAL WORK VALUES:

- What kind of an employee/service member do I want to be? A hard-working employee? A dependable soldier? A trustworthy officer?
- What parts of work are important to me? Using and building my skills? Fixing problems? Leading a team of people?
- What do I like about my current job/duties? Is it the way people at the job site treat each other? The feeling of accomplishment? Good benefits
- What level of involvement do I want at work? Do I want clear work hours and “home” hours? Do I want to lead projects and be involved in making a difference at my job?
- How does this value fit with my other values? Does this fit with serving my country?

Answering these questions will help clarify your values and workplace goals. Your answers can help you decide how to deal with work-related problems and succeed at work. If being a team player is one of your personal work values, isolating yourself from co-workers will make that value hard to achieve. To become a team player, you should stay involved with team activities and get support.

Your feelings affect your values and commitments. If you put your feelings first, then feeling depressed may cause you to skip work. But if you put your values and commitments first, you may feel depressed but you’ll go to work anyway. Making decisions based on values isn’t always easy or fun. But part of living well is living in line with your values and goals.

The way your values fit with the demands of your job has a big impact on job satisfaction and performance. No job is perfect, but once you understand how your job fits with your goals and values, you’ll enjoy a more fulfilling work life.

1.4.2 Setting Goals And Excelling At Work

Most people want a satisfying and successful job – where their values and abilities are fully appreciated. This kind of success and satisfaction at work doesn't happen by accident.

To excel at work:

- Know your strengths and weaknesses. Do you prefer working with mechanical objects or people? Are you an independent worker or a strong team player?
- Deal with your disabilities. Ask for accommodations when necessary.
- Take care of your self away from work. Eat healthy and exercise. Talking to someone when stressed or upset. Relaxing and socializing with others.
- Do your best at work. Complete tasks on time. Strive to meet all work responsibilities.
- Communicate with coworkers. Manage conflict without getting angry. Praise success while making suggestions for improvement.
- Adapt to changes at work. Keep up with technology changes. Stay up-to-date on training. Be willing to try new ways.
- Pursue personally satisfying work goals. Identify your ideal future position or promotion. Develop the skills needed to achieve a promotion. Figure out which projects at work you enjoy most.



1.4.3 Maintaining Positive Work Relationships

Positive workplace relationships depend on the following attributes:

- Positive attitude.
- Reliability and dependability.
- Caring about others and showing it.
- Admitting mistakes without getting defensive.
- Communicating well.
- Supporting authority.
- Putting the “best foot forward.”

Being assertive on the job helps you meet work goals without creating unnecessary conflict. Being assertive is different from being aggressive.

- Being *aggressive* means putting *your* needs and feelings ahead of everyone else's.
- Being *passive* means putting someone else's needs and feelings first *and* neglecting your own needs and feelings.
- Being *assertive* balances these extremes: caring for the needs and feelings of yourself and others *equally*.

Here are some ways to be assertive and excel on the job:

- Speak out at meetings and share your opinions when asked.
- Don't just complain about problems. Be solution-oriented.
- Create a support network—give and get support as part of a team.
- Express needs, strengths, and goals positively.
- Keep learning new things.



1.4.4 Creating Work Success: Next Steps

Make a list of specific, achievable work goals. Your list should include personal goals for work, relationships, assertiveness, general work attitudes, and performance measures. Choose which goals are most important to you and focus on them. Keep your list in your wallet or purse. Refer to it often to check your progress toward success.



To learn more about succeeding at work, check out the other materials in this program, including the interactive activities and the *Succeeding At Work Workshop*. The *Succeeding At Work Workshop* has much more material you can use at work.