

## Get on Track With Goal Setting

Learning new aspects of any job takes time. Goal setting can help you stay focused during the process.

### Try this step-by-step approach:

Make a list of improvements you'd like to make to your skills over the next year. Break down each skill into three parts:

#### 1 Immediate goal

#### 2 Short-term goal

#### 3 Long-term goal

Think of ways you can meet each goal.

**Example:** If you'd like to improve your communication skills, vow to write down notes before your next meeting to help you focus your thoughts (immediate); ask a third party to read over and help you improve your written communications (short-term); or read a book on effective communication strategies and brainstorm how you can use them in your job (long-term).

**The key:** Visualize your success. Mentally "rehearse" reaching your goal. See yourself doing your best, achieving success and enjoying the rewards. Imagine the roadblocks you'll encounter, and picture yourself overcoming them.

## SKILLS FOR THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Are you a great negotiator? Always organized? A good problem solver? Find ways to bring those skills to bear in your personal life as well as at work. Think of your hobbies, interests and relationships just as you do your job — devoting yourself to improvement can only help you get more out of them. Plus, developing a full and enjoyable personal life keeps you relaxed and happy, which will help you stay on top of your work life as well.

## Keep Your Mind Sharp

If your brain came with an owner's manual, one of the first rules in the book would be to use the proper fuel and maintenance for your "engine." After all, you can't use your skills to the fullest if you're running on empty — feeling tired, dragged down and uninspired. Use these healthful suggestions to help boost your problem-solving abilities.

**Eat right.** Consume more "brain foods" such as complex carbohydrates and vegetables high in beta-carotene (carrots, squash and kale).

**Cut down on caffeine.** Caffeine can make you jittery and anxious and bring on a mid-afternoon withdrawal headache that hampers your performance.

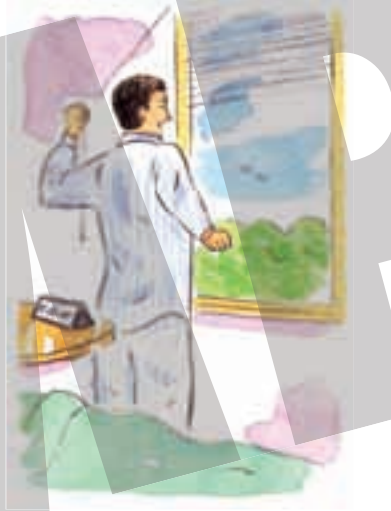
**Get plenty of rest.** Strive for seven to eight hours of sleep a night to feel rested and ready to go. Research shows that sleep doesn't just recharge your body's battery. Important physiological developments take place, too, that help your brain absorb each day's learning.

**Keep moving.** Regular exercise — at least 30 minutes of moderately intensive cardio (aerobic) exercise, five days a week — helps you stay energized and alert.

**Remember:** Shaping up your skills is just like shaping up your body. It takes time and dedication, and you may not see results overnight. But the long-term benefits are well worth the effort.

# Always Learning

## Keeping Your Skills Sharp



## Skills = Success

To be successful in today's competitive workplace, you need to keep learning. Constantly sharpening your skills (and learning new ones) not only makes you a better, more productive employee, but also provides you with an ongoing challenge that will help you along the road to professional and personal fulfillment.

### 3 Ways to Improve Your Skills

#### 1 Seek out training.

Explore on-site chances for job development as well as outside learning opportunities such as local networking nights, professional conferences and classes.

#### 2 Read all you can.

Every profession has trade journals and newsletters. Stay up to date on what's going on in your field by reading them regularly.

**3 Join an organization.** An organization affiliated with your line of work gives you the chance to meet and talk with others in your field, attend conferences, and get discounts on reading and training materials. It may also provide online resources to help you learn more.



## Seek Out a Mentor

A mentor can help you learn new skills and teach you to make the best of the strengths you already possess. You might have more than one mentor in your life, or you may have different ones as your skills progress. Keep these tips in mind as you look for a good mentor.

- Seek out people who are already where you want to be. A supervisor, colleague or someone who simply appears to be in exactly "right" place for his or her skills and abilities and who enjoys his or her job all make good mentors.
- Search for people who are at the same stage as you. Take a look at others in your position. Do any of them have particular skills or qualities that you admire and would like to emulate? **Questions you might ask:** Would you have

## LEARN SOMETHING NEW

You never know when you'll learn something new. The best policy is to keep an open mind all day long and never say "no" to learning. **Here's how:**

**LISTEN to others.** When viewing a presentation, attending a meeting or even just participating in a break-time conversation, listen actively and concentrate on what others say. Their ideas may spark new ones of your own.

**MANAGE stress.** A stressed mind is like a cramped muscle. It's tight and closed to stimulation. Controlling your stress level keeps you receptive to learning new skills and also helps you stay healthy and productive. **Try this:** Take frequent breaks to breathe deeply and stretch ... exercise regularly ... find a support system.

**TRY something different.** If you always go about your work the same way, your skills could be stuck in a rut. Examine the systems you use in your work life, everything from safety procedures to filing to managing inventory. Is there anything you could do more efficiently?

**LEAVE yourself time.** Save yourself an unscheduled hour every day. It will come in handy when an emergency crops up. On emergency-free days, use that hour to read up on your trade, research new developments on the Internet or explore training opportunities.

done anything differently in getting to where you are now? How did you go about learning and improving your skills?

- Learn how your mentor achieved success. Ask him or her to go to lunch or to meet with you for a few minutes. Explain which skills of theirs you admire and what you'd like to learn.
- Realize that a role model is just a model. You can learn a lot from a mentor, including new ways to work, how to avoid mistakes and tips for success. Ultimately however, you must bring your own personality, work ethic and skills to bear on your position — and perhaps return the favor and become a mentor yourself.



## Exercise Your Mind?

The jury is still out as to whether the kinds of puzzles, memory-recall exercises and games that advertise improved brain function actually work. However, research does show that keeping an active mind may help delay the onset of age-related dementia and memory loss.

In any case, they can't hurt you and if you have fun doing them, they'll contribute to your sense of relaxation and well-being.

