

Leadership Skills for Youth Development



Can you back up your “soft skills” with hard facts?

Often times when people are asked to describe themselves on a résumé or application, they will use words like “detailed,” “strong communicator,” “responsible,” “enthusiastic,” “professional,” “team player,” etc. But when it comes time to select candidates to interview for college or the workplace, interviewers are more than likely going to look beyond those words, to see if you can actually demonstrate these important leadership traits. In order for this to be possible, students between the ages of 5 – 21 must have multiple opportunities to practice these skills both inside and outside of the classroom.

Introduction

Our increasingly knowledge-driven world demands people who have the education and skills to thrive in a competitive, global marketplace, and to understand the increasingly complex world in which they live. That means that in order to compete and succeed, **all young people will need an effective education that prepares them for college, career, and life.**

Increasingly, education through and beyond high school represents the only clear path to achieve the American Dream. Already, the vast majority of jobs in the United States are available only to high school graduates. By 2020, nearly 90 percent of all jobs will require at least a high school diploma, and two-thirds of jobs will require some form of post-secondary education.

To keep young Americans on track to attaining the education they will need throughout their lives, they need quality early childhood education, the ability to read at grade level at critical junctures such as the third grade, and an education that instills critical thinking and problem-solving skills, such as the college and career readiness standards. This preparation will make more of them college-ready, which is increasingly important each year. Two-thirds of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education by the time today's middle school students enter the job market.

Clearly, a high school diploma is a crucial threshold that young Americans must cross if they want any real shot at prosperous, thriving adulthood. If birth is life's starting line, then high school graduation is life's *second* starting line for success.

Through service to others and community, young Americans develop the character and competence they need to be helpful, hopeful and civically engaged all their lives, regardless of their own life circumstances. The chance to give back teaches young people the value of service to others, the meaning of community, and the self-respect that comes from knowing that one has a contribution to make in the world.

When paired with learning, serving creates a stronger commitment to school and contributes to academic achievement. Service as a form of experiential education connects the classroom to the real world and engages students in understanding contexts in which they live, learn, worship and play.

Helping to address community needs also aids in the development of cognitive skills that continue in young people through early adulthood, by improving on their critical thinking and creative problem solving abilities.

As brain skills are built, so is character. Serving builds empathy, hope for the future and a sense of personal responsibility to help others all their lives. Serving, volunteering and leadership engage young people in more developmental relationships with adults and peers.

Leadership Skills for Youth Development, is a curriculum which focuses on teaching “soft” or workforce readiness skills to youth. The curriculum is targeted for youth ages 6 to 21 in both in-school and out-of-school environments. The basic structure of the program is comprised of modular, hands-on, engaging activities that focus on six key skill areas: **communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism**. Interestingly, research suggests that these soft skills are not just important for first-time employees. They are also important for the experienced professional. **Source:** Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

The curriculum is also comprised of a “character” component. The traits found within this curriculum are caring, courage, fairness, honesty, integrity, responsibility, and self-control. It is a “starter list” of leadership character qualities/skills that you can add to as they learn more about leadership.

Activities within this publication were created to provide an introduction to the “basics” of soft skills. The basic foundation for the structure of these activities includes convenience, cost-effectiveness, and creativity. They were structured in such a way as to be easily incorporated into current programming and/or already established curricula.

Leadership soft skills cannot be taught in a vacuum nor can they be acquired simply because the goal of a lesson plan notes that it should be so. Rather, they must be introduced, developed, refined, practiced, and reinforced. Did You Know Publishing is committed to providing resources regarding soft skills in a unique way that is useful, open to creativity, hands-on and fundamentally beneficial for all types of youth programs and therefore, all types of learners. The subject matter of this publication reflect that commitment.

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