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CCLB

# On the Job

**Essential Skill of Working with Others**



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# Working with Others

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## Teamwork and More

Working with Others deals with the extent to which employees work with others to carry out their tasks. Do they work cooperatively? Do they work alone? It does not include non-task related social behaviour that occurs in the workplace, such as small talk. That is not saying small talk is not important but rather that this definition is confined to work tasks.



The Essential Skill of Working with Others is based on two dimensions:

- Levels of coordination and integration with others in the workplace and
- Roles and responsibilities of the worker to work with others

It is further defined through four levels of complexity ranging from minimal responsibility for interaction with others to coordinating and integrating work with many others and being responsible for this integration with many complicating factors.

### **Sample Working with Others Tasks for Assemblers, Fabricators and Inspectors and Railway Track Maintenance Workers**

The following examples illustrate how different occupations demand different levels of skill in Working with Others.

Assemblers, Fabricators and Inspectors (NOC # 9485) mainly work independently as part of a team under the direction of a lead hand or supervisor. They sometimes work with a partner to complete large or complex jobs. They work in co-ordination with

others in the organization, such as engineers, design technicians, lead hands and supervisors, to clarify information or troubleshoot problems. Inspectors co-ordinate their work with assemblers, electrical fitters and wirers to ensure product quality. Some assemblers, fabricators and inspectors, work in a team environment and participate in interdepartmental continuous improvement meetings. Working with Others is not considered one of the important skills for this occupation.



Railway Track Maintenance Workers (NOC # 7432) work mainly as members of a three or four member team. When they are not working as part of a team, they often work in pairs. They often participate in formal discussions about work processes or product improvement, and have opportunities to make suggestions on improving processes and inform other workers or demonstrate to them how tasks are performed. Working with Others is considered one of the important skills for this occupation.



## Teaching Tip – Cultural Norms for Working with Others

If asked, everyone says they are good team players, but what exactly does that mean? In some cultures a good team player is one who follows the instructions of the boss without question, avoids conflict and is cooperative.

- In some Canadian workplaces a good team player is one who takes risks to reach or surpass the team's goals. The best employee is not the one who simply does as she is told, but who thinks through the problem and uses her intellect and experience to make revisions where they will obviously enhance efficiency and reduce company costs. This may entail some negotiation (even confrontation) with the "boss", but it will bring value to the work.

- In some cultures, leadership is gained purely through the highest level of education achieved. In Canada, it is sometimes based on training, experience, talent, vision, personality and/or luck.
- When practicing the skill of working with others the instructor must realize how embedded in culture this skill can be and discuss the many possible situations that might arise in different workplaces.

### Workplace Anecdote

An ESL worker complained that his colleagues were picking on him. He was hurt that they were making fun of the way he said the letter 's', pronouncing it more like the letter 'z'. When the supervisor discussed this with the colleagues they were surprised. They did not mean to pick on him but rather saw it all as good fun and harmless teasing. It is hard to understand that sometimes Canadians tease the people they like and that this is done in good humour. Teaching the skills to interact with colleagues and to learn if the intent of the comments is fun or is hurtful (and in a worse case scenario a violation of human rights) can be both a cultural and communication skill.



### Tips



## Teaching Tips – Working with Others

The ESL classroom affords rich opportunities to practice the skill of Working with Others. Watch for teachable moments when students are interacting with each other. For example:

- **Social Loafers** — When students are working in groups, watch for “social loafers”- group members that do not add value to the group.

These are the participants that are riding on the coat tails of others or who require more encouragement and support to take risks. Discuss opportunities to practice and encourage learners to take these opportunities to take control of their own learning.

- **Respect for Others** — Watch for group members treating each other with respect and patience. Write the sentences on the board that demonstrate this respect. Also watch for abruptness and anger. In some cultures it is still okay for the boss to express anger to the workers. This is a great teaching moment and a launch for great discussion.
- **Gender Issues** — Watch for gender issues. Are the female group members treated the same as the other members or are they given subservient roles? Watch to see that opinions are listened to and respected. It is always good to discuss the possibility of having a female boss in the Canadian workplace. In some cultures, females in the workplace are a rarity and females in positions of authority even more rare. Watch for discrimination among different national groups. In Canada we are sensitive to these issues, but some newcomers originate in more homogenous cultures with certain biases. This is a great opportunity to discuss stereotypes.
- **Leadership** — Watch for people assuming leadership based on age, gender or level of education and not on natural leadership ability.



#### Classroom Anecdote

An ESL class that was assigned a group presentation activity. One group had four members of which the most senior was a PhD. in Geology. This man was a shy fellow who had spent most of his academic career doing independent research. He had not had the opportunity to develop supervisory or managerial skills in his previous job. He was given the leadership role. He did not know how to delegate, lead a discussion or set goals within a group. His group procrastinated too long and did not get the task completed on time or at an acceptable level.

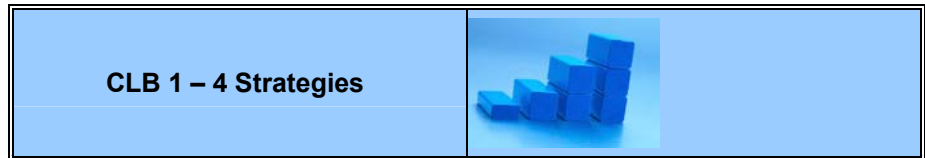
When discussing it afterwards, the group expressed frustration with the leader's directions. When I asked why he was the leader they said he has a PhD. When he was asked if he liked that role he said no. In that group there was only one very dynamic lady who was pursuing a career as a Project Manager. When I asked why she had not been given the role as leader the men looked as if they had not even thought of it.

This was a wonderful teaching moment to discuss interpersonal dynamics within a group and expectations of fairness and respect in the Canadian society.



*Two assessments often used in career counselling are the Meyers-Brigg<sup>1</sup> and the Princeton Review Career Quiz.<sup>2</sup>*

This could also lead to a discussion on choosing an occupation that fits with your personality as well as your skill set. Some people just have a preference to work alone and will excel in that environment, but for that same person a management job might be too far outside his comfort zone. The Essential Skills Profiles can help learners consider different career options that suit their personalities and skill sets.



## **CLB 1- 4 Strategies**

As has been mentioned in some of the other On the Job sections, the skill of asking questions and clarifying information is one that can not be practiced enough. In our goal-oriented society, completing the work correctly and efficiently is very important in many workplaces.

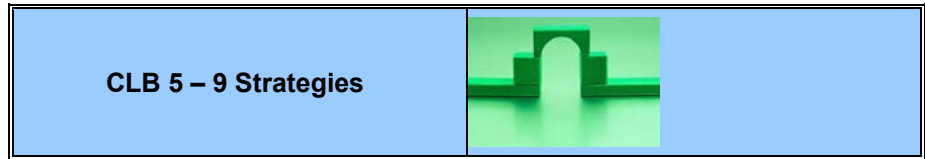
- Put learners into groups or pair work for various activities in the classroom, from correcting each other's work to working in the computer or language lab.
- Mix up group members or pairs by putting each student's name on a small recipe card or piece of paper. Once you have a deck of cards, shuffle and place names face down on the desktop, and select names of the group or pair. By shuffling the cards before each use, you can mix up the learners easily and quickly.
- If some learners are hesitant or do not want to work with another student in the class, there are a few things that can be attempted:
- If the student just does not want to work with another student based on a value judgement they have made seemingly without basis or justification, then sit down with the student away from the group once the other groups have started to work and find out what is the problem. Hopefully it can be resolved through a discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> The Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI)© is a test to help determine a person's personality type. More information can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers-Briggs\\_Type\\_Indicator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers-Briggs_Type_Indicator) as well as other sites. Similar free online assessments are available, including <http://www.personalitytest.net/types/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> The Princeton Review Career Quiz is available at <http://www.princetonreview.com/cte/quiz/default.asp?careers=6>.

- Mention to learners that while in class they might be able to work with friends occasionally, in a workplace workers are often assigned to work together in pairs or on a team by a supervisor. It is to a worker's advantage to be able to work with a variety of people well.



## CLB 5 – 9 Strategies for Working with Others

Within many workplaces, Canadian workers behave more informally than their counterparts in other cultures. The social distance between the boss and the employee in many Canadian workplaces is fairly small.

- People usually use the boss's first name and interact informally. This does not in any way diminish our respect for supervisors, and ideas are shared, discussed and even debated with those in authority.
- Learners who come from cultures with a high degree of social distance between the figures of authority and the worker might be unsure of how to react or interpret the actions of supervisors here. Discussing and being ready for the possibility of this difference will help with their transition into the workplace.
- Asking for information and making clear what you need to have to complete your job are very important Oral Communication Skills. It cannot be assumed that your co-workers and supervisor will always know what you require. People are often busy and do not take time to take care of new workers. Sometimes waiting until someone notices the worker is having a problem is too late. Asking for assistance is appropriate, acceptable behaviour in most workplaces.

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**Note:** Some research and programs have been very successful using a mentoring component for ESL learners who are on co-op placements or new hires in a workplace.<sup>3</sup>

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- Learners from more sociable cultures have commented that it can sometimes be lonely in the Canadian office environment because everyone gets down to work and eats lunch at their desk. Every work place is different and has its own corporate culture. Learners have to be aware that this might be the corporate culture in their company and that employees in other companies may not interact in the same way. In some cases, relationships are secondary to profit margins. The important thing is for learners to have the skills and knowledge to

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<sup>3</sup> Career Bridge in Toronto has had a very successful bridging program that includes a mentoring component. More information can be found at <http://overview.careeredge.ca/index.asp?FirstTime=True&context=0&FromContext=4&language=1>.

determine and navigate the cultural milieu in which they find themselves.

Workplace Anecdote
<p>A work experience student was given a work placement at a local business to do office administration tasks. During the work placement the student performed well and was given a strong evaluation by her supervisor. At the end of the placement, she was not hired and started to cry. The supervisor was surprised, as they had given her a good evaluation and the opportunity to gain Canadian work experience.</p> <p>The student thought that they had a friendship and thought this would guarantee a job. The supervisor was working on a goal-oriented model and the student on a relationship model.</p>

### ***Instructional Design Ideas***

Try the following ideas with learners to practice and develop their Working with Others skills.

Instructional Design Ideas	
Classroom Activities	Link to the Workplace
<p>During group work, watch for various kinds of group dynamics and use this as an opportunity to reinforce Canadian practices. (Refer back to the discussion on small talk in the <b>On the Job</b> Oral Communication section for a few more ideas.)</p>	<p>Work in groups or teams. This requires people to be aware of the dynamics that exist in groups. What a person says and how they say it can change a meaning.</p>
<p>Design activities that practice negotiation. The pyramid method (described in the <b>On the Job</b> Writing section) works very well with these activities and can be used anytime there are a number of choices to be made.</p>	<p>Negotiate deadlines, work schedules and even salaries. To do this effectively while still preserving the relationship is an important skill.</p>
<p>Establish classroom rules that enforce respect for others, polite exchange of ideas and equal opportunities for all.</p>	<p>Stress equal rights for all people. This not only simulates the Canadian workplace but what we strive for in society as well. The Canadian Human rights act reinforces this point.</p>
<p>Do not be afraid to discuss issues like gender, race, or sex discrimination in the classroom. Human rights legislation both protects us and dictates our behaviour.</p>	<p>Reinforce the Canadian Human Rights Act as it covers equal treatment of all and is reinforced in most company's policies, federal and provincial legislation.</p>



<p>Encourage risk-taking behaviour such as stating an opinion, speaking out in class, interacting with classmates and going into the community and speaking English.. Discretion is key to remember. When covering this topic in class, it requires diplomacy and tact. Also discuss signals that a listener may give to indicate he does not want to hear a person's opinion.</p>	<p>Communicate ideas and opinions (Although many workplaces encourage this behaviour, not all welcome opinions that are either social or work-related. A discussion about which environments and topics are safe to express ideas in and which are not is useful to learners.)</p>
<p>Encourage membership in organizations such as volunteer groups, sports groups or parent groups and work-related groups such as professional associations or unions. Ensure that learners understand what volunteerism entails as this is a new concept for immigrants. Volunteerism requires the same commitment to the work as does an employee/employer relationship and can provide teamwork experience (often with less pressure). It is also a good networking opportunity.</p>	<p>Encourage networking to increase contacts and gather information.</p>

**Notes:**

# Glossary of Terms

## **STAR**

STAR formula is a method used in career counselling for Describe a "situation" or task you faced, the "action" you took, and the outcome/result. Often used in resume writing, interview situations, and other work-related areas.



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