

Learning Objectives

- Examine how young people with disabilities think about rights and responsibilities.
- Brainstorm ideas and solutions to help young people balance.
- Generate practical solutions to help programs teach responsible work behavior.
- Identify solutions for young people, parents, teachers and service providers.

Why Look at This Issue?

- Young people we work with know their rights as individuals with disabilities, but did not always act as responsible workers.
- When questioned, most knew their responsibilities, but did not always act in responsible ways.
- We wondered whether this was only happening in our little corner of the world, or whether it is happening all over.

Our Experience: Example #1

An employee did not show up for work as scheduled, and did not call to inform us that he would not be in.



Example #2

An employee walked out in the middle of a presentation at a large regional conference. When asked about it later, he said his brain told him to do it.



Example #3

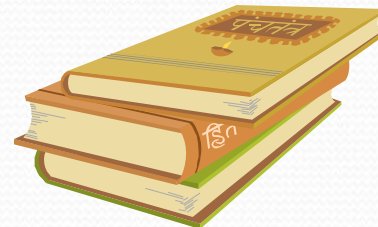
One of our employees recently called in and left a message on the phone that he was quitting that day and would not be back to work. He said the work was boring.



Method 1: Literature Review

A Graduate Assistant (Elizabeth) read a lot of articles in peer reviewed journals and saw a trend:

- Responsibility was discussed ONLY in relation to parents, caregivers, teachers and others to care for individuals with disabilities.
- Responsibility of individuals with disabilities in the workplace was discussed very little.




Method 2: Interviews

A Graduate Assistant (Carol) conducted interviews with past and present CEL employees with developmental disabilities to find out their knowledge and understanding of responsibility in the workplace.



Interview Questions

1. What does the word responsibility mean to you?
2. Why is it important to you?
3. How do people practice responsibility in the workplace?
4. What is the difference between your rights as a person with a disability and your responsibility to your job and employer?

- 
5. Where did you learn about being a responsible employee (worker)? (Was it from parents, family members, teachers, or supervisors?)
 6. Please think about how a responsible worker would perform their job.
 7. Please describe those responsible work behaviors.
 8. Do you think that you look like that person when you are working?

Five Themes

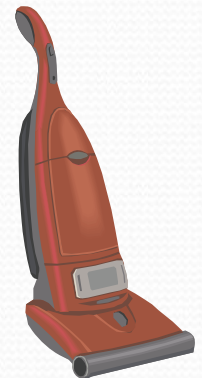
The same key ideas (themes) came up in most of the interviews, giving us an idea of where our young people were coming from. The themes were:

1. **Responsibility** is learned at home.
2. Treating others with **respect** (the Golden Rule) is important.
3. Positive **communication** in the workplace is important.
4. **Completing** work assignments is important.
5. Punctuality and **dependability** are important.

Theme 1:

Responsibility is Learned at Home

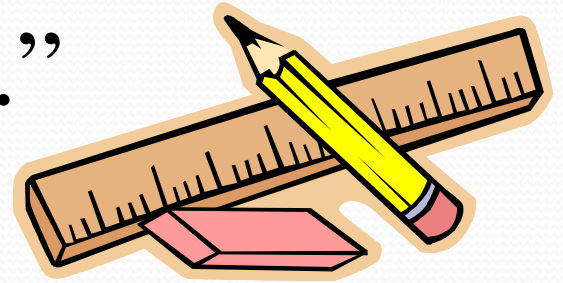
“If the shampoo’s empty, fill it up; if the vacuum bag is full, empty it; and if the plants need water, you don’t wait for someone else to water them.”



Theme 2:

Treating others with respect is important (The Golden Rule)

“You should always have a smile on your face and be pleasant.”



“Don’t just do the bare minimum, pick up the slack, help someone finish their work if it is needed.”

Theme 3:

Positive Communication in the Workplace is Important

“Don’t talk trash or gossip about others.”



“Calm people and promote peace, why don’t you two talk about this calmly.”

Theme 4:

Completing Work Assignments is Important

“You should not goof off and talk too much.”



“You need to finish what you start and be able to take initiative, get started.”

Theme 5:

Punctuality and Dependability are Important



“If people don’t come to work, the boss will get angry, and no one would have a job because they would be fired, and they would hire someone else.”

Results #1

All of the people that we interviewed seemed to understand the concept of responsibility to their employer. However, their behavior and their understanding did not always go hand-in-hand.

Results #2

Interviewees agreed that people with disabilities are very familiar with their *rights* as a person with a disability and that more attention needs to be paid to teaching the *responsibilities* that go along with those rights.

Brainstorming #1

1. Who was responsible for teaching you about workplace behavior? What did you learn?
2. What did you learn about this in school, transition programs, or supported employment?
3. Can you talk about some problems you have experienced at work because of someone else's behavior? Your behavior?

Brainstorming #2

- Please examine the CEL Code of Conduct that was created by Peer Mentors.
-
- The Code outlines the behaviors Peer Mentors feel are important not only for Peer Mentors and Ambassadors, but for everyone who has a job.
- Did we miss anything? Would this be helpful to you?

Code of Conduct

1. Be on Time
2. Be Responsible
3. Seek Feedback
4. Be a Positive Role Model
5. Maintain Professional Boundaries
6. Communicate Respect
7. Golden Rule
8. Learn about the impact of other's disabilities
9. Learn About Solutions/Resources to Share
10. Deal with Problems Directly and Constructively
11. Accept Feedback from Supervisors and Co-Workers
12. Work Collaboratively
13. Be Flexible
14. Abide by Established Workplace Rules, Policies and Procedures

Recommendation

Based on our experiences, interviews, and review of articles, we believe there is an imbalance between how rights and responsibilities are treated in our schools and programs.

We recommend that teachers, program managers, parents, and people with disabilities begin to examine the issue of balancing rights with responsibilities.

Recommendations for Teachers

- Teach individuals how to take responsibility.
- Start early.
- Build on the lessons individuals learn at home.

Recommendations for Service Providers

- Make sure young people make career choices that are compatible with abilities and true interests.
- Help people understand that jobs are not fun and rewarding everyday; that they may need to work toward a better job by doing well at the current one.

Recommendations for Parents

- Make sure young people have an opportunity to take responsibility from a young age.
- Teach responsible behavior at home by assigning tasks and expecting (and rewarding) follow through.

Recommendations for Young Adults

- Remember that jobs are not fun everyday; work toward long term goals.
- Other people are relying on you; follow through on commitments even when you don't feel like it.
- Responsible behavior will be rewarded; know that your boss and co-workers are paying attention to how you handle yourself.

Rights & Responsibilities....



...Go Hand in Hand