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## Attitude is everything

**T**hree thousand employers can't be wrong! They told U.S. Census Bureau interviewers that an "A" grade average, outstanding knowledge and skills, and graduation from an exceptional school mean nothing unless an employee's attitude is also excellent. They said the most important consideration in hiring is the applicant's attitude.

Once you are on the job, attitude continues to rank at the top of the list of most important skills. According to recent research, the biggest reason people lose their jobs is a poor attitude. Attitude is more important than how smart you are and the technical skills you bring to your work. So, if you want to get the best job you can and earn good promotions, showing a positive attitude is your best bet.

### What is attitude?

Attitude is the general feeling you communicate to others. It has nothing to do with intelligence.

While no one can actually see how you feel about things, you give off signals that other people pick up and interpret. If they are comfortable with the attitude you exhibit, they are drawn to you. If they are uncomfortable with your attitude, they are driven away from you.

We form opinions about co-workers, bosses, and others based on the attitude they show us. As you read the list below, what attitude do you think the speakers give off?

<i>It's not my fault!</i>	<i>I don't believe you.</i>
<i>I can't stand her.</i>	<i>Buzz off!</i>
<i>They're talking about me.</i>	<i>I never get a lucky break!</i>
<i>I always look terrible.</i>	<i>That's not my job.</i>
<i>I'm not going to listen to you.</i>	<i>Who do you think you are? Get out of my way!</i>



Your attitude shows up in your facial expressions and body language. A smile may mean "I'm an easy person to work with" or "I'm pleased to be with you," while a frown may mean "I'm angry" or "I'm difficult." In business, a handshake or a pat on the shoulder expresses an attitude of friendliness or goodwill.

*(continued on page 2)*

### What's inside!

In these pages, you will learn to:

- match your attitude to your words.....p. 4
- accept responsibility for your attitude ....p. 7
- change your attitude .....p. 8
- take good attitudes to work .....p. 10

# Attitude *(continued from page 1)*

## Life is easier for people with a good attitude

Having a good attitude is important in both your personal life and work life. People like to be around others who are happy, upbeat, and enthusiastic. They do not like to be around whiners and complainers.

We usually say people have a “good” or a “bad” attitude, when what we really mean is that they look at life in a positive, optimistic way or in a negative, pessimistic way. Optimistic people believe, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.”

An optimist thinks to herself, “There’s an opening for a better job where I work. Maybe I’ll get it.” A pessimist thinks, “I’d like to get the new position, but I don’t think I will.” The pessimist probably won’t get the job because she is setting herself up to fail. Her attitude will be transmitted to others through her words and actions.

A friend who doesn’t return a phone call may be viewed by a pessimist as “mad at me,” while a person who looks at life optimistically will think, “He’ll return my call when he gets time.”

## Success and attitude go together

Your success or failure at work may depend on your attitude. An upbeat attitude generates energy. It drives you to try new ideas, accept new challenges, and see the possibilities in new things.

A negative attitude holds you back. You use your energy to focus on obstacles, barriers, or reasons why things won’t work. The brightest people can fail when their outlook on life is negative, and average people reach great success when their outlook is optimistic.

Jared, a 21-year old confined to a wheelchair at 18 because of a swimming accident, was told he would never walk again. He learned to play wheelchair basketball and became a star in competitions around the world. His upbeat, cheerful attitude gained him many friends.



Asked how he could be so cheerful when such an awful thing had happened to him, Jared answered, “How could I not be cheerful when so many wonderful things have happened to me?”

Sean, at 25, has been virtually untouched by trauma or tragedy. He lives in a big home with a loving family and has almost anything he wants. But the smallest problem can ruin his day or week. For example, when his car tire was flat on Monday morning, he let it affect his whole week. Finally, his friends told him to, “Get over it!” Sean sees the worst in every situation. Do you know people like Jared and Sean?

## Attitudes affect health

Optimists have fewer physical and emotional problems because they feel less stress. Gloria Hochman, in an article entitled “You Are Happy or You Can Learn To Be,” says discontent and negativism lead to stress. Many medical studies show that stress is associated with high blood pressure, ulcers, heart attacks, hypertension, and asthma. Other stress-related diseases include migraine headaches, stroke, and even the common cold. Positive attitudes have also been known to help the healing process in severe and life-threatening illnesses.

Check out your attitude in Activity 1.



## Check out my attitude

1

**Activity 1.** Evaluate your attitude by responding Yes or No to each statement.

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. I complain immediately when I don't like something.                             | Yes | No |
| 2. I can't stand do-gooders.   | Yes | No |
| 3. You had better not try to pull a fast one on me, or I'll get you back.          | Yes | No |
| 4. If you don't succeed the first time, give up because you'll embarrass yourself. | Yes | No |
| 5. I think it's good to complain; then people know exactly how I feel.             | Yes | No |
| 6. Being positive most of the time is just too unrealistic.                        | Yes | No |
| 7. If anything goes wrong, it ruins the rest of my day.                            | Yes | No |
| 8. If I do a good job, nobody cares about the way I act.                           | Yes | No |
| 9. Backing down makes you look weak.   | Yes | No |
| 10. Few people understand what I go through.                                       | Yes | No |

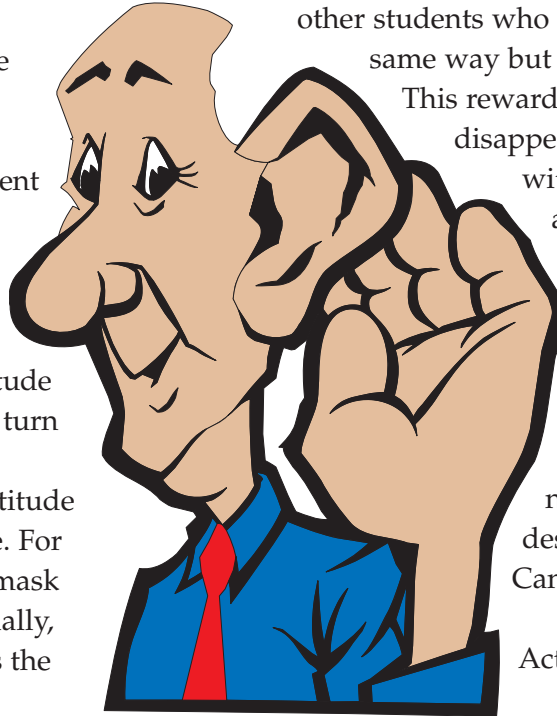
If you responded Yes to one or two statements, you think negatively sometimes. If you responded Yes to at least five statements, you see the bad side too often. If you responded Yes to more than five statements, life must be tough for you. You need to learn coping behaviors.



# Your attitude speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you are saying

**W**ords are important when they deliver the same message as your attitude and actions. But often they disagree. If they disagree, people pay more attention to your attitude than to your words. Perhaps you know another student who always says after a test, "I failed that one," yet you know from past experience that the person usually does well. This is either a gloom-and-doom attitude or fear that telling the truth will turn other students off.

Sometimes we display an attitude because we think it fools people. For example, a cocky attitude may mask insecurity or fear of failure. Usually, the only person who is fooled is the one with the attitude.



Students with bad attitudes may get a lot of attention. Their behaviors often are admired by other students who would like to act in the same way but don't have the courage.

This reward system generally disappears at work, where people with poor attitudes are fired or are given bad performance reviews.

Several attitudes and the signals they give off are described below. Some represent positive attitudes and others represent negative attitudes. Do these describe anyone you know? Can you add others to the list? Analyze work attitudes in Activity 2.

## Attitude

Complaining  
Determined  
Fearful  
Rejecting  
Superior  
Inferior  
Insecure  
Arrogant  
Humble  
Intimidating  
Belligerent  
Persevering  
Victimized  
Optimistic  
Pessimistic  
Enthusiastic  
Caring  
Resilient  
Uncooperative  
Confrontational  
Defensive

## Signals given off

Nothing you do will make me happy.  
Nothing can stop me.  
I worry about everything.  
People don't like me.  
I'm great at everything.  
I'm not good at anything.  
I'm not sure what I should say or do.  
I'm pretty important.  
We are all equally important.  
I'll bully you.  
Oh, yeah? Just try it.  
I'll keep trying until I make it.  
Poor me.  
Things are going to be okay.  
Nothing works out right.  
Okay, let's try it.  
You are important to me.  
Nothing keeps me down for long.  
No, I'm not going to try anything new.  
Make me.  
It's not my fault.



## How does attitude affect my job?

**Activity 2.** Assume you work as a lab technician in a chemical plant. You are part of a team that evaluates chemical mixtures. Choose three positive and negative attitudes from the list on page 4, and write a sentence to describe how each would affect your relationships with your co-workers. Describe how you think your supervisor would respond to each attitude.

<b>Positive Attitudes</b>	<b>Effect on co-workers</b>	<b>Effect on supervisor</b>
1. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
2. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
3. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

<b>Negative Attitudes</b>	<b>Effect on co-workers</b>	<b>Effect on supervisor</b>
1. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
2. _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
3. _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

## Attitudes are contagious

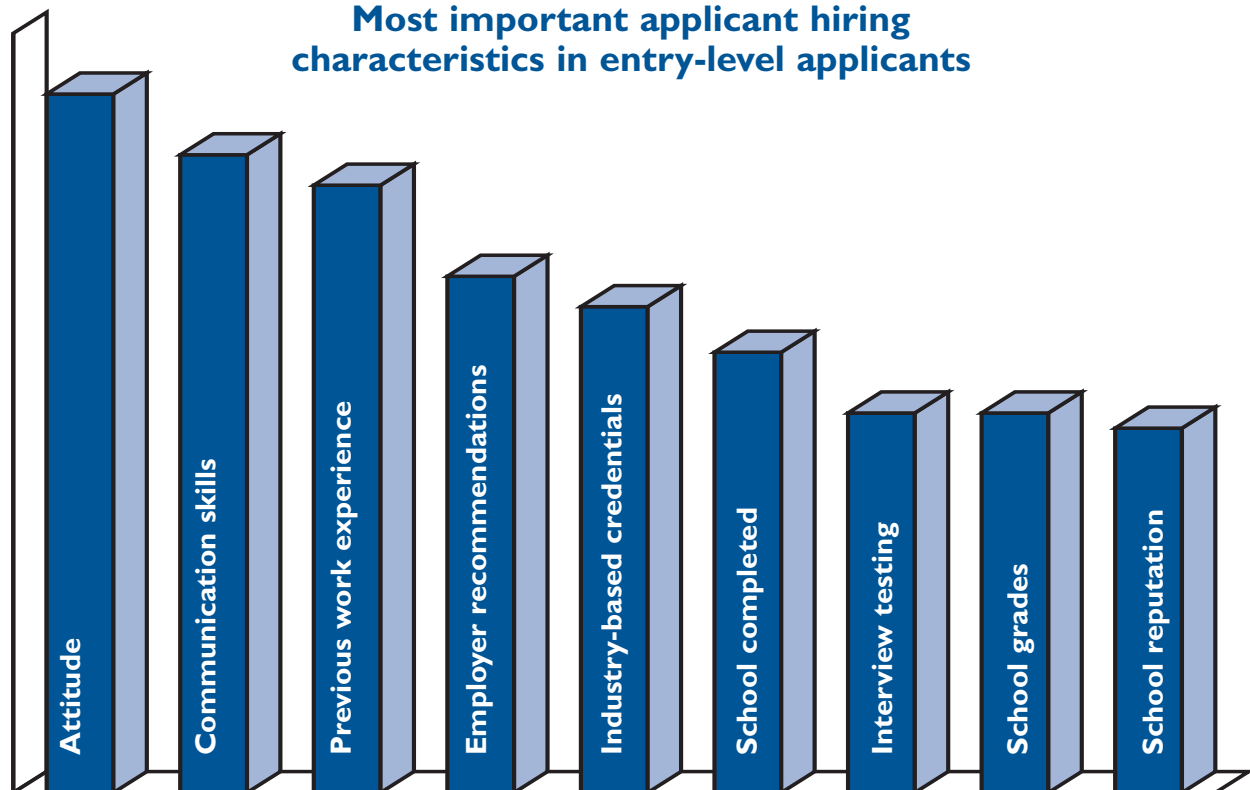
**H**ave you noticed what happens to a group of people when one person's words, expressions, or body language is especially negative or positive? The person can bring down or raise up a whole group. Consider the case of Nadia, who, with a team of friends, delivered meals to the homeless as a part of her community service project at school.

Eric, Josh, and Jenn, the other team members, felt a burst of satisfaction each time they located a person who needed food. Nadia, however, complained constantly—first, about the car being too small to hold four people; later, about the weather being too hot; and finally, about how cautious her friends were when entering unknown neighborhoods.

If you had been in the car, you would have noticed how everyone's enthusiasm dropped in response to Nadia's negativism. Eventually Josh and Jenn got into an argument when she told him not to be so hard on her friend Nadia. The day ended badly for everyone.



**Most important applicant hiring characteristics in entry-level applicants**



Source: The National Employer Survey was designed by the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, administered by the Bureau of the Census, and funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

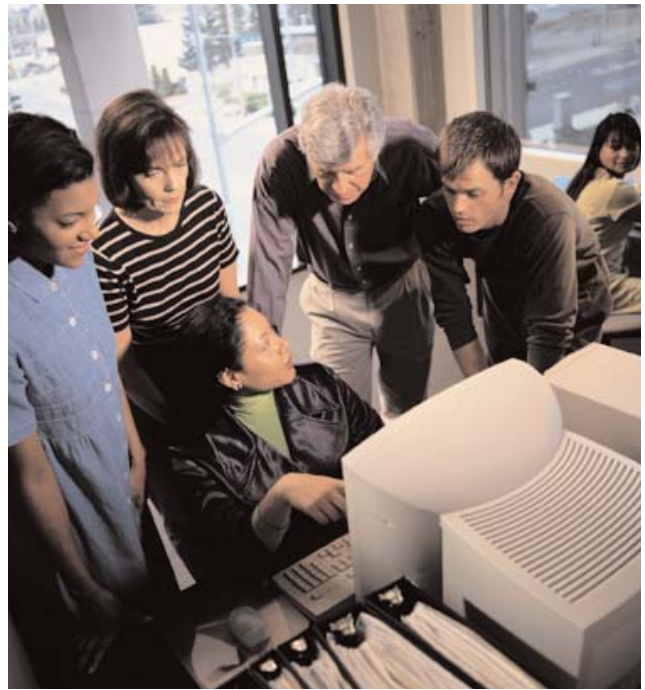
# Don't blame your attitude on a bad life

**O**prah Winfrey was abused by relatives as she grew up, but her optimism and perseverance gave her the strength to become one of the most famous and well-paid women in America.

Tim Allen, star of the TV show Home Improvement, spent time in prison because of a drug problem. Yet a fierce determination to succeed helped him overcome his past and rise to great success.

Sarah was shuttled from one unhappy foster home to another between the time she was seven and sixteen. She had every reason to develop a defeatist, or "I'm giving up," attitude; yet she became one of the top ten students in her class and went on to become a doctor.

Danielle saw her brother shot on a street corner. Her mother turned to drugs to deal with the pain, and her father left his family. Knowing that she couldn't depend on anyone for help, Danielle took an after-school job, relied on her friends for emotional support, and kept her grades up. A teacher who didn't know Danielle's background commented about how "well-rounded and all together" Danielle's life appeared to be.



These examples are extreme, but they show that a person's bad life history is not the reason for his or her attitude, and it shouldn't be used as an excuse. By developing a positive attitude, all of us can make our lives easier. In Activity 3, describe how attitude has helped or hurt someone you know.

## It's all up to you

**3**

**Activity 3.** Among your many acquaintances, there may be people whose attitudes stand out, either as positive or negative. Select a positive and negative example and share them with the class. Write a sentence or two to describe each person's attitude and how it affects other people.

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# You can change your attitude

A poor grade, a correction from a supervisor, a dented fender, a lost CD are unpleasant events, but you can recover from them.

Your company will not fire you because you make one honest mistake. People will still like if you come in second or third in a competition. You don't lose face with your friends by admitting that you are wrong sometimes.

Follow the guides below to change one or more of your attitudes; then practice your new attitude over and over until it becomes second nature.

- **Avoid negative thoughts.** Negative thinking has a way of sneaking into your mind. If you use the words "I can't, I won't" frequently, you may have negative tendencies.
- **Know that your thoughts start with you.** Say to yourself, "Here I go again. I'm not going to fall into this negative trap any more."
- **Break the pattern.** You built your negativity over a long time, so it will take time to break the habit. For example, if you make low grades at the beginning of a course, don't allow yourself to believe you will always make low grades.
- **Resist being a victim.** If you think to yourself, "I'm always getting picked on," then you will put yourself in a position to be picked on. Your life doesn't make you feel bad; your thinking does.

As you replace your negative thoughts with positive ones, you will feel better. And as you feel better, fewer and fewer negative thoughts will appear. In Activity 4, look honestly at your negative thinking.



## Factoids

- Attitudes change as a result of life experiences.
- Attitudes are misinterpreted easily.
- A good or bad attitude does not make a person good or bad.
- You are the only person responsible for your attitude.

# What should I do?



4

**Activity 4.** Think about your attitudes and identify two you would like to change. Write why you want to change each attitude.

1. Attitude to change:

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Why I want to change this attitude:

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2. Attitude to change:

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Why I want to change this attitude:

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# Take positive attitudes to work

**Y**ou may be able to hold on to a negative attitude in your personal life, but you cannot keep a job and grow in a career if you have a bad attitude. Employers simply won't put up with it.

Several techniques that will help you overcome inappropriate work attitudes are described below. Learn them well. They may be the difference in your having a well-paying job with status and an entry-level, low-paying job that holds you down.

## 1. Eliminate defeatist attitudes.

Companies want their employees to be self-confident and decisive. It is time consuming to doubt yourself, agonize over simple decisions, and worry about little things.

2. **Stick with winners.** Do you know why Olympic athletes are housed in villages during the Olympics? It's because their coaches want them exposed only to positive people. Listen to how the winners at your company talk, and pick up ideas about how they stay positive.

3. **Stop complaining.** Everybody has their challenges. Co-workers have very little sympathy for whiners.

4. **Keep going.** Nobody likes a quitter, especially supervisors. Quitters affect the amount of money the company makes. When you have a problem, work it out and keep going.

5. **Banish the "victim" mentality.** Things always seem to go wrong for some people. They expect it, and it occurs. Feeling like a victim becomes a habit.

6. **Say, "Thank you for pointing out my mistake."** If you have trouble with your

supervisors, maybe your reaction is to become defensive. Instead say, "I appreciate your pointing out my mistake. How do you think I can fix it?" It is all right to admit you don't know everything.

7. **Reduce unrealistic standards.** You may impose unrealistic standards of perfection on yourself. If you create a standard that is impossible to achieve, you can expect to fail.

Combine these techniques with the recommendations below to improve your attitude at work. Most are common sense, but some may not be easy if you are a negative thinker.

- Focus on the positive aspects of work.
- Help your co-workers.
- Reduce unrealistic expectations of yourself and other people.
- Think optimistically.
- Anticipate some rejection.
- Smile.
- Say something pleasant.
- Change negative statements to positive ones.
- Turn obstacles into opportunities.
- Find a way around problems.

Analyze the statement in Activity 5.





## Close-up: Trey's surprise

**T**rey is the classic case of an individual who doesn't know how lucky he is. If Mary, his supervisor at his job in a specialty steel factory, weren't understanding, he would have been out the door long ago.

Trey is younger than most of the other workers, but he is better educated and acts like a "know-it-all" around the plant. He takes long breaks, leaves early, and doesn't do anything unless it's in his job description.

He's heard that an opening for a supervisor is coming up soon, and he's prepared to grab it. He's had two years of college, more than anyone else on the floor. He's a smooth talker, and he figures that what he doesn't know he can learn quickly from the older workers.

Trey's six-person work team at the factory is asked by the supervisor to review all the job applications, including Trey's and one from another team member, and to make a hiring recommendation. Trey isn't worried; he feels confident the team will recommend him.

Trey can't believe it when Mary tells him he was passed over for the supervisor's position and that the job went to a less-educated person.



He is shocked even more when he sees the review from his teammates. They used these words to describe Trey:

*Loud and obnoxious*  
*Complains and talks back*  
*Tries to be the center of attention*  
*Has a "chip on his shoulder"*  
*Thinks the world owes him something*  
*Blames others*  
*Acts superior*  
*Points out other people's faults*  
*Thinks he's better than the rest of us.*

In Activity 6, tell Trey what he needs to do to be considered for a future promotion.



## Clean up your act, Trey

6

**Activity 6.** Trey will have the opportunity to apply for another promotion in six months. Assume you work with him. Tell him why his attitude kept him from getting the promotion and what he should do before trying again.

Trey, you didn't get the promotion because \_\_\_\_\_

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Here's what you should do: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Wrap-up: a summary

- Attitude is the most important consideration in hiring.
- Attitude is how you think and feel inside.
- You give off signals about your attitude.
- People like to be around optimistic people.
- Success is related to attitude.
- Health is related to attitude.
- People pay closer attention to your attitude than to your words.
- You control what you think.
- You can change your attitude.
- One person's attitude can bring a whole group down.
- Employers won't put up with a bad attitude.



## Speaking, writing, doing

**2** **I appreciate you.** For one day express appreciation as often as you can to everyone with whom you are involved. Use “please” and “thank you” often. Say, “I appreciate your help” and similar words. Record how each person reacts to you. At the end of the day describe how you feel.

Person 1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Person 2 \_\_\_\_\_

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Person 3 \_\_\_\_\_

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Person 4 \_\_\_\_\_

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Person 5 \_\_\_\_\_

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How I feel: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Speaking, writing, doing

**3 It's their attitude.** With a partner, interview the manager of any two of the following establishments: pharmacy, hardware store, beauty shop, hospital, business office, fitness center, insurance company, or restaurant. Ask what the biggest staff attitude problems are. What happens when the employee does not change?

Write a one-page report or give an oral presentation to your class describing what you learned. If you have recommendations for the establishment you visited, make the recommendations.

## Establishment 1

Attitude problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What happens when the employee does not change? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Establishment 2

Attitude problem: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What happens when the employee does not change? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_