

TAKING INITIATIVE ON THE JOB

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INTRODUCTION

Taking initiative may be the single most important thing a person can do to succeed in the workplace. Employers repeatedly list it as the first quality they look for when filling a position. What makes the ability to take initiative such a vital skill? Busy employers don't have the time or the desire to give workers detailed instructions or solutions to their work problems. They want workers who can think for themselves and find ways to make the most of their time.

The opportunity to use initiative is present in every career field at every level. Many of today's top entrepreneurs began their careers as sales clerks, waiters, and secretaries. They knew that whatever job they were working held the ticket to the next level. They used initiative to make the most of their positions and excel in their fields. They worked longer and harder to get noticed. They found ways to make products or services better. They learned new skills or used new ideas to save their companies time and money.

People who succeed at work don't just have good ideas. They know how to put those ideas into action by taking risks and going against tradition. To do so, they must use creativity and a keen knowledge of their business. They must ask specific questions and find the answers. Why is my job important? How can I do it faster? How can my actions lead to more profit?

Profit is certainly a by-product of initiative, but the reasons for taking initiative go beyond the quest for money. Initiative is also a way for employees to showcase their skills and talents. It earns them the respect of coworkers and employers, while increasing their self-confidence.

Another benefit of initiative is the personal enrichment it provides. By volunteering to learn new skills or work in different departments, workers will increase their value in the workplace. They may gain skills in communication, technology or finance. These skills will stay with them—even as they rise in the company or move on to another job.

Perhaps the most personal benefit of initiative is the element of excitement and interest it can add to a job. No one wants to watch the clock all day, and initiative is a sure cure for boredom or lack of direction. By using initiative, any employee can stay busy, content, and fulfilled on the job.

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

Taking Initiative on the Job takes a thorough look at the modern workplace, exploring the many possibilities for innovation and improvement. It provides tools and information that will help students understand their skills and make the most of their potential.

A variety of activities will help students learn to be creative, take action when it's needed, and make the most of opportunities as soon as they present themselves. From goal setting to problem solving, students will sharpen their skills and learn how to make the most of their careers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After viewing the videotape *Taking Initiative on the Job* and participating in class activities and discussions, your students should be able to:

- understand specific ways to take initiative on the job
- identify problems in the workplace and search for solutions
- put their ideas into action
- set, manage and accomplish career goals
- understand the importance of learning more about the values, goals and objectives of their place of business
- work with others to come up with new ideas and solutions to problems
- recognize opportunities for improving the workplace and emphasizing their particular skills and talents
- appreciate the value of taking risks and thinking in new ways
- understand how initiative is better than “watching the clock,” and appreciate how initiative can make work more fulfilling
- express their ideas in a polite, yet assertive manner
- better understand their own ability to take initiative

Taking Initiative on the Job begins with a quote by Ben Chavis, former Executive

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Director of the NAACP. The quote reads, "Don't measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but by what you should have accomplished given your ability."

After a montage of images featuring people in the workplace, we meet our narrators. They discuss the single quality that employers look for above all others - initiative. A worker who takes initiative helps himself and his company in countless ways. To illustrate this point, a variety of workers are introduced as interview subjects, from young interns to experienced supervisors.

Dave, a 14-year employee at a large grocery chain, says "You have to learn the company's objectives and their goals. Then it's time to step out on your own. You have to take some risks and make decisions on your own. That's going to help you grow and help the company meet its goals." Dave's boss agrees. He explains how valuable Dave is when he takes the initiative to solve problems on his own.

The narrators describe taking initiative as "seeking out or recognizing what you can do to make your place of business more profitable, more efficient or just a nicer place to work." They illustrate the point in a segment called, "Real People, Real Results." In the segment, the narrators tell the story of a Massachusetts state employee who discovered an error in the budget. Her discovery balanced the state budget and saved hundreds of jobs--including her own.

Next, the video explores each level of initiative. The first level occurs when employees wait for the boss to tell them what to do. The second level happens when employees suggest ways to help out, letting the boss know that they are interesting in doing more. The third level of initiative occurs when employees start on tasks without permission, informing their bosses of their intentions. The fourth and highest level of initiative is when employees take action and let the supervisor know after the job is done. The narrators explain that this type of initiative is usually appreciated, but common sense should be used to avoid overstepping boundaries.

Another "Real People, Real Results" segment tells the story of a bank worker who did independent research on the company's computers. By suggesting that the computers be turned off at night, the worker saved the bank over a quarter of a million dollars a year.

Obviously initiative rewards the boss, but what about the employee? What are the personal rewards? The narrators remind viewers that the rewards are significant, whether you're working full-time at a career job or part-time at a short-term job. To prove their point, they move to a video store location to talk about how initiative can

PROGRAM SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

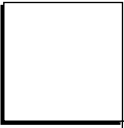
reward any hard worker. Various interview subjects describe the benefits that initiative has provided for them. Even those who started at the bottom or took non-paying internships gained invaluable skills and knowledge. Those skills will follow them to other jobs and help them meet their career goals.

Why do employers like initiative? The narrators talk about several reasons. First, independent workers make life easier for busy bosses. Second, one motivated thinker can have a single idea that makes a big impact. And finally, contagious energy can spread to other employees. With these thoughts in mind, the viewers are challenged to brainstorm together and find ways to make the classroom a more effective learning place. A signal is given for the tape to be stopped during the brainstorming activity.

When the narrators return, they discuss some rules of thumb for using initiative. For example, workers should ask themselves what needs to be done. They should give their supervisor some hints about what they could be doing to help out. They should also learn everything they can about their organization. And finally, they should be willing to take risks and learn from their mistakes. By taking these steps, workers will help to improve their organizations. They will also showcase their talents and make their jobs more fun. And finally, they'll learn new skills that can be useful for years to come.

After giving viewers a quick review, the narrators offer one last story about initiative. After the Oklahoma City bombing, two hardware store managers, acting independently, loaded up their stock of lumber and supplies and delivered it to the site of the wreckage. It was one example of a small initiative that made a lot of people very grateful.

As the program closes, Robbie Jenkins, the owner of a recording studio, expresses what could be the most important reason for taking initiative. He says that thinking independently will help you move through smaller jobs until you reach your career goal, and that taking initiative will "help you be the person you intend to be."



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STUDENT WORKSHEETS

BUSINESS BINDS

How could you solve each problem below by using initiative?

1. You work for a small bakery in your hometown. The bakery is locally famous for its cranberry banana bread. In the summer, when business is booming, tourists from around the country fill the store to buy the bread. They complain that they can't get anything like it back home. In the winter, when tourism is slow, the bakery has trouble making a profit. Sometimes, the lack of revenue even forces the owner to cut back your hours.

2. You work for a coffee shop that has two basic types of customers. First, there are business people who come in to get their morning coffee on the go. Second, there are small groups of people who sit at tables and talk to each other while enjoying slow cups of coffee. Lately, you've noticed that some customers are annoyed about not having enough space while standing in line. They must crowd around a row of tall stools that line a counter. You've also noticed that the stools are usually unoccupied.

3. You work in a pizza delivery place as an order taker. Someday, you want to be a cartoonist. Your boss constantly gets on your case because you doodle when you aren't taking orders. He says you should draw on your own time. To make things worse, he's really stressed out because he can't think of a way to market his new Rocketship Pizza Combo without spending a fortune on advertising.

STORM OF IDEAS

Brainstorming is a great way come up with new ideas at work. Choose a partner and use the brainstorming tips below to solve this problem:

You and your brainstorming partner are both waiters in a restaurant. The chef is very experimental and loves coming up with new recipes. Some of the recipes bomb with customers, while others are smashing successes. Local customers are becoming wary of the hit-or-miss menu. They never know what kind of items they can expect. As a result, the restaurant is losing customers and money.

1. List as many ideas as you can, as quickly as you can. Don't leave out ideas because they seem silly or impossible. Any idea, no matter how ridiculous, can trigger a good idea in your mind or your partner's mind.
2. Ask "what if" questions and answer them.
3. List sources that can provide you with more information. The more knowledge you have, the more ideas you will have.

DIARY OF A SOLUTION

On these pages, you will develop a solution to a problem that exists in your own life. You can use a problem from a part-time job, a volunteer job, or a class.

Step 1: What is the problem?

Define the problem using specific words. Who is involved? How serious is the problem? What are the factors contributing to the problem? How long is the problem likely to continue?

In this space, write everything you know about the problem:

Step 2: Get more information.

The best way to find answers is to get information. Check library books on the subject, relevant web sites, company records, or articles in trade magazines. Talk with people who are involved or who may have experienced similar problems. Get as much information as you can, but don't use this "research period" to delay your work on the problem.

In this space, write all the new information you found about the problem:

DIARY OF A SOLUTION (CONT'D)**Step 3: Come up with as many possible solutions as you can.**

This step will work best if you get help from someone else. It can be someone who is also affected by the problem, or someone who might have the skills needed to think of appropriate ideas. Brainstorm together to come up with ideas that will trigger new alternatives.

In this space, write as many solutions as you can:

Step 4: Choose the best solution and apply it.

By weighing the pros and cons of each solution, and by using what you have learned in your research, choose the solution you think will work best for everyone. If the first solution doesn't work, be prepared to try another one. Also, do you need to get your plan approved before putting it into action, or can you simply move forward?

In this space, write the solution you will try:

Step 5: Analyze the results.

What kind of difference, if any, did your solution make? What did others have to say about it?

In this space, write the results of your actions:

HIDDEN ANSWERS

To find answers to work-related problems, we must be able to *see* the problems. Read the story below, then refer to the following sheet.

Puppet Makers, Inc. is a small business that designs and constructs puppets. On your first day as an employee, you go to the front desk. Miss Mathers, the owner, looks up from her nail filing and greets you. There is a large stack of puppet orders on her desk. She hands you an order and tells you to go to the Construction Room to begin work.

In the Construction Room, you find Sam and Paige working on other orders. The room is filled with puppet-making materials of every color and shape. Many items spill onto the floor from open boxes. Your order is for a purple puppet with orange hair. You ask Sam and Paige if they can help you find the materials you need. All three of you search for several minutes before finding the right colors.

While you work, you have to stop several times to search for various things—needles, buttons, thread, and so on. At one point, you must use the wrong color thread. Sam used the last of the correct color on Wednesday.

Paige complains because the puppet she is making must be finished by 5 pm. No one knew about the order, which was lost on Miss Mathers' desk, until the last minute. Sam complains because he has nothing to do until 3 pm. He is waiting for a shipment of blue fur, which he needs before starting on his next puppet order.

HIDDEN ANSWERS (CONT'D)

How could Puppet Makers, Inc. be improved? List as many problems as you can, along with your suggestions for improving the problems.

Problem:

Possible Solution:

Problem:

Possible Solution:

Problem:

Possible Solution:

Problem:

Possible Solution:

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. “If you’re going to do a job, do it right.” Do you think this quote pertains to part-time, short-term jobs or just long-term jobs that are very important to you? Explain your answer.

2. Today’s young people must overcome the negative stereotype of laziness and irresponsibility that is sometimes linked to their generation. Do you think the way young people carry out work obligations can change this stereotype? Why or why not?

3. Do you think initiative is rewarded at “blue-collar” jobs, or is it rewarded at “white-collar” jobs only? Does a plumber, waitress or sales clerk have the same opportunity to gain skills and move forward in the workplace as a stock broker, architect or writer? Explain your answer.

4. Imagine you are given the choice between two jobs. At Job A, you will work very hard, but the workday will be over before you realize it. At Job B, all you have to do is answer half a dozen simple phone calls a day. The rest of the time will be spent waiting to go home. Which job would you prefer? How does your answer support the idea of taking initiative at work?

SUCCESS STORIES

Choose one of the people below. Use the Internet and library resources to learn more about the person. It may help to reference business journals, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and *Business Weekly*. Write a 2-page summary about the person's use of initiative and how it changed the person's work life and personal life. How did the person take risks or use new ideas to succeed?

Will Keith Kellogg (Kellogg Co.)

Henry Ford (Ford Motor Co.)

Milton Hershey (The Hershey Foods Corp.)

Walt Disney (Walt Disney Co.)

Sam Walton (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.)

Mary Kay Ash (Mary Kay Cosmetics, Inc.)

Berry Gordy (Motown Records)

Ruth Handler (Co-founder of Mattel, Inc. and creator of "Barbie")

Dave Thomas (Wendy's International, Inc.)

Ted Turner (Turner Broadcasting System, Inc.)

Oprah Winfrey (Harpo Productions, Inc.)

UPPING YOUR INITIATIVE

1. If an interviewer asked you to list 3 things about yourself that would make you a good employee, what would you list?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
2. If an interviewer asked you to list your 3 greatest weaknesses (a common interview question), what would you list?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
3. List 3 initiatives you could take to improve one of your major weaknesses.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
4. Imagine you have trouble concentrating because a fellow employee talks to you constantly. List 3 initiatives you could take to solve the problem.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
5. Think of a recent problem you have had, at work or elsewhere. What initiative, if any, did you take to solve the problem? What happened?

How could you have solved the problem using a stronger initiative? What might the results have been?

THE REWARDS OF INITIATIVE

Whenever you take initiative on the job, there's a good chance that your actions will produce a reward. For each situation described below, write a possible initiative you could take and a possible reward it could produce. The reward can be an external event or an internal benefit. There are many correct answers, so be creative.

1. You work at a local theater where your job is to take ticket orders over the phone. Your coworkers usually chat when the phones aren't ringing.

You decide to: _____

As a result: _____

2. You work at an Italian restaurant. One night, a couple celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary orders chocolate mousse for dessert. They tell you a story about the chocolate mousse they ate on their first date years ago. Unfortunately, there is no chocolate mousse on the menu.

You decide to: _____

As a result: _____

3. You work in an auto repair shop. You've been a mechanic in the garage for two years, but you're really interested in learning more about the business side of the shop.

You decide to: _____

As a result: _____

4. You work at a small, locally owned hotel. The outdated phone system doesn't always work properly. Frequently, guests miss important messages or get them too late. The owner of the hotel wants to upgrade to a better system, but doesn't know how to pay for it.

You decide to: _____

As a result: _____

EXPRESSING YOUR IDEAS

Initiative is usually welcomed by employers and coworkers. However, it's not just an idea that counts, but the way you present it. The key is to be constructive and sincere. If you're bossy or rude, or if you seem like a know-it-all, your ideas might not be welcomed.

In each situation below, how would you choose to explain your idea to your employer?

1. Your workplace only has one copy machine. To use it, you usually have to wait in line. By the time you reach the machine, it's frequently out of paper or ink, or it isn't working properly.

You decide to investigate the copy machine market to find a smaller model that is affordable and can take the load off the larger copier.

Here is what you say to your employer:

2. You work as an assistant manager for a clothing store. You spend a lot of time talking with young people about fashion and trends. You know that a certain style of jeans is becoming very popular. Your manager ordered a large number of jeans that are not very popular. There are only two days to change the order before it is shipped.

Here is what you say to your manager:

EXPRESSING YOUR IDEAS (CONT'D)

3. You work in a child-care center where your job is to plan activities for pre-schoolers. Everyone at the center is required to be CPR-certified. In addition, you would like to get Basic First Aid certification, both for your job and for your personal enrichment. You would like for your employer to pay the course fee.

Here is what you say to your employer:

4. You deliver food for a local caterer. Currently, the owner pays you flat fee of \$5 for each delivery. Figuring the cost per mile would take up too much of her time and she is very busy. However, the business is growing and delivery routes are becoming longer. You think the system would be fairer if you received 50 cents per mile.

Here is what you say to your employer:

TESTING YOUR INITIATIVE

Are you a risk taker or are you happy with the status quo? To find out more about your level of initiative, answer each question below as quickly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers, so be honest.

1. Imagine your boss is going to miss a plane because he doesn't have time to organize his notes for an out-of-town meeting. You:
 - A) make sure you're hard at work when he passes, so he won't snap at you.
 - B) ask your boss if there's anything you can do to help.
 - C) offer to organize the notes while he wraps up some other jobs.

2. You recently learned a new computer program at work. Now you're constantly interrupted by other employees who haven't mastered the program yet. You:
 - A) move your desk to a location where you won't be interrupted so often.
 - B) ask your supervisor if she can encourage others to give you some space.
 - C) ask your supervisor if you can conduct a series of training sessions to teach other employees how to use the program.

3. You receive a sales call for a product that your company does not carry. The caller doesn't know how to locate the product. You:
 - A) apologize to the customer and tell him to have a nice day.
 - B) ask your boss if it would be okay to give the caller information on a company that carries the product.
 - C) give the customer the phone number of a company that carries the product.

4. You work as a teacher at an elementary school. You would like for your school to have an anti-violence program. You:
 - A) talk with other teachers to see who might be able to teach the program.
 - B) ask your principal if it would be possible to start an anti-violence program.
 - C) choose an anti-violence program that you like and organize a parent-teacher meeting to discuss the possibility.

5. Your workplace is very drab and boring. It makes you feel depressed just to walk through the door. You:
 - A) spend part of your workday on the Internet, looking at decorating web sites.
 - B) ask your boss if it would be possible to add some changes to the office.
 - C) offer to spend a weekend sprucing up the office if the boss will pay for some plants and artwork that you will select.

TESTING YOUR INITIATIVE (CONT'D)

To find out more about your answers, look at the description of each answer type below.

“A” answers: These answers show passive action. Passive employees often do as little as possible to get the job done. They usually avoid problems and wait for the boss to give them directions. Passive employees can strengthen their problem-solving skills by brainstorming with coworkers to find specific solutions to work-related problems.

“B” answers: These answers show more initiative, but they still point to the type of employee who lacks direction and the ability to make decisions independently. This kind of employee can take a stronger initiative by giving the boss specific ideas for making the company more efficient, productive and successful.

“C” answers: These answers point to employees who are assertive and who show strong initiative. Not only do these workers come up with ideas, but they carry them out with little or no guidance. While these ideas are usually welcomed by management, assertive employees must be careful to present their ideas constructively and to go through proper channels before putting major changes into effect.

1. Did you select any answer type 3 or more times? Do you think the explanation of that answer type applies to you? Why or why not?

2. Based on what you learned, in what ways could you improve your ability to take initiative on the job?

THOUGHTS FROM THE VIDEO

The quotes below are taken from the video, *Taking Initiative on the Job*. Choose one and write a short essay describing what the quote means to you. Do you agree or disagree? Does the quote apply to your own life in some way? Does it apply to someone you know? If so, how?

1 “No business can grow if everyone just reports to work. And if a business doesn’t grow, it doesn’t survive.”

2 “An employee can simply sit and wait for his boss to tell him what to do. [But] this is a recipe for disaster on the job.”

3 “Taking initiative...is usually appreciated, but be a little careful. Make sure you don’t overstep your authority and change something the higher-ups don’t want changed.”

4 “No matter how small your job is, you can make a significant difference.”

5 “Why make the effort? Isn’t it just more work? Will anybody really notice?”

6 “A ship is safe at harbor, but that is not where ships belong. Get out on the open ocean.”

7 “It’s a lot more fulfilling to use your brain and your energy on your job than to watch the clock all day.”

BUSINESS RESEARCH

One way to take initiative is to learn everything you can about your place of business. The more you know, the more ways you'll find to contribute and make improvements.

Follow the steps below to learn more about your company or organization. If you don't have a job at the moment, choose a company that you would like to work for in the future.

1. Does the business have a website, newsletter, brochure, or other source that can tell you more? If so, what information can you learn from the source?
2. Does the business have a human resources or public relations department? Does it have any information about the business that would be useful?
3. Does the business have a formal mission statement? If so, what is it?

How can you contribute to the fulfillment of the mission statement?

4. What can you learn about the business from local or national business information sources, such as the Better Business Bureau? Does the business offer stock to the public? If so, what can you learn about the stock from newspapers or the Internet?
5. What can you learn about the structure of the business? How are decisions made? Where does the chain of command begin and end? Are there other offices or organizations in charge of your place of business? If so, describe them.

Initiative can be used in many different areas. You may be stronger in some areas than others.

For each statement below, circle the number that best describes you:

- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| 1—Never | 3—Usually |
| 2—Sometimes | 4—Always |

CREATIVITY

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. I write down good ideas on paper so I can keep track of them. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. Instead of getting frustrated, I work to find a creative solution to a problem. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. I spend time pursuing a hobby in my personal life. | 1 2 3 4 |

INDIVIDUALITY

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. I consider new approaches to the usual way of doing things. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I enjoy stating my opinions, even when others don't agree with me. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. I feel proud of who I am and of the things that make me unique. | 1 2 3 4 |

DESIRE TO WORK

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. If my help is really needed, I volunteer to do more work than expected. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I am happier doing a task than doing nothing. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. If I have nothing to do, I make a point to find something. | 1 2 3 4 |

RISK TAKING

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. When I make a mistake I see it as an opportunity to learn. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. I try new things, even when there is a chance that I will fail. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. I suggest new ideas to people, even when they don't ask for my opinion. | 1 2 3 4 |

COMMUNICATION

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. I ask other people for their ideas and opinions when I have a problem. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. When I have a conflict with someone, I try to work it out by talking with them. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. If I disagree with someone's opinion I tell them in a respectful way. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. I participate actively in discussions with my coworkers. | 1 2 3 4 |

FACT SHEETS

Before you can take initiative on the job, you have to find areas where initiative is needed. What problems can be solved? How can things be better? What can you contribute to the business?

THINK CREATIVELY

- Take time to be creative. If you pursue a hobby or interest that requires you to be creative, the benefits will improve your creative abilities at work, too.
- Find your own channels of creativity. Do you feel more creative when talking with others or when you have total silence? Do you come up with your best ideas while in the office or in the shower?
- Discover and use your individual talents. For instance, if you're a good investigator, offer to research the cost of a new office product. If you're artistic, use your talents to improve the company's ads or logo.

FIND NEW IDEAS

- List as many ideas as you can, as quickly as you can. Don't leave out ideas because they seem silly or impossible. Any idea can trigger a good idea.
- Ask coworkers to help you brainstorm for new ideas.
- Ask specific "what if" questions and answer them.
- Write a list of sources that can provide you with more information. The more knowledge you have, the more ideas you will get.
- In addition to coming up with new ideas, you can also find answers by getting rid of old ones.

LEARN TO SPOT PROBLEMS

- Constantly ask yourself questions: Why was my job created? What is my purpose? What is the purpose of my business?
- Imagine that you are the first person to ever do your job. What would you do differently? Which parts of your job are important and which could be eliminated?
- Could someone else do any part of your job more easily or efficiently?
- How could you do your job faster?
- Learn to spot the difference between important problems and small ones that don't need as much attention.

A GREAT WORKER:

- is open to new ideas.
- has the initiative to put new ideas into action.
- knows that all successful change involves taking a risk.
- owns a calendar and uses it to manage her schedule.
- learns to be good at things others dislike.
- cares about what customers, clients and coworkers find important.
- pays attention when he's a customer and notices how others provide good service.
- knows when to take a break.
- knows that work takes up a third of his time. Therefore, it should be enjoyable.

A GREAT WORKER DOES NOT:

- blame others for his mistakes.
- get discouraged when others disagree with her ideas.
- assume anything negative about anyone or any situation.
- put off things that can be done now.
- support an idea simply because others agree with it.
- view those who disagree with her as the enemy and write them off forever.
- complain helplessly. Rather, he works to find solutions.

Step 1: What is the problem?

Define the problem using specific words. Who is involved? How serious is the problem? What are the factors contributing to the problem? How long is the problem likely to continue?

Step 2: Get more information.

The best way to find answers is to get information. Check library books on the subject, relevant websites, company records, or articles in trade magazines. Talk with people who are involved or who may have experienced similar problems. Get as much information as you can, but don't use this "research period" to delay your work on the problem.

Step 3: Come up with as many possible solutions as you can.

This step will work best if you get help from someone else. It can be someone who is also affected by the problem, or someone who might have the skills needed to think of appropriate ideas. Brainstorm together to come up with ideas that will trigger new alternatives.

Step 4: Choose the best solution and apply it.

By weighing the pros and cons of each solution, and by using what you have learned in your research, choose the solution you think will work best for everyone. Develop a written plan for putting your idea into action. If the first solution doesn't work, be prepared to try another one. Also, do you need to get your plan approved before putting it into action, or can you simply move forward?

Step 5: Analyze the results.

What kind of difference, if any, did your solution make? What did others have to say about it?

Step 6: Learn from your mistakes.

Assume responsibility and be able to admit that your actions did not work as you planned. Ask yourself and your coworkers what you could have done differently. Ask others what they would have done. Use what you learn to prevent future mistakes.

Step 7: Give yourself credit for success.

When an idea is successful, remember to congratulate yourself. Move on to the next problem with new confidence.

Step 1: Choose the right goals.

- Don't try to set too many goals. You'll have more luck with fewer goals that are more specific and focused.
- Make sure your work goals are mutually agreed upon by everyone who will be working toward them.
- Know your abilities and your limits. Don't set goals that are too hard or too easy.
- Write your goals down on paper and keep them in a place where they can easily be seen.
- Make sure your goals have outcomes that you can see and measure for success.
- Focus on what you *can* do, not on what you *cannot* do.

Step 2: Stick with your goals.

- Start with the goal that will have the greatest impact.
- Give yourself a reward each time you achieve a goal or make significant progress toward reaching it.
- Review your goals on a regular basis and adjust them as necessary.
- Look for roadblocks to your goals and find ways to get rid of them.
- Learn to ask for help when you need it—politely but assertively.

Step 3: Make the most of each day.

- Keep a daily to-do list, with important items at the top and least important tasks at the bottom.
- Don't waste time on items at the bottom of your list until you have worked on the important tasks.
- Don't get weighed down in trivial activities that prevent you from making real progress on your list.
- Use a day-planning calendar to schedule all of your major activities and responsibilities.

STUDENT WORKSHEETS

1. **Answers will vary, but should resemble the following: Taking initiative means seeking out or recognizing what you can do to make your workplace more profitable, more efficient, or simply a nicer place to work.**
2. **b) the federal government owed the state money, a discovery that saved her job.**
3. **c) the computers would be obsolete long before the switches would burn out.**
4. **Answers will vary but should resemble one of the following: 1) A busy employer doesn't have time to give employees step-by-step instructions. 2) An employer appreciates a worker who comes up with ideas. 3) Initiative sets a good example for other workers.**
5. **d) pauper.”**
6. **c) He picked up a push broom that was lying in the hallway.**
7. **d) give the boss a suggestion about what you could be doing.**
8. **Answers will vary, but should resemble two of the following: 1—it is common sense to fix what needs to be fixed. 2—The organization will function better, which will benefit you. 3—It will showcase your talents and help you get noticed. 4—You can point to your efforts during evaluations. 5—It will make your job more interesting, fun, and exciting. 6—It's more fulfilling to use your brain and energy than to watch the clock all day. 7—When you try new things, you learn new skills.**
9. **Answers will vary.**

How could you solve each problem below by using initiative? **Answers will vary, but suggestions are given.**

1. You work for a small bakery in your hometown. The bakery is locally famous for its cranberry banana bread. In the summer, when business is booming, tourists from around the country fill the store to buy the bread. They complain that they can't get anything like it back home. In the winter, when tourism is slow, the bakery has trouble making a profit. Sometimes, the lack of revenue even forces the owner to cut back your hours.

You could propose the development of a mail-order department to handle orders for the cranberry banana bread and other baked goods. Catalogs could be distributed to summer customers, allowing them to order the bread year-round.

2. You work for a coffee shop that has two basic types of customers. First, there are business people who come in to get their morning coffee on the go. Second, there are small groups of people who sit at tables and talk to each other while enjoying slow cups of coffee. Lately, you've noticed that some customers are annoyed about not having enough space while standing in line. They must crowd around a row of tall stools that line a counter. You've also noticed that the stools are usually unoccupied.

You could design a better layout for the restaurant. You might find a better spot for customers to wait in line. Also, you could move the counter and stools, or do away with them completely. With the stools removed, you might find a better use for the counter, such as a display space for fruit, muffins, or other products.

3. You work in a pizza delivery place as an order taker. Someday, you want to be a cartoonist. Your boss constantly gets on your case because you doodle when you aren't taking orders. He says you should draw on your own time. To make things worse, he's really stressed out because he can't think of a way to market his new Rocketship Pizza Combo without spending a fortune on advertising.

You could offer to help with the marketing by designing a poster to promote the Rocketship Pizza Combo. You could do the artwork when orders are slow. You could even research the cost of having the posters printed. You would have your first cartooning job and you would solve a problem for your boss.

RESOURCES

Inroads, Inc.

a non-profit career development organization serving 48 US cities

10 South Broadway, Suite 700
St. Louis, MO 63102

314-241-7488

www.inroadsinc.com

Center for Adult Development

a non-profit educational and service organization that promotes adult development in the workplace

5225 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 214
Washington, DC 20015

202-363-8184

www.adultdev.org

Association for Career and Technical Education

a non-profit organization with a wide range of information on vocational-technical education

1410 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

800-826-9972

www.avaonline.org

experience.com

offers online career and college information to young people, including job listings, resume guidelines, and discussion on a variety of workplace issues

www.experience.com