



Making a Good First Impression

Discussion, group work, role play (60 min):

Materials: Flipchart, markers, copies of "Tips for Making a Positive First Impression."

I. Opening discussion (10 min)

Write the following quote from philosopher William James on a flip chart:

"It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome." –William James

Ask participants what they think the quote means.

Elicit that in order to have the most successful work experience possible, it's important to start with a good attitude and to set goals to help us learn new things and acquire new skills. If you start your job believing that it will be terrible, you'll probably prove yourself right.

Ask: "Why is it important to make a good first impression? What happens if you get off on the wrong foot?"

II. Group work/role plays (40 min)

Break participants into groups of four and distribute blank paper or sheets of chart paper. Tell the groups that they have five minutes to think of the "Top Five" mistakes they think people make that give a bad first impression.

When time is up, ask them to turn over the page and give them five more minutes to write at least five ways to make a good first impression.

Then tell the groups their task is to role play all five items on each list. Give the groups about 10 minutes to prepare. They should create a scene set in a workplace where two new employees are starting their first day of work. One group member should portray all of the "dos" and another group member should portray all of the "don'ts." Other group members can play the boss, coworkers, etc.

Give each group a chance to present. After each presentation ask the audience to identify the dos and don'ts that were shown.

III. Wrap up (10 min)

After each group has presented, pass out copies of the "Tips for Making a Positive First Impression" sheet and review it together. Ask the teens if they agree with the tips. Which ones do they think are most important? Hardest to do? Why?

Tips for Making a Positive First Impression

Your supervisor and your colleagues will make assumptions about you based on their first impression, so think carefully about the impression you make and how it will help you achieve your goals on the job. Here are some things that contribute to a good first impression.

Be On Time!

If you are late to work even once during your first week or two, you could show up on time every day for the next year and people will still think you are the kind of person who is late. Make it a habit to arrive early, especially for the first couple weeks on the job.

Ask Questions & Take Initiative

What's the one thing that supervisors hate most? It's employees who don't ask questions or take initiative. If you aren't sure about something, don't wait until your supervisor has to explain it to you. Ask! And whenever you don't have anything to do, volunteer to do something helpful. For example, if there's an event planned in the cafeteria, volunteer to set up the chairs and tables.

Have a Positive Attitude

They call it "work" for a reason. You often have to do things that may be unpleasant, feel "beneath you," or are just tedious. Remember, you're going to be there anyway. It's easier on you—and everyone else—to do an unpleasant task with a good attitude than a bad one.

Use Positive Body Language

Especially at first, you will be judged as much by your body language as by what you say. The most important words in body language are "eye contact" and "posture." People who are successful look other people in the eye when talking to them. They also sit and stand straight instead of slouching, so they look alert and ready to go. Both of these skills can take practice, but the better you get at them, the better the reaction you'll get from others and the more successful you'll become.

Dress Appropriately

Know the dress code at your job and follow it (even if it's not written down). If you're at a summer camp, you may be allowed to wear shorts and a t-shirt. If you're working in an office, you may have to wear a collared shirt and slacks—or maybe even a coat and a tie. While there are variations within the dress code (unless you're required to wear a uniform), they can be quite narrow. You may think there's nothing wrong with wearing a tank top or a t-shirt to work, but if not one of your supervisors wears one, don't do it.

In addition, regardless of the job, make sure you're well-groomed: comb your hair, make sure your nails are clean, don't overdo it on cologne or perfume, and keep your jewelry modest.

Learn Names

Here's a secret to success: Learn the name of everyone you work with and use it when you talk with them. If you talk to a very successful person, they will often tell you that a key to their success was developing a method to remember people's names. You would be surprised how many of them go home at night and write down the name of everyone they met, along with one memorable thing about the person that helps them remember the name.

If that seems goofy to you, just know that someone else is doing it, and someday you may be competing with that person for a job. You won't even know their name, but they'll know yours.