

SUCCEEDING IN THE WORLD OF WORK

In our present society of rapid change and constantly shifting priorities, it is estimated that individuals can expect to change careers approximately 4 to 6 times throughout their work lives. Yet within those career positions, an individual's values, skills, and knowledge are constant and transportable, enabling the individual to be successful in the world of work in general.

The field of social work practice reflects the larger society with political and social changes defining the appropriate skills of today and tomorrow's professional social worker. Therefore, we see that the more successful social worker possesses a wide breadth of skills. As always, the social work professional must understand the individual client, but he must now also understand the impact of the local, national, and global environment in which that individual functions.

In addition, the approach that is taken with the client is now strength-based rather than the previously pathology-based in its perspective. This means that today's social worker strives to identify the strengths or assets a client brings to the situation and capitalizes on those in the intervention planning. This approach calls upon today's social worker to be insightful, resourceful, and respectful in ways that demand more knowledge and skill than in the past. As a result, today's social worker must be willing to engage in ongoing self-assessment, be open to continual self-development, and must possess a clear sense of her identity as a cultural being, and to be able to define who she is as a person in the context of the profession of social work.

Contemporary social work students should emerge from an academic program with an awareness of the need for interpersonal, technical, and organizational skills. The individual social worker must be attuned to the maintenance and enhancement of one's needs and opportunities for professional development, to honing of work habits, and to leadership development. Today's social worker must understand himself in relation to clients, co-workers, and the profession, in general, as well as the many multidisciplinary perspectives of team or flat (non-hierarchical) organizations. This awareness serves to make a difference in the way an individual views his job and performs at work.

The professional ladder of a social worker generally runs parallel to changes in the world of work, where opportunities for continuous learning and development serve as the rungs on the career ladder*. Individuals must understand the structure of the new world of work. The changes dictate that social workers now carry their portfolio of skills and experiences with them from agency to agency rather than spend their working lives with one agency. The successful professional must, therefore, be able to self-assess, recognize growth opportunities, be willing to take calculated risks, and understand how to negotiate change.

Professional Development – Foundation Level

Is able to attain and maintain professional credentials, license, etc.; is aware of commitment to planning for continued professional development.

Knowledge: Understands license requirements; is aware of legislative issues regarding licensing standards; is knowledgeable of new certification and developments in the field.

Values: Recognizes the importance and value of the social work license to oneself and to the profession; understands the protection provided to the client by licensing and its recognition as a regulator.

Professional Development – Advance Level

Knowledge: Possesses knowledge that passing the LISW exam is evidence of professional competency; is aware of resources for continuous self-development (seminars, conferences); possesses knowledge of self in terms of desirable employability skills and strengths and weaknesses!

Skills: Has the capacity to conduct continuous self-evaluations; able to create a personal resume; able to successfully conduct self in a variety of interview settings.

Values: Holds a commitment to continuous learning; is committed to maintaining the integrity of self and profession, organization, or agency.

Possible Assessment Activities: Registers for LISW exam and passes exam; participates in assessment activities, such as Personal Profile Survey, Myers Briggs, Learning Styles Inventory, etc.; creates workplan for continuing education, creates a resume and professional portfolio; conducts a mock interview.

Work Habits – Foundation Level

Is flexible, adaptable, able to compromise, committed to job, willing to go beyond job description, able to manage time effectively, is respectful of clients, co-workers, and other professionals; can work effectively in an interdisciplinary team; is a clear and concise communicator, both verbally and in writing.

Knowledge: Understands the changing needs of society in a global world; has an understanding of how to budget time; recognizes the major contributions of other professions to the field of social work and social work to other professions; understands need to continue to develop job skills; knowledge of organizational structures.

Skills: Is capable of setting priorities, delegating responsibility, budgeting time; possesses effective communication skills; respects other professions; can directly address a concern with peer or counselor.

Values: Has a commitment to lifelong learning in the profession; has respect for the client's personal value system; views creativity with respect and humility; recognizes supervision as a learning method; respects clear, direct communication.

Work Habits – Advanced Level

Knowledge: Comprehends the politics and nuances of authority relationships; understands how motivation, goals, and values drive people's actions.

Skills: Invites and uses constructive criticism; is able to collaborate; integrates knowledge of other professions to own knowledge base; exercises problem solving skills, decision making skills, and negotiating skills; is able to recognize when current systems are not working for a client and makes creative use of other resources.

Values: Possesses respect for self, others, and other professions; respects the value of criticism; can work for change within organizational structures.

Possible Assessment Activities: In Box/Out Box exercise for prioritization and time allocation; creating a daily schedule for one month, indicating times set aside for leisure, learning, work, etc.; role plays case studies simulating need for negotiation skills, receiving criticism, and team projects.

Leadership Development – Foundation Level

Is able to attain, maintain, and move into positions of increased responsibility in social work profession, has strong work ethic, knows how to be prepared, follows through on commitments, works independently, knows when and how to use supervision, shows initiative, balances personal and professional roles to avoid stress/burn-out; is able to achieve comfort with competing demands and standards.

Knowledge: Is knowledgeable in techniques of conflict resolution, motivational theory, and leadership theory; is aware of resources in community; student is able to state what he knows and does not know and when to seek help; possesses knowledge of learning styles, desirable management skills, personality types, and desirable leadership skills; understands how the work environment impacts or interacts with personal life; understands the concept of measurable outcomes.

Skills: Is flexible; makes rational decisions based on knowledge; recognizes supervision as opportunity to learn; is available as a resource to strengthen the morale of the institution and the profession.

Values: Values compensation that respects one's skills, experience, and education; uses knowledge wisely; views seeking supervision as a strength; views problems as an opportunity for learning.

Leadership Development – Advanced Level

Knowledge: Possesses knowledge of the work environment such as career ladders, personnel practices, and social work practice; has a knowledge of the importance of organizational culture.

Skills: Is able to deal effectively with conflict; possesses self-awareness and self-assessment; take risks; (is able to communicate a vision for the organization or program).

Values: Is committed to bring forth professional expertise and resources, (be all you can be); is dedicated to the enhancement of the profession and society; is willing to mentor and pass on knowledge gleaned from experience; possesses integrity.

Possible Assessment Activities: Writes essay on view of leadership in a social work agency and assess self in relation to the essay in terms of present situation and plans for leadership development; role plays confrontational situations where leadership is necessary; articulates personal and professional capacities to highlight in a mentoring situation.

*Hall, Douglas T. and Associates (1996). *The Career is Dead – Long Live the Career, A Relational Approach to Careers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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