

What is Hospitality?

“Thanks for your *hospitality!*” What does that word mean, anyway? Literally, it means “the receiving of a guest; the treatment given to or received by a guest.” But did you know that there is an entire industry of careers related to this concept? People who work in the hospitality field could have jobs that range from being a part-time cook in a restaurant to serving as president of an international company! The hospitality industry includes opportunities to work with hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, convention centers – even theme parks – to name a few. And although the training for this kind of work is as multi-faceted as a beautiful quilt, there is one common thread that runs through all of the pieces and holds everything together: customer service.

If you are considering employment in the food service industry, the best way to understand customer service is to think about *your own* experiences as a customer in the places where you choose to dine away from home. What makes you return over and over; and what makes you decide never to go back? Think about what you notice when you walk into a restaurant. Most people will make a decision about the quality of an eating establishment within the first few minutes. Are the trash cans overflowing, or is the area tidy and wiped clean? Are the supplies fully stocked, and are the employees helpful when you tell them that you need something? In what condition do you find the rest rooms? Do you feel welcome and appreciated? Or do you feel like you have bothered the people who work there? Customer service is not simply the “Thank you” that you should hear from a staff member when you pay for your meal; it is, rather, the way you are treated from the time you enter the building until the time you leave.

When you are an employee in a restaurant, you contribute to the ambience of that environment if you have any contact at all with the public. Whether you are clearing tables, sweeping the floor, seating people, taking orders and serving the meals, or working the cash register, your attitude has an effect on the customers. It is a privilege to be selected as someone’s dining choice, and people need to know that you appreciate their patronage. There are many ways to demonstrate that appreciation, most of which require very little effort on your part. Here are some very basic ingredients for good customer service.

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- S – SMILE!** Smiling is a universal language that conveys a feeling of acceptance, welcome, and good will.
- E – EYE CONTACT:** When you look someone in the eye, you create a feeling of connection that lets the customer know he or she has your full attention at that moment. Even during very busy times, this small gesture will show that you care and you are listening.
- R – RESPECT:** Respecting your customers includes demonstrating respect for your managers, your co-workers, and your work environment. Unresolved issues need to be addressed privately – no one wants to hear you grumbling or complaining.
- V – VOICE:** Speak to your customers the way you would like to be spoken to. Does your voice have a sarcastic tone? Do you mumble and then become frustrated when people don't understand you? Speak in a voice that is clear, friendly and delivered with appropriate volume for the setting.
- I – INITIATIVE:** Anticipate what needs to be done and then do it without being asked. Whether it's prepping food in the kitchen before it runs out or restocking paper products before the customers report empty containers or offering a carrying tray for take-out orders, customers appreciate having their needs met in an efficient and timely manner.
- C – CONVERSATION:** Learn to engage in small talk if a customer wants to chat a little. Don't carry on personal conversations with your co-workers as if the customers are invisible; engage them, include them, and do your best to remember their names!
- E – ENTHUSIASM:** When you are enthusiastic, you lift the spirits of the people around you!

Working successfully in a restaurant often requires a little bit of theatrical skill. No one feels up all of the time; and there are certainly days when being pleasant to others is the last thing on our minds. However, working with the public is much like being part of the cast of a Broadway play: every day, the audience is different; and even the ones who return are expecting the same quality "show" each time. When you walk through those doors and clock in for your shift, you must learn to leave your personal troubles outside. Your customers are not responsible for your problems, and they should not have to suffer as a result of them. If, however, the thought of serving people day-after-day truly *is* at the root of your discontent, then the hospitality industry – especially working in a restaurant – is probably not the best fit for you.

Hospitality has to do with treating people the way you would like to be treated. Good customer service is essential to success within the hospitality industry. Think of someone in your life whom you are always happy to see. Now, practice putting that person's face on everyone you encounter. If you can do that, you will be successful not only in your career, but in your life!

Cecilia B. Thomas, Owner
Tropical Smoothie Café and Deli

APPLYING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED:
What is Hospitality?

1. Write a paragraph in which you give several reasons for calling the food service and lodging businesses the “Hospitality Industry”.
2. Write a paragraph that tells of a very memorable experience that made you decide to return to a place or never to go back to that place again. Tell why you made your decision in your paragraph.
3. Why is cleanliness so important to the businesses in this industry? Do you care about places being kept clean? Why?
4. What annoys you about going into a place of business where the employees seem to be more interested in other things than helping you? Why?

The Workplace of Today

The summary from *Virginia's Changing Workplace** gives some interesting and perhaps surprising information about what employers are looking for in the folks they hire.

Read the 3-page article and look over the list of jobs that follows.

Then: answer these questions.

1. If you are working now, what has your supervisor told or shown you he or she thinks is the most important thing a worker should do? If you are not currently working, either think back to the job you did hold and that supervisor to answer the question, or ask a friend or family member.

2. How can you show someone that you have a strong work ethic?

3. What is one way that you have shown initiative? Think both of your work history and your life so far to answer this.

4. What are three things that you can and will do to persuade someone to hire you?
 - 1.

 - 2.

 - 3.

**The executive summary is used with permission of Career Prospects in Virginia, www.careerprospects.org*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virginia's Changing Workplace summarizes what 564 employers across the state have to say about entry-level jobs for people who do not have 4-year college degrees. The employers were large and small, rural and urban, male and female. Some were franchise owners or the proprietors of their own businesses; others were the human resources directors of hospitals, manufacturing plants, banks, and other large organizations. The 54 occupations they talked to us about range from those that require virtually no hard skills to the highly technical, from landscaping to carpentry to radiology.

The Workplace of Today

According to Virginia's employers, today's workplace trends include:

- **Dissatisfaction with the work ethic of employees**
Employers feel that today's workers, especially at the entry level, need a greater awareness of the basic workplace value of 'a day's work for a day's pay.'
- **The computerized workplace**
The number of workers who use or rely on computers and computerized technology has increased dramatically, and new ways to use this technology are being found every day.
- **Worker empowerment**
Today's workers are expected to solve problems and make decisions that were formerly the province of supervisors and managers.
- **Rising educational expectations, professionalization, and credentialism**
Employers are demanding higher educational levels of job applicants, and more occupations are requiring licensing or certification.
- **Customer service**
Throughout the workplace customers and clients are demanding better service and better quality products.
- **The flexible workplace**
Constant change requires flexibility and adaptability, particularly in the face of cross-training, the trend toward temporary work, and the competition-driven need for non-traditional work hours in service-oriented occupations.
- **Constant change that requires lifelong learning**
Today's workers must be prepared to keep up with demands for the new skills required by constant change throughout the workplace.

Virginia's Changing Workplace

Martin, J. H., Carrier, A. H., & Hill, E. A. *Virginia's Changing Workplace: Employers Speak*. University of Virginia: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, 1997.

To keep pace with these trends, employers require new workers to have a number of basic technical skills that have come to be called 'hard skills.' They expect employees to have learned these skills in school.

- **Reading**
Successful applicants for the vast majority of jobs must be able to read, understand what they are reading, and apply this understanding to their work.
- **Math**
Workers need to be able to do basic math, including word problems.
- **Writing**
The demand for workers who can write clearly has increased in almost every occupation. Writing clearly includes using correct spelling and grammar in order to convey ideas to coworkers, clients, and customers.
- **Speaking**
The ability to convey one's meaning clearly is vital to successful oral communication in both formal and informal contexts.
- **Computer literacy**
Computer literacy includes knowing how computers operate and what they can do; familiarity with word processing, spreadsheet, and database software; carrying out basic hardware-related tasks; and recognizing the difference between operator error and computer-caused problems.
- **Reasoning, problem-solving and decision-making**
Successful problem-solving and decision-making require using logic to solve problems and make decisions based on an understanding of how and why things work the way they do.
- **Understanding the broader picture**
In order to make intelligent decisions, employees need to understand how their work fits into the wider picture and contributes to the broader aims and goals of the organization.

In addition to these basic skills, employers are looking for a number of personal qualities—'soft skills.' Many employers believe that some or all of these soft skills are inculcated in the home rather than in school.

- **A strong work ethic**
To employers, a good work ethic means good attendance, promptness, the flexibility to meet employers' changing requirements, having a positive attitude, and making an effort to do the job thoroughly and well.
- **A positive attitude**
The 'positive attitude' employers want includes cooperativeness, taking direction and correction willingly, eagerness to learn, being pleasant and polite, and in particular, getting along with others.
- **Independence and initiative**
Showing independence and initiative means working without the need for constant supervision—finding things to do on one's own, making suggestions, and being interested in making things work better.

- **Self-presentation**

Self-presentation means making a good impression—wearing appropriate clothes, speaking well, being courteous and professional.

Of all these trends and skills, those pertaining to the work ethic were by far the most important. In fact, employers' dissatisfaction with the work ethic of today's entry-level employees was so pervasive as to be very nearly unanimous.

Finding and Keeping a First Job

Finding a job was not an original focus of this study, and numerous publications on the subject, ranging from brochures to entire books, are easily available. Nonetheless, we decided to include a chapter on getting and holding a job because even though the interview questions did not directly address the job-finding process, so many employers expressed so often and so well their astonishment and dismay over how poorly young people perform in applying and interviewing for jobs.

To summarize what employers said about getting and holding an entry-level job and about being promoted beyond the entry level:

- Employers tend to prefer applicants who are known to themselves, colleagues, or current employees. Networking is therefore the most important strategy an applicant can use to locate openings. Simply walking in to inquire is also a highly effective strategy, particularly in a small enterprise where access to the person who makes hiring decisions is relatively easy. However, the applicant most likely to be successful will use all appropriate strategies simultaneously.
- Applicants should regard each contact with the employers' establishment as a formal one. They should arrive neatly and appropriately dressed, if possible unaccompanied, and able to remain for on-the-spot testing or interviewing if these are offered.
- Resumes and applications should be neat, complete, and truthful. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation should be perfect.
- Job applicants should anticipate that they will be tested for both soft and hard skills and be prepared to encounter such testing at any point during the job-finding process. They should also be aware that drug testing is a mandatory pre-employment test administered by many employers.
- Job applicants should remember that the interview is their best opportunity to sell themselves to the employer. They should dress, behave and speak accordingly.
- In today's workplace, entry-level workers would do well to regard their jobs as paid training, providing a work history and basic workplace skills for the future. Thus, even if entry-level employees do not expect to spend many years at a place of employment, or do not feel that their work is what they really want to do, they should treat the job as what employers call 'a real job.' They should plan to spend at least a year at a job in order to become a more attractive candidate for a new one.

Career Prospects: General Workplace Skills Internet Lesson

Teacher Notes: See this site for good basic work skills-related articles and exercises for your students. Students can do the activities online so that they are able to practice their computer skills while job searching. Most activities include a printer-friendly page which will be helpful to students. “Looking for and Finding a Job” is an online activity that can be used with the Career Prospects pages in this Guide.

Here are some of the lessons on this site:

1. Looking for and finding a job
2. How to figure out what kind of a career you might like
3. Hunting for a job is a job in itself.
4. Learn to read the want ads.
5. How do you fill out a job application?
6. How to plan and write a cover letter.
7. Learn what goes into a resume and how to format one.
8. Networking is the best way to find work. Here’s how to get started.
9. How to have more contact with potential employers through internships, informational interviewing, etc.
10. How to prepare for a job interview
11. Use entrepreneurial skills to create opportunities.

Career Prospects in Virginia:

http://www3.ccps.virginia.edu/career_prospects/Teachers/teach-jobsearch.html