“Kids These Days!”
Preparing At-Risk Youth for Workplace Success

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Danbury, NC
90 min session
Part 1: Soft Skills

What soft skills are in highest demand with today’s employers? Why do so many youth fail to use them?
Employers want workers with SOFT SKILLS:

People skills needed to deal with difficult situations and get along with coworkers, customers, and supervisors.
WHAT PEOPLE SKILLS (SOFT SKILLS) ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR SUCCESS AT WORK?
EMPLOYER SURVEY SAYS:

1. Self-Control Skills
   - Handling stress
   - Ignoring provocation
EMPLOYER SURVEY SAYS:

2. Communication Skills
   - Understanding directions
   - Dealing w/criticism
EMPLOYER SURVEY SAYS:

3. Social Skills

- Joining activities
- Reading body language
EMPLOYER SURVEY SAYS:

4. Problem Solving Skills

- Prioritizing tasks
- Avoiding assumptions
Why do some high risk youth have a hard time using these skills?

1. SKILL DEFICIT
2. MOTIVATION DEFICIT
3. COGNITIVE CONFLICT
Imagine you get a job as a bag boy at a busy supermarket...
Would you help Jenna out at register 4, please?

How about getting me a soda out of the machine in the break room?

I need you to sit with my kids for a couple of hours after work.
You’ve had a "COGNITIVE CONFLICT!!"

@#$% this!!

Enough is enough!
What’s the Point?

Workplace success requires not only strong vocational skills, but mastery of a range of social skills as well.

Many at-risk youth simply do not have these vital skills.
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Part 2: Cognitive Conflicts

What are employers’ most common unspoken expectations? Why do teens have such a hard time with them?
What beliefs drive youth behavior in their HOME & PERSONAL lives?

1. Life should be fun!
2. Family & friends come first.
3. It’s okay to take a break when you’ve worked hard.
4. Friends should help each other out with problems.
5. Personal appearance is a personal decision.
6. No one has the right to boss you around.
Thomas’ Home Situation

Thomas has a fight with his parents when they criticize his choice of clothes. He storms off to his room, slams the door, and logs onto Facebook.

‘Pull your pants up! Change that shirt! Take out that earring!’ Why can’t you guys just let me dress myself?”

5. Personal appearance is a personal decision.
One night, Lori decides to have a few drinks with her friends and stays out past her 11PM curfew. When she gets home, her aunt is furious with her, but Lori blows her off.

“It’s MY life. I’m old enough to make up my own mind about what I can and can’t do!”

6. No one has the right to boss you around.
Employers want workers with GOOD ATTITUDES:

i.e., An intuitive understanding of their “common sense” expectations.
What babysitter expectations are so common sense that you wouldn’t bother mentioning them?

E.g.: “No friends allowed.”
Common Sense
Employer Expectation #1

“Work comes first. Don’t let home & family issues get in the way.”
Common Sense
Employer Expectation #2

“Do what you are asked to do, even if you don’t want to.”
“Do your best to fit in. Don’t act or dress TOO different.”
Common Sense
Employer Expectation #4

“Always stay busy... or at least LOOK busy!”
Common Sense Employer Expectation #5

“Work is work. Don’t expect it to always be fun.”
Common Sense
Employer Expectation #6

“Stay out of other people’s problems.”
The rules which guide our PERSONAL LIVES often conflict with employers’ UNSPOKEN RULES.
Conflicting Rules of Home versus Work

1. Life should be fun!

E. Work is work. Don’t expect it to always be fun.
2. Family comes first, no matter what.

A. Work comes first. Don’t let home issues get in the way.
Conflicting Rules of Home versus Work

3. It’s okay to take a break when you’ve worked hard.

D. Always stay busy, or at least LOOK busy!
Conflicting Rules of Home versus Work

4. Friends should help each other out with problems.

F. Stay out of other people’s problems.
Conflicting Rules of Home versus Work

5. Personal appearance is a personal decision.

C. Do your best to fit in.
6. No one has the right to boss you around.

B. Do what you are asked to do, even if you don’t want to.
Most employers have unspoken expectations which they seldom explain directly to new employees. These often conflict with the beliefs young workers use in their personal or social lives, creating “cognitive conflict”.
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Part 3: Successful Interventions

How can we help at-risk youth find more success at work?
Cognitive Behavioral Interventions

CBI promotes self-change by developing awareness of thinking (cognitive) and stronger interpersonal skills (behavioral).
Stephen Covey, author of “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”:

“Seek first to UNDERSTAND, then to be UNDERSTOOD.”
Code-Switching

Helping at risk youth switch from the code of the street
Code-Switching
to the employers’
code of the workplace
Two Cognitive Behavioral Strategies

When youth are behaving unprofessionally at work due to strong personal beliefs, punishment isn’t enough.
Strategy #1. Cognitive Coaching

Indirectly teach workplace attitudes and skills by coaching students through problems.
Strategy #2. Cognitive Skills Instruction

Directly teach workplace attitudes and skills by providing classroom-based instruction.
Beginning to Work It Out
soft skills training program
for at-risk youth & young adults:

• Personal beliefs
• Unspoken Rules
• Anger management
• Dealing w/Criticism
• Expressing Concerns
• Problem Solving
Youth have a tendency to use personal beliefs when judging their work behaviors. We must help them develop both cognitive awareness and new interpersonal skills if they are going to adjust to the culture of the workplace.