Introduction:
Taking charge of your soft skills
Welcome to *UP Skills for Work*!

The program helps you build your **soft skills** which include:

- motivation
- attitude
- accountability
- presentation
- teamwork
- time management
- adaptability
- stress management
- confidence

**Soft skills** are ways of acting or thinking that make it easier to work well with other people. Sometimes they’re called “people skills.”

**This workshop**

Soft skills help you work well with others—at work, at home, and in your community.

In this workshop, we will explore 9 soft skills. We will talk about:

- Why soft skills are important
- How soft skills relate to essential skills
- What it takes to improve your soft skills
- Some strategies for solving problems at work

You will also get a chance to go over your own soft skills.

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**Futureworx**

This program is delivered in collaboration with Futureworx. For more information on soft skills, check out [futureworx.ca](http://futureworx.ca)

**Canada**

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What skills do we need at work?

- **Technical skills**: The skills needed for specific tasks at work. For example:
  - Working with power tools
  - Making an Excel spreadsheet

- **Essential skills**: Skills that are important for any type of job. For example:
  - Oral communication
  - Problem-solving

- **Soft skills**: Ways of acting and thinking that make it easier to work well with other people. For example:
  - Teamwork
  - Time management

In this workbook and the rest of the *UP Skills for Work* program, we focus on **soft skills**.

In the Skills Pyramid above, soft skills are at the bottom. You might say they are the **base for all other skills**. In fact, many experts think that soft skills are the most important skills for our success and well-being at work. In this workbook, we will talk about why that is.
What are essential skills?

Before we get into soft skills, let’s look at the skills in the middle of the pyramid: **essential skills**.

The Government of Canada has named 9 essential skills that we all need for work, for learning, and for life. You probably use at least some of these skills at work and at home every day. Essential skills help us learn the technical skills we need on the job. They also help us grow in our career and adapt to changes.

As we learn more about soft skills, you will see how **soft skills are essential too.** Through the *UP Skills for Work* program, we are also working on at least 4 of the 9 essential skills: thinking, working with others, oral communication, and continuous learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential skill</th>
<th>Workplace examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral communication:</strong></td>
<td>• Understanding feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking, listening to, and</td>
<td>• Resolving conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding people.</td>
<td>• Talking to customers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Working with others:</strong></td>
<td>• Being part of a team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working and cooperating with</td>
<td>• Working on our own alongside others</td>
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<tr>
<td>other people to get the job</td>
<td>• Creating a positive work environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>done.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking:</strong></td>
<td>• Getting organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding, understanding, and</td>
<td>• Making decisions about tricky situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considering information.</td>
<td>• Coming up with new ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Continuous learning:</strong></td>
<td>• Learning on the job</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaining new skills and knowledge</td>
<td>• Taking training courses to improve our skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>over time.</td>
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## Chart continued from previous page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential skill</th>
<th>Workplace examples</th>
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</table>
| **Numeracy:** Understanding and working with numbers, amounts, and measurement. | • Handling cash  
 • Estimating costs  
 • Placing orders |
| **Reading:** Reading and understanding written information. | • Understanding written instructions, orders, e-mails, websites, and text messages |
| **Document use:** Reading and understanding information and symbols in documents. Adding information to documents. | • Filling out an order form  
 • Checking labels on cleaning products  
 • Creating a chart or a sign |
| **Writing:** Writing text and writing in documents on paper, computers, and other devices. | • Writing e-mails, letters, and reports  
 • Keeping records  
 • Answering requests |
| **Computer use:** Using computers and other digital technology. | • Using cash registers or other machines that are run by computers  
 • Using the internet  
 • Working with spreadsheets |

A place for your notes:

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What are soft skills?

Think about the phrase **soft skills**. What comes to mind?

**Soft skills** are ways of acting or thinking that make it easier to work well with other people. Sometimes they're called “people skills.”

In the *UP Skills for Work* program, we talk about 9 specific skills that we all use to manage ourselves and work well with others. We use these skills at work, at home, and in the community.

Take a look at the 9 soft skill definitions and examples in this chart. Add in your own examples of how you use the 9 soft skills at work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft skill</th>
<th>Workplace examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation:</strong></td>
<td>• Doing your best even if no one is watching&lt;br&gt; • Having high expectations of yourself at work&lt;br&gt; Write your own example</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Attitude:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Being respectful and friendly with co-workers, supervisors, and customers&lt;br&gt; • Body language and tone of voice that show you care about doing your job well&lt;br&gt; Write your own example</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Accountability:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Taking responsibility for the quality of your work&lt;br&gt; • Admitting when you make a mistake, and fixing it&lt;br&gt; Write your own example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft skill</td>
<td>Workplace examples</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation:</strong></td>
<td>• Using language that is right for your workplace</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dressing in a way that is right for your workplace</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teamwork:</strong></td>
<td>• Helping other people when they need it</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Resolving conflicts with co-workers in a respectful way</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time management:</strong></td>
<td>• Following schedules and meeting deadlines</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Focusing on your work and getting tasks done on time</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptability:</strong></td>
<td>• Being positive about workplace changes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Being ready and able to learn new skills and new ways of doing things</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stress management:</strong></td>
<td>• Doing what you can to limit how stress is affecting you, your work, and your co-workers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Knowing how to ask for help when you are overwhelmed</td>
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<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence:</strong></td>
<td>• Believing in yourself when you have to deal with challenges and new situations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sharing new ideas and speaking up for yourself when you need to</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>
Let’s talk about it

- Which of the 9 soft skills are most important for you at work? At home?

- Do you use your soft skills differently when you’re at work than when you’re at home? How?

- Are there any skills you’d like to add to the list?

- We all learn our soft skills somewhere. Where did you learn your soft skills? Who did you learn them from?

- Let’s be honest: it can feel uncomfortable to talk about our soft skills. Why do you think that is?

A place for your notes:

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Soft skills look different for everyone

We all use soft skills every day, whether we realize it or not. At first it might seem like soft skills are just part of your personality. But that’s not really true.

Your personality can affect the way you use your soft skills. Two people with different personalities might have different ways of communicating. For example, someone who is more shy might show their teamwork skills in a different way than someone who is more outgoing. Both people could be great team players, even if they had different strategies for showing it. No matter how you choose to show them, soft skills are something you can learn and work on.

Use the table below to write down a couple examples for the two types of personalities we just talked about. How do you think they would show their teamwork skills differently at work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More shy</th>
<th>More outgoing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good teamwork looks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>like this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>sounds like this</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Soft skills and personal leadership

When you think of a “good leader,” who comes to mind? What are their qualities?

We usually think of leadership as leading other people. We can also be good leaders to ourselves. Making the most of soft skills means being good leaders to ourselves, or showing **personal leadership**.

Personal leadership is about **how we manage ourselves**, including:

- Our behaviour
- Our goals and the direction we want to take in our career
- How we work to be our best in all parts of our life (home, work, community)

We can show personal leadership in many different ways. For example:

- Understanding our strengths and our weaknesses
- Enjoying when we succeed
- Looking for ways to improve
- Sticking to a plan
- Being kind to ourselves
- Knowing how and when to ask for help
- Learning from all kinds of experiences

What are some other ways we can show personal leadership?

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**Let’s talk about it**

- What does personal leadership mean to you?
- What are some ways that you try to be a good leader to yourself?
- Do you think good personal leadership can make a difference at work? How?
How can soft skills make a difference?

No matter what technical skills you have, soft skills make a difference. Soft skills help us:

- Solve problems and get along with people
- Learn new skills and deal with changes
- Make the best use of our technical skills

Meet Amani

Amani is a cleaner in an office building. When she gets to work, the boss looks at the clock. “Ten minutes early, like always,” he says. Amani says hello to her co-workers. Everyone has a smile for her because she’s so friendly.

Later that night, Amani and her co-worker Jasmine are cleaning an office together. Jasmine watches Amani vacuuming the hallway for the second time. She thinks, *Amani cleans carefully, but she’s not the fastest cleaner on the team.* “Are you almost done?” Jasmine asks, “We still have two more floors to finish.” “Yeah, I’m almost done,” says Amani. “Here, let me help you with the garbage.”

Let’s talk about it

- Would you want to work with Amani? Why or why not?
- Which soft skills do you think Amani is good at? Which ones could she improve?
- Do you think Amani’s soft skills are making a difference for her at work? How?

A place for your notes:
Soft skills in action
Meet Sarah and Miguel

Sarah and Miguel work at the same store. They are both cashiers who serve customers quickly. One day the store has a big holiday sale. It is much busier than usual. At 9:30 am the checkout lines are already really long. Customers are getting frustrated.

Sarah looks at the long line of shoppers and groans. This is going to be an awful day, she thinks. The customers are all going to blame me for the long waits. When customers come to her station, she’s afraid to look them in the eye.

Miguel looks at his long line and thinks, Wow! Lots of people! Oh well. I just have to focus more today. He takes a deep breath. He smiles at the next customer. “Busy day today! I’m sorry about the long lines. I’ll help you as quickly as I can.”

At the end of the shift, the store manager thanks the staff for their hard work. She comes over to Miguel’s station. “Your work was especially good today,” she says.

Let’s talk about it

• How did Miguel use his soft skills to deal with this situation? How do you think his approach affected his day at work? How do you think it affected his co-workers? His boss?
• What was different about Sarah’s way of dealing with the situation?
• Have you ever been in a situation like this as a customer? How do you think Miguel’s approach affected his customers? What about Sarah’s approach?
• Have you ever been in a situation like this at work? How did you deal with it?
My Soft Skills

Now it’s time to think about your own soft skills. These questions are about how you use your soft skills in a work situation. Try to be honest with yourself here! It will help you see what your strengths are, and where you can improve.

Where are you starting from?
Read each statement and rate yourself for each one.

1 – rarely true     2 – sometimes true     3 – usually true

| When I go to work, I really want to do my best. | 1 2 3 |
| I know how to present myself. I make a good impression on people. | 1 2 3 |
| I adapt well to change. I don’t get stressed out when things change. | 1 2 3 |
| I try to keep a positive attitude, even when things are hard. | 1 2 3 |
| I’m a team player. I like working with other people and helping my co-workers. | 1 2 3 |
| I handle stress pretty well. When I start feeling stressed, I know how to deal with it. | 1 2 3 |
| I take responsibility for my work. If I make a mistake, I admit to it. I also try to fix what went wrong. | 1 2 3 |
| I know how to use my time well. I get my work done in the time I have to do it. When things are slow, I find something to do. | 1 2 3 |
| I am a confident person. When something needs to be done at work, I believe that I will do it well. | 1 2 3 |

If you have time, repeat the exercise: think about how other people would rate your skills (for example, your boss, or your friends). Do you think they would rate you the same, or differently? Why?
Making a change: Supports and barriers

So far, we’ve focused on you. But when it comes to making a positive change, you are not alone. Sometimes the first step is looking at your environment: where you are and what’s around you. In every environment, we find supports as well as barriers.

Supports and barriers come in many different forms. For example:

- The people around us
- Our life experiences
- Our financial situation
- Services we can use in our community (like taking the bus or going to the doctor)
- The place where we live, and the society that we live in

Let’s talk about it

Let’s talk about a workplace environment. At work, what kinds of supports might help you succeed? What kinds of barriers might hold you back?

A place for your notes:
What do you need to grow your soft skills?

**Improving your soft skills at work is a bit like growing a plant.** You can plant a seed. But what if there is poor soil, or too many weeds, or not enough rain? These things can make it hard for your plant to grow (barriers).

You can’t always control the soil or the weather. But you can take action or get help to make it easier for your plant to grow (supports). You can pull out the weeds. You can ask a friend or search online to learn how to make the soil better. You can water your plant on the days that it doesn’t rain.

Look at the image below. Think about these questions:

- Think of the growing plant as one of your soft skills. What is one soft skill you would like to improve at work?
- Think of the sun, the water, and the soil as supports that can help you change your soft skill. What supports do you need at work to make this change?

If you like, write some notes, or add your ideas to the image.
Strategies for setbacks: Problem-solving

Sometimes, when we are trying to make a change or learn something new, it is hard to know where to start. Problem-solving is a tool that can help.

Think back to the 9 soft skills and the 9 essential skills we learned about earlier. When we’re solving problems, we’re bringing many of these skills together.

You can use this problem-solving guide in different situations:

✔ Learning a new skill
✔ Dealing with an issue at work
✔ Thinking through a personal problem
✔ Doing activities in this workshop series

Try these steps:

Step 1 Identify the problem:
• How does it affect you?
• What are the causes of the problem?
• Are other people involved? If so, how might they view the problem differently than you?

Step 2 What are the barriers?
• What might stop you from solving this problem?
• How can you deal with those barriers?

Step 3 What are the supports?
• What knowledge or skills do you have that can help you solve the problem?
• Who can help you?
Step 4  Think about different possible solutions:
• What do you need?
• What do the other people involved need?
• What would be your ideal solution?
• What solution might other people want?
• Think of some solutions that you could live with even if they are not ideal.

Step 5  Pick a solution. List 3 or 4 possible actions to make it happen:
• Consider the pros and cons of each possible action.
• Talk about your ideas with a friend or family member.
• Which idea is best?
• Which idea is most realistic?

Step 6  Pick an action and make a plan:
• Is there anyone you need to talk to about your plan?
• Do you need more information to make sure your plan works?
• Do you need help from anyone to support your plan?

Step 7  Take action. Follow through with your plan.

Step 8  Reflect:
• Did you solve the problem? If not, what didn’t work this time?
• Consider going back to step 4 and trying another possible solution.

Remember:
You don’t have to solve the problem right away. Following these steps shows you one way to get started. But sometimes, solving a problem takes time, and more than one try.
Practicing what we learned: Problem-solving

We can use problem-solving steps to deal with real workplace issues. Here are 3 stories about people dealing with challenging situations at work. Pick one of the stories to read. Use the problem-solving steps we learned on the previous page: think about how the people in the story could resolve the issue.

Think about:

- What is the core problem?
- What are the barriers that make it hard to solve the problem?
- What are some possible solutions?
- What are some supports that could help the people involved solve the problem?

Meet Jordan and Alex

Jordan and Alex are both cooks in a hotel kitchen. Jordan works the day shift and Alex works the evening shift. They work at the same station, and they see each other briefly each day when Alex arrives at work. Alex thinks Jordan should do a better job of cleaning up when her shift is over. Jordan thinks Alex is too pushy and a bit of a bully. The tension between them keeps getting worse.

Meet Tania

Tania likes her job stocking shelves at a big store. But she’s not making enough money. She needs more hours. She has talked to her boss about it a few times, but she still isn’t getting more shifts. Tania thinks, *I like working here. But if I can’t get more than 20 hours a week, I’ll have to find a new job.*
Meet Steve and Raj

Steve works in a warehouse. He likes to stick to the rules. But his co-worker Raj always wants to bend the rules. He always wants the group to take 5 extra minutes at break time. And he tries to get people to goof off and waste time. Steve is worried that the boss might get angry with the whole group. But he doesn’t want to tell the boss about Raj’s behaviour. Raj is a nice guy and Steve doesn’t want to get him into trouble. But he keeps getting more and more uncomfortable with the situation.
Congratulations!

You have completed the *UP Skills for Work* Introduction workbook and taken the first step toward building your soft skills.

The *UP Skills for Work* program offers other workshops. There is one about each of the 9 soft skills. These workshops give you the chance to dig deeper into the soft skills you’d like to work on.

We hope you’re inspired to think about your soft skills and participate in future workshops.

Remember, people are always growing and learning. We can always improve our soft skills—both the ones we’d like to change, and the ones we already feel confident about.

Wrapping up

How did you feel about this workshop?

What was it like to think about your soft skills? Did anything surprise you?

What is the most useful thing you learned in this workshop?