

TRAINEE SUPPORT SHEET 3: ENSURING PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

ACCA

Within the practical experience requirements you need to complete as a trainee, three of the Essentials performance objectives relate to personal effectiveness, your ability to manage yourself, communicate with others and use information and communications technology. This guide will help you to identify opportunities to develop your self-management and communication skills.

MANAGING YOURSELF

Your workplace mentor may be providing you with guidance as you gain practical experience. However, how you approach and manage your workload, strive for higher standards and work with other people will determine whether you meet your performance objectives. These factors will also contribute to your development as a professional and to your long-term career success.

Although self-management is a performance objective in its own right, it's also a skill you will employ when meeting most of your other performance objectives.

Listed below are points you should consider when managing your workload.

Prioritising and planning

- What are you doing to ensure efficient use of time and resources?
- How are you organising your workload to have a clear view of all the tasks you need to complete?
- What steps are you taking to build in extra time to handle problems, unexpected additional work or unavoidable distractions?

Quality assurance

- How thoroughly do you check your work before submitting to your workplace mentor or manager for approval?
- When appropriate, how are you demonstrating that you can take the initiative and not always waiting for instructions on what to do?

Development of working relationships

- How effective are you at getting the best out of colleagues?
In what ways might you alter your behaviour to improve results?
- When dealing with your manager or more senior colleagues, what are you doing to encourage guidance and feedback?

Development of skills and knowledge

- Without being prompted by your workplace mentor, how are you striving to improve yourself by acting on perceived or casual feedback?
- What steps are you taking outside of your daily responsibilities to gain knowledge?
- How do you demonstrate that knowledge at work?

Professionalism

- How are you adapting to fit the culture of your team or employer?
- What kind of attitude do you think your output indicates?

DEVELOPING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

In most jobs, the majority of your time at work involves dealing with other people. Whether you are working alongside peers, reporting to a line manager, delegating to juniors, collaborating with non-finance colleagues or liaising with employees of clients or suppliers, how you interact with them is vital to your personal effectiveness.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEHAVIOURAL STYLES

Although each of us is unique, many people exhibit common characteristics that dictate the way they relate to their surroundings – at home and at work. As a finance professional, you must be able to perceive how the people you deal with respond in the office environment – including what they each regard as significant or urgent and how they might behave as a result. Improving your perception of other people's 'behavioural styles' may help you to adjust your own behaviour and therefore get better results from your dealings with them, leading to the following benefits:

- working more positively with your workplace mentor while you gain practical experience
- obtaining better feedback from managers or clients
- improving your promotion and management prospects
- adding to your job satisfaction
- gaining access to more high profile work or clients.

Adjusting your own style to achieve better results from working with others doesn't require you to act in a false way. You simply have to stand back and observe, in order to improve your understanding of why people behave in certain ways.

IDENTIFYING COMMON STYLES

Watch and listen to your colleagues to observe how certain traits and characteristics can determine how they give and receive information.

- Do they appear to listen to some people more than others?
If so, who and why?

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- How do they respond to people who are critical, or hesitant, or emotional, or forceful?
- Are they more friendly and co-operative in meetings or on the phone? What factors influence this?
- Do they prefer information to be conveyed verbally or do they insist on everything in writing? If that depends on who they are dealing with, who and why?
- Do they welcome statistics and facts to support an argument or are they more likely to make instant decisions based on instinct?

You also need to understand your own style, so that you can alter how you behave to be more successful when dealing with others. For instance, if you tend to be driven mainly by intuition and you're working on a specific project with a colleague who approaches tasks in an objective way, you might find it helpful to support your ideas with facts and figures.

USING STYLE AWARENESS

Put your heightened awareness of others' likely behaviours to good use as you accumulate practical experience and consider the following:

- If you wish to observe a colleague in a meeting, how receptive will that colleague be to your suggestion? Why? If it's the first time your colleague is attending this kind of meeting, it may be better to wait until the second meeting, but how might your colleague's behaviour influence your decision?
- If you are given the opportunity to undertake a job rotation, how is the colleague with whom you are temporarily swapping roles likely to respond to 'handover' instructions? Is it better to simply leave thorough notes and follow up later or will your colleague be keen for you to take them step by step through your job?
- What factors influence your mentor's disposition? What events or actions of others tend to be most pleasing or annoying? When is he or she likely to be most or least receptive to requests for help?

- When communicating facts in writing, is the provision of supporting data likely to be welcomed or might it be regarded as unnecessary? What previous behaviour might the recipient have demonstrated that could guide your actions?
- If you are being coached by someone with whom you're unfamiliar, how might you best communicate that you prefer to work things out for yourself before asking for help, without affecting the coach's interest and enthusiasm?
- When shadowing a colleague, are they likely to welcome questions while they are working on a particular task, or does their behaviour indicate you should wait until the end before seeking explanations?

The subject of behavioural styles and personal effectiveness is well documented with many variations on the theme. However, be careful not to become too prescriptive about style awareness – judgement from your own experience shouldn't be invalidated by theories on behavioural style.

As with self-management, effective communication is not just a stand-alone performance objective. It's a skill you will need to continue developing throughout your career. As you refine your personal effectiveness, you will find that not only does your ability to meet performance objectives improve, but so too will your capacity to take on more responsibility, with minimum levels of stress and with increased energy and drive.

You are likely to experience positive benefits outside the workplace too, meaning you can really enjoy the rewards of your hard work. Improving your personal effectiveness makes you better at managing your job and your life outside of work.