

# SPIRAL GROUP, INC.

SHAPING TODAY'S JOB SEEKERS FOR EMPLOYERS OF CHOICE.®



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE | 1

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE—1

The Professional Development course is comprised wholly of Soft Skills modules. Developing this particular skill set is crucial for promoting your success in the workplace.

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>WORKPLACE VALUES</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION TO SOFT SKILLS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>MINDFUL DECISION-MAKING</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THE HABITS OF CONSIDERATE PEOPLE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE ART OF ACTIVE LISTENING</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>BODY LANGUAGE BASICS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>DEVELOPING CREATIVITY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CUSTOMER SERVICE BASICS—CULTIVATING A POSITIVE MINDSET</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CUMULATIVE EXAM</b>	

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# 1 | WORKPLACE VALUES

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To convince potential employers of your skills and experience, you must be capable of identifying your workplace values. Below are some common workplace values. Which of the items below describe what you truly value in the workplace?

- |   |                                       |  |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civility           | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty      | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-Solving | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Confidence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competitiveness    | <input type="checkbox"/> Openness     | <input type="checkbox"/> Professionalism | <input type="checkbox"/> Stability       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity         | <input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality         | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Detail-Orientation | <input type="checkbox"/> Positivity   | <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition     | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline         | <input type="checkbox"/> Humility     | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect         | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovation      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility        | <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom      | <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty         | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity       |

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# 2 | INTRODUCTION TO SOFT SKILLS

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*“We are all capable of learning and cultivating soft skills.” —Michelle A. Jones*

Soft skills are personal characteristics that allow us to relate positively to others. These skills enhance our personal interactions and lead to greater job performance and overall satisfaction. Unlike hard skills, soft skills are easily transferrable to any job, organization, or industry. Therefore, they are an investment worth making. Oftentimes, we place the focus of our career development efforts on hard skills and other skills that specifically relate to our ability to get work-related tasks done. As a result, we may neglect to develop our soft skills.

Some examples of soft skills include listening skills, mindfulness, personableness, professional networking abilities, and customer service skills. Applying these skills can help you to build stronger work relationships, work more productively, and maximize your career prospects.

## SOFT SKILLS ARE LEARNED

While some soft skills come more easily to one person than they might to another, they are not inborn. Like all skills, they must be learned. Because we all have our own preferences and ways of moving through the world, some soft skills may be more difficult to learn than others. Nevertheless, we develop soft skills in the same way we develop any other skill, through practice. Spending time with people who seem to effortlessly demonstrate a soft skill that you find challenging to grasp is one way to build your soft skill set. Another way is to seek opportunities to practice, where the risk of failure is low, until you feel confident in your ability.

## PROFESSIONALISM

The term professionalism may conjure up images of a cold and brusque person. However, professionalism is a key soft skill, and doesn't require you to be inauthentic, distant, or detached. A person demonstrating professionalism conducts himself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. He discovers ways to be productive and communicate effectively; he reports to work on time, returns promptly from breaks, and dresses appropriately. He is clean, neat, and organized. He speaks clearly and politely to everyone with whom he interacts.

A professional knows that in order to achieve his overall career goals and the goals within a given task, he must use clearly defined methods. This includes setting goals, mindful decision-making, planning, and scheduling. Once the tasks are completed, he evaluates the success of his methods. The following is a list of five key points to help you master the skill of Professionalism.

- **Be consistent.** An important characteristic of the workplace professional is his ability to be consistent. Always changing can cause you to become confused about what you truly value, and others will question your beliefs.
- **Complete work to a deadline.** If you are scheduled to complete a particular task, make sure it is done in a timely manner. It is easy to feel out of control when you disregard the plan you should follow, and the deadline you need to work toward.
- **Be flexible.** So, you're sticking to the plan and working toward your deadline, but discovering that sometimes things don't go according to plan. This is your chance to display your flexibility so that you can get things back on track.
- **Educate yourself.** Be an avid reader. Talk and listen to mentors and peers. They may know something that could help you along your journey.
- **Stay physically, emotionally, and mentally fit.** The ability to stay fit is an important soft skill. Exercising your body and mind is crucial to professionalism. Failure to do so can lead to emotional, mental, and physical illnesses.

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# 3 | MINDFUL DECISION-MAKING

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Decisions need to be made carefully and mindfully. In stressful situations, it is easy to make decisions based on emotions, stress, external pressure, and finances. Therefore, it's imperative to recognize events that increase the risk of making a poor decision that can have long term and negative consequences. Mindful decision-making combines reason with intuition to come up with choices that are practical. The following are some mindful decision-making steps to help guide you in this process:

- **Be in the moment.** Pay attention to how you feel physically and emotionally. This allows you to understand any feelings of conflict, as well as their source. The source of the conflict may be revealed as you become mindful. Naming the conflict will help you make the decision without fear.
- **Be clear and investigate for clarity.** Begin by investigating your feelings and identifying the type of decision you are making. A neutral decision, for example, should not create a great deal of stress. Once you identify the decision, make sure you have collected the necessary information to make the decision. Additionally, you should consult the people who will be affected by your decision.
- **Make a choice.** Once you have all the information, listen to your intuition, and then write down your decision. Take some time to consider your decision, and if you are still comfortable with it after a few days, act on it.

#### TAKE AN INWARD JOURNEY

Think of some decisions you've made based on your emotions, stress, external pressure, or finances. Now, consider how mindful decision-making could have altered your decisions.

## 4 | THE HABITS OF CONSIDERATE PEOPLE

*"Although challenging in today's world—especially the world of business, it still pays to be considerate of self and others."—Michelle A. Jones*

Taking a passive approach to behaving with consideration toward others can stem from our subconscious nature rather than intentional actions. However, that doesn't mean we can't put a little effort toward being more considerate of those around us. The following habits are what set considerate and civil people apart from the rest.

**They practice empathy.** Considerate people are capable of figuratively putting themselves in other people's shoes. Their sense of compassion for others drives them to connect. They derive personal joy and satisfaction from this selfless exchange.

**They smile often.** Smiling makes a significant impact on how others perceive you. Make the effort to smile for the positive impact it has on others.

**They are intuitive of other people's needs.** As you channel your sense of empathy and consider how others around you are feeling, choose to act on that information. Simply asking someone how they're doing can do wonders for their mood and self-esteem.

**They mind their manners.** Being polite doesn't begin and end with saying please, thank you, and you're welcome. It involves a comprehensive acknowledgement of another person's feelings and behaving accordingly. Follow the golden rule and treat others like you want to be treated; from being punctual (respecting others' time) to not talking over others (exercising self-control) to actively listening to what others have to say.

**They put others first—sometimes.** Selflessness can be a double-edged sword for considerate people. While prioritizing others' needs over our own makes people happy and creates a sense of fulfillment for us, we often lose our ability to take care of ourselves first. Striking that balance is just as important as being considerate in the first place. Otherwise, we fall into the realm of people-pleasing, which leads to a decrease in our own productivity.

**They maintain the willingness to compromise.** The ability to cooperate is a skill that will present plenty of opportunities for you to master, because it is an unavoidable aspect of dealing with others in business and personal relationships. Compromise can be challenging when you are in a position of less influence. You may be expected to follow the lead of your superiors, without regard for your own feelings and opinions. Nevertheless, learning to hold on to your beliefs and high standards, while accepting the ideas of others, is crucial to your success in the work place.

**They apologize, but only when warranted.** Some people apologize for fear of offending others. Others forgo apologies altogether, coming across as rude and insensitive. Similar to the people-pleasing tendencies of kind and considerate people, apologies must be balanced. Being considerate means apologizing when you realize you've made a mistake. But when you're a people-pleaser or obsequious, the only person you're harming is yourself.

## 5 | EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence is the ability to comprehend, understand, and profit from experience. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to perceive, assess, and manage the emotions of yourself and others. Having an awareness of our emotions, where they come from, and what they mean can allow us to take a more rational, well-planned approach to how we are going to make a specific decision.

An increased awareness helps us to identify who we are and how we interact with others. When we are able to understand why we are the way we are and why we tend to react to things the way we do, we gain more of an appreciation for others and who they are, which can lead to stronger relationships. Increasing your abilities in the following areas will ultimately lead to an increase in your emotional intelligence.

#### EMPATHY

This is the emotional capacity to share in the feelings of others. In order to be empathic, you must be able to recognize, classify, and understand your own feelings. Empathy is most helpful when the one empathizing has experienced a variety of feelings because it strengthens their ability to react appropriately in difficult situations.

#### SELF-AWARENESS

This is the ability to accurately perceive one's skills, knowledge, value, and responsibilities. It is being confident in what you have to offer, both personally and professionally. It is not only important for your self-esteem; it is also the first step in the process of self-acceptance. Without understanding the reasons why you think and behave the way you do, you may never fully appreciate yourself or see the importance of self-improvement.

Self-awareness offers power and a sense of peace. This characteristic will easily transfer over into your work life—how you perform your duties and interact with others. Lack of self-awareness can cause you to underestimate your worth in an organization and the quality of work that you perform. This can have an even more dramatic effect when you hold a leadership position. Not only will you have doubts about yourself, but the people you lead will question your competence, which could ultimately lead to a lack of leadership effectiveness.

### SELF-REGULATION

Also known as self-control, this is the ability to control one’s emotions, desires, and behaviors in order to reach a positive outcome. Self-regulation can be difficult, especially when we are often encouraged to express our feelings. Nevertheless, we must maintain high levels of professionalism while expressing our feelings in the workplace.

### SELF-MOTIVATION

This is an essential part of excelling at life. You must learn to motivate yourself because you cannot depend on others to do it for you. You have to know how to encourage yourself regardless of how difficult a situation. The following are some guidelines to building self-motivation.

- Work towards a cause.
- Don’t compare yourself to others.
- Utilize positive thinking.
- Make the conscious effort to persevere.
- Don’t relive past failures or successes.
- Write down your plan for improvement.

## 6 | CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is akin to the study of logic. The result of our actions is indicative of our ability, or inability, to apply critical thinking. One of the most important characteristics of a critical thinker is emotional intelligence. Critical thinkers know how and when to use their emotions in the decision-making process. The more you exercise your critical thinking skills, the better you will become at identifying, understanding, and managing your own emotions. Below are the five components of critical thinking.

<b>REASON</b>	This is the most important critical thinking component, and occurs when we use our knowledge of a thing, process, or statement to determine if another thing, process, or statement is true. When we apply reason, we use logic to determine “what follows what.”
<b>OPEN-MINDEDNESS</b>	This is the virtue by which we learn. Open-minded inquiry is a central theme in education. Being open-minded means taking into account relevant evidence to revise a current understanding. It means being critically open to alternatives, willing to consider other possibilities after having formed an opinion, and refusing to allow preconceived notions to inhibit reflection on newly presented information.
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	Analysis helps us to differentiate and process information. The ability to analyze is a highly-ordered thinking skill, which involves the process of discriminating and unraveling.
<b>LOGIC</b>	Logic allows us to develop valid conclusions. A conclusion is valid if it follows from statements that are accepted as facts. For instance, a logical statement might be $1 + 1 = 2$ . This is a rule based on fact. A factual statement is called a premise—a statement that is assumed to be true and from which a conclusion can be drawn. When reasoning does not follow the rules, we say it is illogical.
<b>OBJECTIVITY</b>	This is judgment based on observable phenomena and uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices. We use objectivity to help us to engage more thoughtfully and deliberately in the critical thinking process. However, we must be careful not completely exclude our emotions, or subjective feelings, in the decision-making and problem-solving processes, because evaluating information objectively helps us to be more thorough.

## 7 | THE ART OF ACTIVE LISTENING

Hearing is the ability to perceive via the auditory sense. Assuming an individual is not hearing-impaired, hearing simply happens. Listening is the act of hearing attentively, which means that it is something that an individual consciously chooses to do. It requires concentration so that the brain processes meaning from words, sentences, and non-verbal clues. As opposed to hearing, listening skills can be learned and refined.

The art of active listening allows you to fully receive a message from another. Especially in a situation involving anger or tense exchange, active listening allows you to be sensitive to the many dimensions of communication that make up an entire message. These dimensions include:

- **The occasion for the message.**  
What is the reason the person is communicating with me now?
- **The words chosen.**  
Is the message being made formally, or is it with aloofness or slang?
- **Pauses and hesitations.**  
How do these enhance or detract from the message?
- **The length of the message.**  
What can the length of the message tell me about its importance?
- **Non-verbal clues.**  
What does eye contact, posture, or facial expression reveal about the message?
- **Volume and pace.**  
What clues do the loudness and speed give me?

### EMPATHIC LISTENING

Empathic listening is the art of seeking a deeper understanding of how others are feeling. This requires excellent discrimination and paying close attention to the nuances of emotional signals. Empathic listening involves the following basic tasks:

- **Repeating, verbatim, the content of the communication.**  
The words, not the feelings.
- **Rephrasing the content.**  
Summarizing the meaning of the words in your own words.
- **Reflecting feelings.**  
Seeking to capture the speaker’s feelings through his body language and tone.

## LISTEN TO THE BODY

Non-verbal communication involves the use of gestures and postures that act as cues. We send and receive non-verbal signals through the use of body language. It is the single most powerful form of communication, and if a conflict arises between our words and body language, our body language rules every time. When communicating, the goal is to sound upbeat, under control, and clear. Below are some tips to achieve this:

- Breathe from your diaphragm
- Stand or sit up straight so that you sound confident when speaking. Posture affects breathing and tone of voice.
- Deeper voices are more credible than higher pitched voices. Try speaking in a slightly lower octave.
- Smile to warm up the tone of your voice.
- If your voice is particularly high or low, exercise it by practicing speaking on a sliding scale. You can also sing to expand the range of your voice.
- Enlist a trusted individual to receive honest, constructive feedback about the tone of your voice.

## ASKING QUESTIONS

This requires the use of specific questioning techniques to elicit more information from speakers. Below are three types of questions and phrases to use when practicing active listening.

Type I Open Questions and Phrases	Open questions and phrases stimulate thinking and discussion, and pass control of the conversation to the respondent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Tell me about the employee orientation process.”</li> <li>• “How do you open the emergency exit door on an A858 aircraft?”</li> </ul>
Type II Clarifying Questions	Clarifying questions remove ambiguity, elicits additional detail, and guides the answer to a question. This also helps the speaker evaluate his own opinions and perspective. Such as, “ <i>What sort of savings are you looking to achieve?</i> ”
Type III Closed Questions	These require a one-word answer. Closed questions provide facts and allow the person asking the questions to maintain control of the conversation. For example, “ <i>Who will lead the meeting?</i> ” and “ <i>Do you know how to open the emergency exit door on this aircraft?</i> ”

# 8 | BODY LANGUAGE BASICS

Body language refers to the messages we send to others through our posture, facial expression, and physical gestures. The listener pays more attention to body language than verbal messages. This implies that if our body language is inconsistent with the verbal message being sent (e.g. frowning while saying you’re happy), the verbal message becomes less credible. These inconsistencies can even nullify the verbal message, and result in the verbal message being perceived as a lie. At the very least, contradictions between verbal and nonverbal communication can result in confusion.

In this module, we’ll examine the components of body language. Unless we actively practice non-verbal communication skills, we can’t really be sure if we’re actually sending the message we want to deliver. Below are the five components of body language.

<b>Eye Contact</b>	Eye contact is one of the most important aspects of non-verbal communication. Steady eye contact often indicates attention to the person one is in conversation with, as well as a willingness and sincerity to connect. The lack of eye connect can be viewed as defensiveness, nervousness, or social withdrawal. The eyes are the “windows into our soul”, and one can tell if an individual is happy, sad, or angry simply by looking into their eyes.
<b>Facial Expression</b>	There are universal facial expressions for different emotions. For example, anger is often indicated by sharp stares, crunched eyebrows, and the baring of teeth. Sadness can be denoted by teary eyes and drooping lips. However, the expression and perception of emotions tend to vary from culture to culture.
<b>Posture</b>	The way we sit, stand, and walk can also communicate. Slumping in a chair is considered a sign of inattention or disrespect. Walking with one’s head and shoulders down can be interpreted as a sign of nervousness or low self-esteem. Withdrawing to a fetal position can also be indicative of fear or depression. The puffing of one’s chest has been traditionally interpreted as pride.
<b>Specific Movements</b>	There are specific movements that are associated with certain messages. For example, nodding is generally a sign of agreement. Raising clenched hands are interpreted as a sign of angry challenge. Stomping of the feet can be an indication of frustration.
<b>Physical Contact.</b>	Shaking of hands, hugging, slapping, punching are all forms of communication. The same can be said about our physical closeness and distance with another person. Standing too close to a person can be considered an invasion of boundaries, while standing too far from a person can be construed as avoidance.

## IT’S NOT WHAT YOU SAY, IT’S HOW YOU SAY IT

Non-verbal communication also includes the way we deliver information. A simple change in tone can alter the meaning of statements and questions. It is important to be aware of the way we speak so that we can communicate more effectively. The next time you begin to speak, consider the following:

<b>Tone of Voice</b>	This refers to the use of changing pitch in order to convey a message. The same message can be delivered using either a rising, dipping, or falling intonation. Changes in tone can help inject emotions into messages. Messages can be upbeat or depressing depending on the speaker’s tone. Changes in tone can also help identify the purpose of a sentence.
<b>Stress and Emphasis</b>	Placing emphasis on certain words and phrases can change the meaning of your message. Consider the differences among the three statements below. The italicized word represents where the emphasis lies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You <i>mean</i> he disobeyed his mother?</li> <li>• You mean he <i>disobeyed</i> his mother?</li> <li>• You mean he disobeyed <i>his</i> mother?</li> </ul>
<b>Pace and Rhythm</b>	The speed of speech and use of pauses can change the meaning of words spoken and affect the clarity and effectiveness of a communication. For instance, people who speak too fast can be difficult to talk to; a listener might feel too pressured to catch everything that they have to say. On the other hand, a person who speaks too slowly can bore their listener.
<b>Volume</b>	The volume you choose also matters in communication. Ideally, one should speak in a moderate volume while in the company of others. A voice that is too soft can communicate nervousness or lack of assertiveness, while a voice that is too loud can communicate anger and aggression. A person should choose to be flexible when it’s appropriate to do so.
<b>Pronunciation and Enunciation</b>	Pronunciation refers to speaking a word in a way that’s generally accepted or understood, while enunciation is the act of speaking clearly and concisely. Developing one’s skills in pronunciation and enunciation ensures that one is accurately understood.



## CREATING A POWERFUL INTRODUCTION

Creating a powerful introduction is not as difficult as it may sound. If you project warmth and confidence when introducing yourself to others, you've made a powerful impact. Many people size you up even before you say a word, which is why it's important to mind your body language.

When you introduce yourself, stand up straight, relax, and establish good eye contact. State your first and last names. Depending on the situation, you may also state your affiliation and/ or position in the company. For example: "Hello. I'm Michelle Jones, Founder of Spiral Group, Incorporated."

When the other person provides their name, repeat it in acknowledgment. For example, "It's nice to meet you, Maya." Repeating their name is an acknowledgment that you were actively listening to their introduction.

## PAY CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE SIGNALS WE SEND TO OTHERS

Our non-verbal communication is something we do subconsciously, and can be influenced by many things. Life experiences, role models, culture, hidden thoughts, and feelings are all examples of what influences our non-verbal communications. Begin using your body language more effectively by increasing your awareness. Try to get more information about what you communicate non-verbally so that you will know what to change and what to keep. Ways you can do this include watching a videotape of yourself, studying yourself in front of a mirror, and getting feedback from peers and friends. Body language is a skill, so keep on working at it. Soon, it'll be second nature to you.

# 9 | DEVELOPING CREATIVITY

"Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way."—Edward de Bono

Creativity is difficult to define, even for the most creative person. But to make this task a little more interesting, educational, and creative, I've decided to put to use my advanced English dictionary.

📖 The word create is defined as the ability to make, cause to be, or bring into existence.

📖 A creative person is defined as a person whose creative work shows sensitivity and imagination.

People often limit their definitions of creativity to art, but creativity comes in the form of original thought, divergent thinking, problem solving, inspiration, and imagination. In order to improve creativity, it is essential that you understand the definitions of creativity, creative thinking, and the steps you can take to improve your thought processes.

## DIVERGENT THINKING

Rather than finding a single correct answer, the divergent thinker discovers various ways to address problems, such as brainstorming and predicting. It is possible to increase divergent thinking by implementing open-ended questions when addressing problems. Moving toward divergent thinking may not be comfortable for analytical thinkers, but practice will cultivate creativity.

## REMOVING MENTAL BLOCKS

Everyone faces mental blocks from time to time. These blocks prevent focusing, finding solutions to problems, discovering inspiration, and achieving our goals. Overcoming mental blocks is difficult, but it can be done. If you find yourself blocked, stop and refocus by doing something distracting, such as a change of scenery or a visit to someplace relaxing or inspirational. Below are a few more techniques for removing mental blocks:

Meditate	Read	Exercise	Listen to music	Sing	Watch a movie	Organize
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## MAINTAIN A POSITIVE MINDSET

Remaining positive is essential to the creative process. Improve on your positivity and change your mindset so that you can become more successful and creative in whatever you do. Here's how: **1.** Count your blessings by focusing on the things that you have to be thankful for in your life. You may want to keep a list of good things to pull your attention away from negative intrusions. **2.** Confront negative thoughts. When facing difficult times, place the events in the proper perspective. It is easy to overreact. Facing the situation directly and honestly will prevent an unhealthy focus on the negative. **3.** Use positive affirmations or listen to music that lifts your spirit by empowering you. This may seem strange at first, but positive affirmations and music that empowers will help you believe that the best is possible and that you are deserving of it.

## SPARK YOUR CURIOSITY

Albert Einstein was quoted as saying, "The important thing is to never stop questioning. Never lose a holy curiosity." Therefore, keep an open mind. Open-mindedness is essential if you are to have a curious and creative mind. Be open to learning, unlearning, and relearning. Much of what you know and believe just might be incorrect, so be prepared to accept this possibility and change your mind when necessary. Refuse to accept things as they appear. If you merely accept the world as it is without digging deeper, then you will certainly lose the 'holy curiosity'.

Examine into the nature of things that are of interest to you by asking questions, relentlessly. The best way to dig deeper beneath the surface of any thing is to ask questions. *What* is that? *Why* is it made that way? *When* was it invented or discovered, and *by whom*? *How* does it work? Am I capable of making it work better? What, when, why, who, where, and how are the best friends of curious and creative people. Below are a few more tips for cultivating your curious and creative nature.

• **Don't label something as boring.** Doing this closes the door of possibilities. Curious and creative people are unlikely to do this. Instead, they see it as a gateway to an exciting new world. Even if they don't have time to explore, they'll leave the door open to be visited at a later date.

• **See learning as fun.** If you see learning as a burden or something that frustrates you, then you may not delve into anything. But if you see learning as fun, you will naturally *want* to dig deeper. So, look at life through the glasses of fun and excitement so that you can enjoy the learning process.

- **Diversify.** Diversifying will introduce you to other worlds, which may spark your interest to explore them further. One way to do this is through diverse reading. Choose a book or magazine on a new subject and let it feed your mind with the excitement and possibilities of a new world.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

It is possible to improve the problem-solving process by implementing creativity. This requires looking at each problem as a unique situation rather than applying the same principles to every similar problem. Below are some tips for creative problem solving.

- View the problem in different ways.
- Be open to different problem-solving options.
- Do not make assumptions that all projects or problems are the same.
- Keep looking even when the solution is not easily found.
- Look at the big picture when addressing problems.

## IMAGINATION AND INSPIRATION

Imagination is the ability to deal resourcefully with unusual problems. Inspiration is experiencing an instinctive knowing as part of solving a problem. Some ways to cultivate imagination and incite inspiration are to read stories; expose yourself to new experiences and influences; get plenty of rest; daydream; and meditate. Imagination and inspiration prompt creativity and provide the motivation that urge us to believe that we can and should do something creative.

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# 10 | CUSTOMER SERVICE BASICS—CULTIVATING A POSITIVE MINDSET

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*“The customer is always right? Says who?”—Michelle A. Jones (Customer Service Expert)*

You may wonder how cultivating a positive mindset is essential to customer service. Nevertheless, the formulation of a basic framework is required when broaching the field of customer service. We’ve all heard the adage, the customer is always right. Well, I must pose a very important and probing question because this axiom has truly sparked my curiosity, **“Who made that up?”**

**No, this is NOT that kind of training program. There is no way that I would ever encourage anyone under my tutelage to believe that... people who attempt to disrespect the service worker; who try to get to know the service professional “better” while in line by asking for their phone number, as well as other probing and personally intrusive questions; who are celebrities and believe that they can threaten the service workers because they can’t navigate their limousines through the drive-thru lane as initially believed; who line jump and get pissed off when you professionally confront them on their rude behavior; who talk loudly and inappropriately on their cell phones while ordering; who choose to physically chastise their child and/or spouse in front of both you and the multitude of others behind them; who are not prepared when they order; who choose to begin retrieving their preferred method of payment from their wallets and purses after placing their order; who stand outside in the freezing cold for an extended length of time with a sandwich you sold to them when it was hot, and then come back inside the restaurant complaining that you sold them a cold sandwich; and who place special food orders and then deny that’s what they ordered, although their uneducated and mentally stunted asses know that’s what they ordered because at the time of placing the order, you repeated it back to their hard of hearing asses to ensure accuracy!**

**...are right about anything.**

## CULTIVATING A POSITIVE MINDSET

Although keeping a positive mental attitude in the face of difficulty isn’t easy, the following tips can assist you when it comes to dealing with difficult people and challenging situations, and keep you out of police custody.

**Do not respond with negative words or emotion.** When working in the service field, you will encounter negativity from your customers, but if you respond with negative words or emotions, this can reinforce that negativity. While responding with empathy often requires you to acknowledge a customer’s negativity, your choice of words can set the tone for the remainder of the conversation. For example, to acknowledge that your customer has had a frustrating experience, using the word “challenging” rather than “frustrating” can communicate that the problem is solvable rather than insolvable.

**Focus on positive thoughts.** Negative thoughts and emotions tend to narrow our focus. As a result, we perceive that we have fewer options. However, positive thoughts and emotions have a tendency to broaden our focus and open up a wider range of possibilities. Cultivating positive thoughts and emotions also has a cumulative effect of helping us become more resourceful over time.

**Keep in mind that difficult and challenging people are very likely to be miserable people.** Persons who are generally unhappy can be exceptionally difficult, and pursue negative “rewards” in their interactions. When dealing with difficult people, you can help them by refocusing their attention on the problem at hand. For example, rather than feeding into their negative emotions and behavior, seek doable solutions. During their display of misery, they may have offered the solution to their own problem—hopefully, you were paying close attention when this occurred.

For example, if the negative customer seeks a refund, but it goes against the company policy, just give it to them. I’ve had to do this on occasion, and it was more rewarding to watch them as they walked away than it would have been for me to keep the \$5 they spent on a meal they decided they didn’t want and debate with them about company policy. Dealing with this type of individual can be a source of frustration; so, when dealing with generally unhappy persons it’s important to remain authentically positive and professional.

## DEVELOP AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Cultivating an attitude of gratitude, engaging in regular exercise, and invoking inner peace can also have dramatic effects on our sense of well-being. Here are some ways to accomplish this:

**Be grateful.** It’s easy to focus on the negative things that happen in our lives, while the good things often escape our notice, such as the person who greets you with a smile or holds the door open for you. Taking note of the good things involves a conscious decision and can be very rewarding. Psychologists from the universities of California and Miami performed an experiment in 2003 that found that keeping a daily journal of what you’re grateful for can increase your sense of wellbeing. On the next page, we’ve provided a list of what you can do to develop an attitude of gratitude.



- Listen to the song “Be Grateful” by the Hawkins Family.
- At the beginning of your workday, list five things you’re grateful for in a gratitude journal, or make a mental note of the them. Incorporate this into your daily routine.
- Reward yourself. For example, after one week of maintaining your written or mental journal, pick a small reward for yourself, and then be grateful that you can reward yourself. A cup of coffee from your favorite coffee shop; purchasing an actual dvd instead of a bootleg copy of a movie you’ve wanted to see; or getting a professional pedicure, are all examples of ways to reward yourself for consciously choosing NOT to go back to jail.

If you miss a day, don’t be too hard on yourself. Simply keep in mind why you missed it. Be aware that a change in routine can disrupt habitual behavior and may require the development of a new reminder and routine.

**Keep your body healthy.** Regular exercise is crucial for producing a positive attitude. It stimulates the production of endorphins, which are known to combat depression effectively. Some important tips of good exercise are:

- Avoid exercise within the three hours before you go to sleep.
- Vary your routine from time to time by replacing old exercises with new ones.
- Never exercise beyond your physical capabilities. The ideal exercise plan includes flexibility, strength, balance, and endurance training.

**Invoke inner peace.** Cultivating a positive mindset involves the process of invoking peace within. By identifying automatic negative thoughts, you can counter them with alternatives. Practicing meditation can help you focus on the moment and feel more relaxed. Doing this for as little as ten minutes a day can have powerful effects on your overall demeanor throughout your day. Don’t forget to schedule time for play so you can enjoy life on a regular basis. This will not only help you develop a positive outlook, it will increase your creativity and keep you out of police custody.



**Click to begin the Cumulative Exam for this Course.**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Michelle A. Jones is the Founder-Instructor of Spiral Group, Inc. The not for profit organization provides online **Employment Preparation Training** for job seekers who are willing to learn how to become job ready; how to make effective use of the skills they already possess; and how to communicate these skills to Employers of Choice. As a useful services provider, our main goal is to assist individuals in achieving self-sufficiency.

Michelle has over twenty years' experience (1984-2005) in the hospitality industry as an hourly worker, cashier supervisor, assistant manager, general manager, training manager, and franchise operations consultant. She has worked with the following organizations: Subway, Portillo's, Quiznos, Dock's Great Fish, Burger King, Chili's, Target, and Jeepers.

She is a certified ServSafe® Instructor and registered ServSafe® Exam Proctor. She also holds the following diplomas and certifications: Diploma in Human Resources; Diploma in Business and Legal Studies; Certificate in Instructional Systems Design; and Certificate in Six Sigma. Michelle is a Web Developer. She designed and maintains SpiralGroup.org.

Michelle opened her first business, RMRC (Restaurant Materials Resource Center), in 1999 where she designed business documents, labels, and posters for the foodservice industry. In addition, Michelle is a mystic, cartomancer, and ordained minister. She received her ordination on April 19, 2007. Since 1994, she has been a student of Astrology, Mysticism, Magic, Mythology, Theosophy, Numerology, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, the Nordic Runes, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and other Occult Sciences. From 2009-2012, she taught basic lessons in astrology online.

## SOME OF THE MUSIC THAT INSPIRES MICHELLE

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- ♪ "Mind Power" & "Superbad" by James Brown
- ♪ "Unbreakable" by Michael Jackson
- ♪ "Every Praise" by Hezekiah Walker
- ♪ "Black Man" & "Jesus Children of America" by Stevie Wonder
- ♪ "It's A Beautiful Thing" by Boney James
- ♪ "I Go To Work" by Kool Moe Dee