ESSENTIAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN WORKFORCE READINESS

When considering skill building toward career readiness, you likely first think of technical skills. For a career in finance, for instance, you need to be able to manage money, use specific software, manage debt and track spending. However, many of the skills that determine a person's success in this field are not technical, or hard skills, but are what are often called soft skills.

Hard skills: We refer to these as technical skills. They are teachable, definable, quantifiable and specific to particular jobs. Such skills include things like:
- Strategic planning
- Software expertise
- Bookkeeping

Soft skills: These are less definable, non-measurable skills generally related to *how* a person does something, instead of *what* they do. These skills include:
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Critical thinking
- Leadership

We address two sets of soft skills with skill building toward workforce readiness – social-emotional skills and employability skills.

Social-emotional skills: These are skills related to how youth feel about themselves, their relationships with others, and their ability to regulate emotions and solve problems. We focus on the following social-emotional skills when addressing workforce readiness.
- **Goal setting:** Setting and working toward personal goals
- **Planning:** Creating steps to achieve goals
- **Self-confidence:** Belief in one's abilities; an optimistic mindset
- **Self-efficacy:** Perceived capability to do a specific task
- **Evaluating:** Process used to make informed decisions and identify appropriate options
- **Communication:** Ability to transmit ideas clearly, both verbally and non-verbally, and listen well to others

Employability skills: These are the skills people need to succeed in any job or workplace. We will focus on the following employability skills.

- **Digital literacy:** Ability to navigate technology necessary for college and the workplace safely, ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks and accomplish goals
- **Time management:** Prioritizing one's time for activities and tasks to balance academic life, personal time and/or work
- **Problem-solving:** Ability to remove personal bias from a situation to identify the primary source of a problem in academic or work-related settings; to think of solutions
- **Self-advocacy:** Ability to identify one's needs, be able to explain them to others, and ask for help when needed in college and workplace environments
- **Self-discipline:** Ability to monitor and self-regulate behaviors in different situations to accomplish academic and career goals
- **Workplace etiquette:** Demonstrating personal accountability, integrity and effective work habits when in workplace environments
- **Teamwork:** Ability to work with others within a team structure for academic and work-related projects; can negotiate and manage conflict
- **Technical skills:** Possessing both the necessary knowledge and technical skills needed for employment in a desired career field

Clubs and Youth Centers excel in building soft skills, because at its core youth development is social-emotional development. Club staff can be intentional about supporting the development of both types of soft skills by:

- Incorporating opportunities for youth of all ages to have assigned responsibilities (with titles) during, and apart from, structured program times (e.g., hang up coats, distribute snacks, assist with activities, collect sports equipment)
- Setting high, but realistic, expectations for youth during structured program times to mirror workplace expectations (i.e., punctuality, attitude, teamwork)
- Intentionally calling out specific examples of positive workplace behaviors when demonstrated, either privately or publicly, and encouraging youth