

CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Skills for Success in the Workplace – Distribution Centres: Problem Solving

OALCF ALIGNMENT

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	2
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A2. Interpret documents	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	1

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- Employment
- Apprenticeship
- Secondary School Credit
- Postsecondary
- Independence

Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

- Adaptability
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity and innovation
- Digital
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Reading
- Writing

NOTES: Part one of a five-part series on SFS in Distribution Centres.

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SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE: Distribution Centres

Note for practitioners:

This series of **Skills for Success Curriculum Resources** can be used as a supplement to the Material Handler resource published by Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) based on curriculum developed by Literacy Link Eastern Ontario (LLEO) in 2012 (<https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Warehouse-Curriculum-Jan-14-2021-FINAL.pdf>). It is not an adaptation of that material but rather an addendum focusing on five identified Skills for Success competencies: **Problem Solving, Adaptability, Creativity & Innovation, Collaboration, and Communication.**

These resources are learner-based and activity-focused, moving the learner through on-the-job “scenarios” they will then respond to. By participating in the activities, the learner will gain an understanding of the workplace challenges that might require them to use a given competency and its associated strategies.

Practitioners may be required to assist learners by reading the activities.

The series is divided into five sections that can be used separately or in tandem:

- Skills for Success in the Workplace: Distribution Centres – **Problem Solving**
- Skills for Success in the Workplace: Distribution Centres – **Adaptability**
- Skills for Success in the Workplace: Distribution Centres – **Collaboration**
- Skills for Success in the Workplace: Distribution Centres – **Communication**
- Skills for Success in the Workplace: Distribution Centres – **Creativity & Innovation**

*This is Section One, Skills for Success in the Workplace: Distribution Centres –
Problem Solving*

SFS In the Workplace: Distribution Centres Problem Solving

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What is a Distribution Centre Job?

A distribution centre is another word for a **warehouse**.

A job in a distribution centre might mean:

- moving boxes and crates in a warehouse
- accepting products at a business
- sending products from a business
- recording the arrival and movement of products
- driving products to and from places

Work at a distribution centre is best for people who:

- enjoy physical work
- like to work with their hands
- can work on their own and as part of a team
- can follow instructions
- are well-organized

Distribution centre jobs might require you to:

- have a driver's license
- lift heavy things
- be flexible about your work hours
- be responsible for valuable items
- wear a hard hat and safety boots
- apply workplace safety standards

Examples of Distribution Centre Jobs

Many types of businesses offer distribution centre jobs. You could work as:

- a warehouse associate at an online retailer like Amazon
- a material handler at a large box store like Walmart or Costco
- a stock person in the receiving area of a grocery store like NoFrills
- a mover for a moving company
- a delivery driver for a courier company like Purolator
- a driver merchandiser for a large company like Coca-Cola
- an inventory clerk for a big retail store
- a forklift driver in the warehouse of a large company

Distribution Centre Job Tasks

Some of the tasks you might do at a distribution centre job include:

- unloading new inventory from a truck
- packing and unpacking boxes
- keeping track of incoming and outgoing inventory on a computer
- stocking shelves
- organizing inventory on warehouse shelves
- driving a truck or a forklift

Inventory is another word for the products that move to and from businesses.



What Skills Do You Need to Work in Distribution Centres?

To succeed in a distribution centre job, you need some key skills. Here are some of the skills that you will likely need:

- organizational skills
- time-management skills
- basic math skills
- basic digital skills
- adaptability
- good communication skills
- collaboration skills like teamwork
- creativity and innovation skills
- problem-solving skills

To succeed in a distribution centre job, you also need some key habits:

- clean and tidy appearance
 - politeness
 - reliability
 - being on time for work
- Many distribution centre workers have less education than a high school diploma, but many require **extra training**.
- Many distribution centre workers are men. But many more women are being attracted to distribution centre jobs.



Questionnaire: Is a Distribution Centre Job Right for You?

Are you thinking about applying for a job at a distribution centre?

Answer the following questions to find out if it's for you:

1. Do you enjoy doing physical work? Yes No
2. Do you enjoy working with your hands? Yes No
3. Can you work on your own and with a team? Yes No
4. Can you follow the instructions? Yes No
5. Can you be well-organized? Yes No
6. Are you able to lift things that weigh up to 9kg? Yes No
7. Can you be flexible with your schedule? Yes No
8. Do you have a driver's license? Yes No
9. Can you reliably get to work on time? Yes No

- If you answered **yes** to many of these questions,
this may be a suitable job for you!



What is Problem Solving?

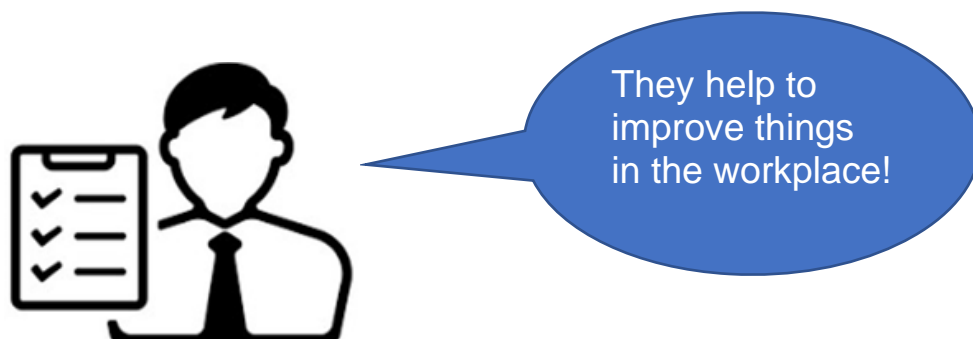
Problem solving is coming up with solutions that work better for everyone.

- Some people think that problem solving is only used by bosses and managers.
- All employees can benefit from developing their problem-solving skills.

➤ Why is problem solving important at work?

Employees with strong problem-solving skills:

- think of better ways of doing things
- help resolve at-work issues
- become valuable members of the team
- help the business to thrive



Problem Solving at Your Distribution Centre Job

There are many sorts of problems you might face at a distribution centre job:

a. Problems on the Job

Even at a well-run place of business, problems will arise. At a distribution centre you will sometimes face problems like:

- inventory getting lost or broken
- products improperly labelled or not labelled at all
- faulty or failing equipment
- safety concerns around the workplace
- on the job injuries



b. Problems with the Work Itself

Even if you love your job, you may face some challenges:

- You might not understand how to do a new task.
- You might have to do a task that you find really challenging.
- You might not enjoy all aspects of your job.
- Some days the work might seem harder or less enjoyable than others.

c. Co-worker or Management Problems

Hopefully, you get along with your co-workers and your boss. But sometimes conflicts do arise at work:

- You might disagree with co-workers about how to do things.
- Co-workers might complain about you to the boss.
- The boss might express concerns about the work you are doing.

d. Customer Problems

Distribution centre jobs can sometimes involve interacting with customers. It is the responsibility of all staff to keep customers happy. You need to address their needs and try to solve their problems.

Customers might need help:

- finding a product or getting it off a shelf
- carrying a product to their car
- understanding how a product works
- learning the price of a product

➤ Helping customers may not be the main part of your job. But you should do your best to help.

➤ Maybe you can't help solve the customer's problem. Tell the customer you will find a manager and do so.



Overview

Start Developing Your Problem-Solving Skills for the Workplace

To address problems, you will need to learn to improve your problem-solving skills.

Here are some steps you can take:

- Listen carefully
- Pay attention
- Be flexible
- Be patient
- Be polite
- Share what you know



Activities

Now for some activities. These will help you use problem-solving skills at work. These activities will provide examples of:

- the types of jobs you might have in distribution centres
- the daily tasks you might do
- on-the-job challenges
- other key skills for success in distribution centre jobs
- dos and don'ts

In each case, you will:

- read a scenario
- think about it
- respond to some questions
- review your work

Activity #1

Joon has been working at a big retail warehouse for one month. He has many different responsibilities. He works with his co-workers to:

- load and unload shipments
- organize inventory in the warehouse
- keep the warehouse clean

He sees that someone has knocked over boxes. The boxes were left scattered on the floor.

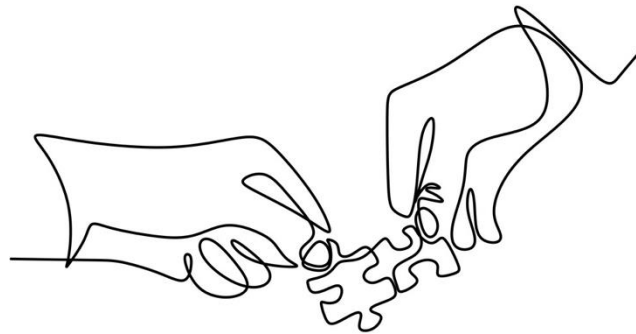
Activity #1 (Continued)

It is Joon's job to help keep the warehouse clean. Joon did not make this mess. He does not want to clean it up.

If he tells anyone, he will have to help clean it up. He may even have to clean it up by himself.

But Joon decides to tell one of his co-workers. They clean up the mess together.

Joon's boss is very pleased that Joon solved the problem and cleaned the mess.

**Questions #1**

1. Do you think Joon handled the situation well? Yes No Not sure
2. How did Joon use his problem-solving skills? Discuss with your teacher or partner.
3. What were the advantages of Joon using his problem-solving skills? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Answers #1

1. Yes, Joon handled the situation well. He encountered a problem on the job and he did his best to solve it.

2. Joon used his problem-solving skills by evaluating the problem. He thought about what needed to be done to solve it.

Cleaning up the boxes was too much for one person. So Joon asked for help. Joon and his co-worker cleaned up the boxes together.

3. The advantages of Joon using his problem-solving skills were:

- The mess was cleaned up.
- Joon did not leave the work for someone else.
- Joon collaborated with his co-worker.
- Joon's boss was also very pleased.

➤ You can't solve every problem. You can't do your co-workers' work for them.

➤ But it is good practice to solve problems when you can.

➤ It is also good practice to help your co-workers when you can.

Activity #2

Svati has been working as driver merchandiser for Coca-Cola for two years.

She drives several different routes. These go from the Coca-Cola warehouse to stores across the province.

After each delivery, she fills out paperwork. The paperwork is to confirm that the product was delivered to the customer.

Svati is proud that she has never received a complaint about her work.

But one day a new staff member, Charles, criticizes Svati's work. Charles says that she does not complete her route fast enough and that her paperwork is sloppy.

Svati is insulted. She is angry and yells at Charles. She tells him that he is wrong.

Questions #2

1. Do you think Svati handled the situation well? Yes No Not sure
2. If you think she could have handled the situation better, what did she do wrong?
Discuss with your teacher or partner.
3. What should Svati have done differently in this situation? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Answers #2

1. No, Svati did **not** handle the situation well.
2. Svati was unwilling to listen to criticism about the way she worked. She was proud that she had not received a complaint before. Charles' complaints upset her, and so she was rude.
3. Svati should have tried to listen to Charles criticisms without getting angry. She should have tried to think about whether Charles was right in what he said.

Even if she disagreed with Charles' criticisms, she should have done a better job being patient and polite.

- **Criticism** is when someone points out something they believe is wrong.
- It can be hard to hear criticism about your work. But sometimes criticism helps you learn new and better ways to do things.
- This is a form of problem solving!

Activity #3

Winston has been working in the warehouse of a big bookstore for two months. He is still learning some aspects of his job.

He is responsible for unloading boxes of books and organizing books on the shelves.

He is also responsible for sweeping the floors at the end of his shift.

One day, Winston's manager expresses concerns to Winston. The manager is not happy with Winston's work.

- The manager thinks Winston does a poor job sweeping the floors.
- The manager says Winston must not read books while on shift.
- The manager thinks Winston should work better with his co-workers when unloading trucks.

Winston is not sure how to respond to his manager's concerns.

Questions #3

1. How could Winston use his problem-solving skills in this situation? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Answers #3

1. Winston should begin by thinking about his manager's concerns.

His manager is pointing out some problems. This can be upsetting. But the first step in fixing a problem is knowing that the problem exists.

Winston's manager has helped Winston to understand what the problems are. Now Winston must decide how to use this knowledge.

He could try to use the manager's advice to do his job better. He could also ask questions that will help him to improve.

Winston might ask his boss for some tips for sweeping the floor. He might ask his boss for ideas about how to work better with his co-workers.

- One of the best ways to solve problems at work is to learn from others.
- Taking guidance from others will make you a better employee.

Activity #4

Phillipe has been working at a Costco for three months. He is a material handler.

- He unloads trucks that arrive with new deliveries.
- He unpacks boxes and puts the products on the shelves.
- He organizes the shelves.
- He keeps his shipping area and the shelves clean.

Another part of Phillipe's job is to assist customers who can't find things on the shelves.

One day, a customer approaches Phillipe and complains about the price of things.

Phillipe impatiently tells the customer that the prices are marked correctly. This makes the customer even angrier.

Phillipe rudely tells the customer: "There's nothing I can do about it. I don't set the prices."

Questions #4

1. Do you think Phillipe handled the situation well? Yes No Not sure
2. What could he have done differently? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Answers #4

1. No, Phillipe did **not** handle the situation well.
2. After listening to the customer, he should have made an effort to be patient and polite.

He could have offered to share the customer's concerns with a manager. He also could have gone to get a manager for the customer.

Sometimes an employee's role in solving a problem is finding someone who is more qualified to solve it.

This is often the case when customers have complaints.

When customers have complaints, managers are better able to address their complaints and satisfy their needs.

Activity #5

Paulo and Marie work in the warehouse of a small wholesale chain.

Their main task is to repackage bulk products into smaller packages. They often transfer bulk spices from big containers to smaller containers to sell at stores.

One day they are waiting on a shipment of spices, but it is late. They know that the driver of the truck is new. They suspect that he got lost.

Since they have no spices to repackage, they have no work to do. Marie is happy not to have any work to do. But Paolo informs their manager that the truck is late.

The manager was pleased Paolo contacted him. The manager calls the driver and gives him directions. The driver arrives a few minutes later.

Questions #5

1. Who showed good problem-solving skills? Paolo Marie
2. How did Paolo use his problem-solving skills? Discuss with your teacher or partner.
3. What were the advantages of Paolo using his problem-solving skills? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Answers #5

1. Paolo showed good problem-solving skills.
2. He determined that the driver might be lost and acted by contacting the manager.
3. By using his problem-solving skills and contacting the manager, Paolo helped the driver find his way to the warehouse.
4. Paolo's manager will be very pleased that he used his problem-solving skills.



Review

Now you have learned some strategies to use problem-solving on the job:

- You have learned the importance of listening carefully on the job.
- You have learned the importance of sharing information with others.
- You have learned the importance of being polite and patient.
- You have learned the importance of being flexible and generous.

You can go back to this guide to review the strategies for improving your problem-solving skills at your distribution centre job.