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PART 1

GETTING YOUR GEAR TOGETHER:
ASSESSING YOUR SKILLS

CHAPTER 1

ASSESSING YOUR SKILLS

1.1

REFLECTING ON YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:

Honoring Self by Preparing for New Career and Citizenship Roles

As you enter the academic home stretch of your college experience it's time to get ready by reflecting on what you have accomplished, what it means to you, and where you to go next in your exciting life's journey. This is a time to honor your accomplishments. This is a time to honor all those who have made your accomplishments possible. This is a time to reflect on your new leadership roles in citizenship and career on the local, national, and global levels. Let's begin this reflection process, which helps you gear up for your academic treasures and for the rest of your exciting life's adventure.

A treasure hunt theme best fits your experience of reaping the rewards of your college experience—that is, earning your degree. This workbook is designed so that you can direct yourself to the reaching you goal, your degree, while still having energy for the rest of life's exciting adventure ahead.

Before leaving on an expedition, a hunter takes time to gear up by *reflecting* on the upcoming event. We have titled Part I of this workbook, "Gearing Up: Reflecting on Your College Experience." It is designed to give you time to gear up before commencement by reflecting.

This section is designed to help you reflect. It assists you in reflecting on the college experience, both within and outside the college. The questions at the end of this section are designed to help you reflect on your accomplishments during your college experience.

You are about to conclude an incredible academic journey with the completion of your degree. While you are preparing for the transition from student to college graduate, take some time to reflect on what this process has meant to you. Most of you plan to enter your chosen career path, or maybe you intend to pursue more education, join a branch of the military, or possibly get involved in the Peace Corps or Vista program.

Whatever your choice, this transitional time before graduation is a great opportunity to reflect on your college experience. What have you learned? What do you want to take with you from the experience? What do you want to leave behind as an academic legacy?

By using this workbook, you have already committed yourself to taking some time to figure out what you have accomplished, what you look like today, and where you want to go with your college degree.

Preparing for the post-collegiate experience presents the challenge of making the best decisions for yourself—personal, professional, global, and beyond—at this exciting transitional time. Graduation is a time to pause and ponder what you have accomplished, what you look like professionally, what you look like as a citizen—and, most of all, to honor yourself for this great accomplishment . . . earning your degree.

The next section includes some of the questions that students have discussed as they prepare for graduation. I hope they will assist you in your reflection process as you make the transition from college student to college graduate. This should begin the ceremonial process of marking this important transition in your life, becoming one of our future leaders with the power of a college degree.

1.2

WORK AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Putting It All Together: The Work Autobiography

This exercise was researched and developed by Kevin Fitch, instructor at the Westwood College of Technology's Denver North campus. The Work Autobiography is a way for you to have a better sense of your work values and skills and consolidate into one paper all of this information from the previous surveys.

The more you know about yourself, the better you will do on an interview and on creating a resume. Before doing this exercise, you may have thought you knew all there was to know about yourself, but after completing this exercise you will learn some new and wonderful things about yourself.

When you begin writing your resume, use the Work Autobiography to identify what needs to be included.

Your Work Autobiography

This exercise will guide you in exploring and getting down to the essence of those work values and skills. Begin by reading the research and background material used to develop this exercise, so that you have a sense of what you are being asked to do. Read through the suggestions for writing your Work Autobiography on page 22. Then begin your paper by freewriting everything you can think of that relates to your work history. After this initial freewriting experience, you will be asked to share your information with a friend and turn in a finished paper in about two weeks. The finished paper will be a 3-5 page paper typed with careful attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation (use Raimes' Keys for Writers to assist you with this).

Remember, this exercise is being done to help you write your resume and to prepare you for an interview, so it is beneficial that you do your best.

Writing Your Work Autobiography

What is a work autobiography?

My lecture today is about how to write a work autobiography, and for this I am grateful to John C. Crystal and Richard N. Bolles for their books *Where Do I Go From Here With My Life?* The goal of this learning activity is for you to record the basic material of your life; to be called your work autobiography. It could also be called a job history, or skill and knowledge inventory, but will be most useful to you if written like a story. It is tempting, at times, to start writing this assignment just like you are going to turn it all into a resume anyway, so why not just start listing technical skills, right? Please resist this temptation, first by including areas of knowledge in your writing (the range of facts and opinions that inform your comprehension of ideas), and secondly by describing those areas with emotional depth (the range of reactions or responses you have had when solving problems). How much do you understand of what you know? How much will you someday understand of what you know? Where skills perhaps reflect practical experience, knowledge reflects intelligence or imagination. Where skills are transferable job to job, knowledge is for life. If in doubt which is which—and they're both important to completing this activity—just remember Francis Bacon's comment: "Knowledge is power. The more one knows, the more one will be able to control events." When having difficulty at any point with what I am asking of you, try to imagine yourself telling someone your story. Be in the audience watching you, or be yourself looking out of your own eyes in your imagination. Explain, describe, or interpret the kind of experience not normally articulated in a resume, cover letter, or application. After that, the important thing is to list your accomplishments or achievements; to identify whatever demonstrates consistency, responsibility, or creativity throughout your lifetime. Nothing is off limits.

How to begin?

Begin by telling about yourself while at work; include any experience that helped you become the person you are at work. Are you persuasive? Are you reliable? Are you funny? Can you demonstrate the common sense understanding necessary to carry out simple two and three instructions, or for solving problems using three or fewer variables? Also include the kinds of examples or details that make your story interesting, and help explain you to others. Be sure to write enough information to describe what you did, what you liked doing, what you will do, or perhaps what you plan to put your time and energy into in the future. You may want to use comparisons and contrasts with other kinds of work. Were you ever hired because of some unusual talent or ability, some interesting thing you said, some unique bit of know-how? Avoid giving superficial attention only to your work life, or dismissing work experience not traditionally recognized as work. Although you are writing in detail, define work broadly to include skills and knowledge you may have acquired under unusual circumstances or in unusual places. This can include part-time and full-time work, volunteer experience, or skills and knowledge acquired during time spent as part of a family, or while in school. Anecdotes from prison, the psychiatric

hospital, a lost weekend or road trip are useful also. Or try this, speculate who you will be in the future, based on jobs in the past. Anticipate what you will learn and how you will apply it at the ideal job.

Skills and Knowledge Reflection:

When you start writing, reflect on what your skills and knowledge taught you about yourself, but don't just repeat someone else's life to no one in particular. Be honest enough with yourself to recognize your flaws, to understand how you fall into certain patterns. How did you progress, and why did you leave your previous jobs? What did you most like, and least like, about the work, or the people? What is the best work environment for you: structured, unstructured; a lot of customer contact, very little; close supervision, hardly any? When you have identified significant skills and knowledge, cluster them into groups of same and different, and then prioritize the clusters. Make sure no time period is omitted, and be sure to focus on genuine accomplishments or achievements. If you were fired, or laid off, and have bad memories about this experience, get them out of the way by describing what you have done to improve yourself since then. No one needs to know about those times in your life when you weren't your best at a job, but they may benefit from knowing how you solved a problem, accepted a challenge, or rose above a difficult situation. If you choose to write primarily about these times, please be specific, and positive if you can. Is there something you understand now you could have done better? Were you someone else then, or have you changed in some particular way since? Try to explore what you would have done if things were different, or the roles were reversed. Imagine, if you can, you are someone else evaluating your job performance.

Add accomplishments and achievement:

For particular accomplishments or achievements, don't worry about being overcome with modesty; feeling there is very little you have ever done well. What kinds of recognition have you most often wanted at work? Imagine what the ideal position might be for you; what would it look like, compared and contrasted with positions held in the past? How would you apply for it, interview for it, or go about learning to do it? Include a list of your heroes for review; what characteristics do they share in common? If it takes one to know one, anything sound familiar? When you don't have enough work experience, use your volunteer experience, hobbies or interests. Consider things you created, works you have published, some kind of community service you performed. Don't leave anything out just because it bored you. Describe it briefly, and admit that it bored you. The important thing here is, you are explaining why someone should hire you, based on your personal perspective, or values, or habits. Try to expand on your skills and knowledge, like you are telling a story again, but this time using the words and ideas of your field of study. Reflect on any applicable experience—truly, truthfully useful, meaningful experience—and add that in too.