ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

University of Alabama at Birmingham SkillSoft Online Course Selections

1. Administrative Professionals: Representing Your Boss

As an administrative support professional, every interaction you have with others leaves an impression of not only yourself but of your boss. The ability to represent your boss in a positive and professional light is essential to both your own and your boss's success.

This course covers the skills you need to be successful as an administrative professional, including communication skills, organizing and managing skills, problem-solving skills, and basic office skills. It also describes strategies for anticipating your boss's needs, for making your boss look good, and for keeping your boss informed. Finally, you are presented with techniques for effectively communicating a boss's messages and decisions.

2. Basic Presentation Skills: Planning a Presentation

Even the most seasoned public speakers can experience nerves before a major presentation. The successful ones, however, have learned how to make those nerves work for them. Positive concern about the impact of a presentation can spur presenters to raise their game, enabling them to get the desired results. For example, a presentation can be immeasurably improved if you devote sufficient time and attention to three key steps - analyzing your audience, organizing your ideas, and selecting an appropriate presentation method. This course describes how to plan effectively for a presentation by carrying out these steps.

3. Business Writing-How to Write Clearly & Concisely

People who have no problem communicating clearly when they speak sometimes struggle to make themselves understood when they write. That's because the ability to write clearly and concisely is a skill that requires effort to master. Acquiring this skill gives you the tools to create effective business documents for readers who lack the time or the patience to search for essential information buried in long, rambling e-mails or reports. Writing clearly also entails organizing content logically and appropriately for the subject and reader. Clear and concise sentences get you part of the way. But you need to organize these into coherent paragraphs that convey the relevant information in the most effective way. This course describes ways to make your writing more clear. Specifically, it covers the importance of using short, familiar words, appropriate connotations, concrete and specific language, and transitional words and phrases. The course also discusses ways to be more concise and explains some best practices for organizing content logically and appropriately.

4. Business Grammar-Common Usage Errors?

When do you use who's or whose? And when should you choose less rather than fewer? Understanding the subtle variations in meanings of such words – ones that are often misused or confused – is important if you want to write clearly and professionally. This course describes how to use commonly confused words correctly, including word pairs that sound alike and those that have related meanings. It also covers verbs that are often misused – for example, affect and effect or apprise and appraise. In addition, the course reviews some idiomatic combinations of verbs and prepositions that can be confusing.

5. Customer Service over the Phone

Can you hear a smile over the phone? When you're providing customer service over the phone – without the benefits of face-to-face interaction with your customer – it can be challenging to establish the right relationship for excellent service. Just like for face-to-face customer service, there are many techniques for service over the phone that can help you to consistently deliver the best customer service.

This course covers the basic rules for answering a customer call including greeting the customer and offering your assistance. It includes information on how to make a good impression by listening and using questions to probe for more information, using your tone, and being able to empathize and be sincere with the customer. This course also describes ways of reflecting or adapting to your customer's style. In the end, customer service should focus on how to better serve and benefit the customer.

Register for an online class at www.uab.edu/learningsystem

6. Critical Thinking Essentials: What Is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking is something everyone does – to some degree or another – in their professional and personal lives. Almost all of your everyday activities require you to seek information, analyze alternatives, assess the alternatives, and reach some conclusion. And all of these processes are part of critical thinking. Thinking plays a powerful role in your life – it determines how you feel, what you do, and what you want. Improving the quality of your thinking, then, improves your life – helping you to achieve your goals, make better decisions, and take charge of what you do. This course defines critical thinking, describes the elements of critical thought, and outlines strategies for improving the quality of your thinking.

7. Decision Making: Making Tough Decisions

Making decisions in your personal and professional life is not always easy, especially when you're dealing with an uncertain or unknown future. And there are many situations that can make decision making particularly challenging, such as when you have to weigh very similar or very disparate alternatives then make compromises and trade-offs between them. Another situation is when you have to determine whether to trust logic, intuition, or some combination of the two.

This course reviews a number of these decision-making challenges and introduces strategies for dealing effectively with uncertainty, making informed trade-offs using a systematic process, and placing appropriate trust in your intuition when making difficult decisions.

8. Decision Making: The Fundamentals

To emphasize the need of a formal decision-making process, C. Wright Mills, an American sociologist and author, once said, 'Freedom is not merely the opportunity to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them – and then the opportunity to choose.' It's been estimated that most human beings make thousands of decisions in the course of an average day, many of which are unconscious decisions. It is important for your personal and professional success that you become an effective decision maker. This involves following an established decision-making process and adapting your decision-making style to suit different situations.

This course introduces you to the fundamentals of decision making and illustrates techniques to help you become an effective decision maker. The course first walks you through the steps of a widely accepted decision-making process. Then it leads to a description of the factors influencing your decision-making style and shows how to adapt that style to suit a given situation. So you'll have everything you need to start on the road to becoming an effective decision maker.

9. Decision Making: Tools and Techniques

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, 'Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide.' Good decision making means choosing the course of action that optimizes the return on your investment of resources. But before you can make a good decision, you need to first identify and evaluate your alternatives. Fortunately, a number of tools and techniques are available that can help you to formalize the process of identifying alternatives, carefully evaluating them, and finally making the best decision possible with the information available to you. These tools multiply the power of your most important assets in good decision making: your intelligence and common sense.

This course introduces a variety of tools and techniques to use at the three most important steps of the decision-making process: generating, evaluating, and choosing between alternative courses of action. Nominal group technique (NGT) is used to brainstorm and prioritize options as a team. Return on Investment (ROI) measures distill the costs and benefits of each alternative into a monetary value, thus enabling you to easily compare your options on financial terms. Three other decision-making tools – the devil's advocate technique, Plus/Minus/Interesting (PMI) analysis, and the ease-and-effect matrix – provide alternate methodologies for challenging and evaluating alternatives before making a decision. Equipping yourself with these tools will ensure you have an edge when you're facing an important decision.

10. Developing and Controlling the Project Schedule

The project schedule is critical to project management. It determines the planned start and finish dates for project activities and milestones. It also confirms which activities are dependent on others, therefore enabling the project manager to prioritize the order in which activities are completed. Developing the project schedule is an ongoing process throughout the project lifecycle, as there are many factors that can either accelerate or delay deliverables in a project. It is essential in successful project management to be able to quickly identify possible impacts, evaluate the effect on all project activities, and adjust the project activities as required to minimize risk. This course covers developing and controlling the project schedule in the project management discipline, and introduces best practices outlined in A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOKÂ® Guide) Fourth Edition, published by the Project Management Institute (PMIÂ®). Specifically, learners will learn how to analyze activity sequences, durations, and resource and schedule constraints, to create the project schedule. Learners will also calculate the critical path using a forward and backward pass, calculate the float, and calculate the critical chain in order to monitor progress and make changes to the project schedule as required. This course provides a foundational knowledge base reflecting the most up-to-date project management information. It will enable learners to effectively put principles to work in their own organizations, and assist in preparing them for the PMBOKÂ® Guide certification exam. This course is aligned with the PMBOKÂ® Guide Fourth Edition, published by PMIÂ®, Inc., 2008. Copyright and all rights reserved. Material from this publication has been reproduced with the permission of PMIÂ®.

11. Developing Employees through Delegation

Skillful delegation creates a true win-win situation: It allows managers to leverage their strengths and focus on strategy while giving team members opportunity to learn and grow. This Challenge Series exercise focuses on how to best develop employees through the practice of delegation.

12. Diversity on the Job: Diversity and You

Just as organizations must respond to demographic and social changes that introduce new languages, cultures, values, and attitudes to the workplace, so must you as an individual. To understand and appreciate diversity, you must develop an understanding of yourself and the ways in which you and others view the world. Your ability to use a variety of strategies to effectively deal with diverse situations in and out of the workplace is very important. Equally important is the ability to share these effective strategies openly, to leverage the diversity that exists within the organization.

This course identifies strategies to help you become aware of your attitudes toward diversity; increase your acceptance of diverse cultures, people, and ideas; and become an advocate for diversity within the workplace.

13. Generating Creative and Innovative Ideas: Enhancing Your Creativity

What makes a person creative? Do you consider yourself creative? Certain personal characteristics have been linked with creativity – for example, a willingness to take risks, the ability to connect diverse ideas, and open-mindedness. And most important, perhaps, is believing that you are creative. Many people get stuck because they think 'I'm not a creative person.' But everyone has creative potential. Understanding the characteristics you possess that boost your creativity and those that inhibit it can help you enhance your creative output in the workplace.

This course explores the essential attributes of a creative person. It also describes barriers to creativity and how to overcome these. In addition, it demonstrates how you can enhance your creativity in the workplace.

14. Generating Creative and Innovative Ideas: Verifying and Building on Ideas

Generating creative ideas can be a very exciting and stimulating process. This is particularly true during the initial stages of idea generation, when many adopt an 'anything goes' approach. Later, however, the workability of ideas needs to be verified, or checked. Ideas are more likely to be relevant and useful when they have been assessed in the context of organizational needs, strategies, and resources. Some techniques that can help verify ideas are getting the opinions of key people and using simulations. Building on ideas continues the process of verifying ideas by helping to make those ideas more clear, relevant, and feasible.

This course covers a variety of techniques used to verify and build on creative ideas. It outlines when to use research and when to use simulations to check the workability of an idea. In addition, it discusses ways to build on ideas effectively.

15. Generating Creative and Innovative Ideas: Maximizing Team Creativity

What makes a person creative? Do you consider yourself creative? Certain personal characteristics have been linked with creativity – for example, a willingness to take risks, the ability to connect diverse ideas, and open-mindedness. And most important, perhaps, is believing that you are creative. Many people get stuck because they think 'I'm not a creative person.' But everyone has creative potential. Understanding the characteristics you possess that boost your creativity and those that inhibit it can help you enhance your creative output in the workplace.

This course explores the essential attributes of a creative person. It also describes barriers to creativity and how to overcome these. In addition, it demonstrates how you can enhance your creativity in the workplace.

16. Getting Results by Building Relationships

How can you get results if you don't have authority? Cultivating relationships and establishing credibility are necessary, because they allow you to influence others. If you have effective influencing skills, you'll be able to get what you need or want from others – whether it's your boss, a peer, or someone in a completely different department. Effective influencing, however, requires that you know how to build good relationships, and that you have credibility. You won't be able to ask someone for help if you have antagonized that person, or if you haven't followed through on promises you made.

In this course, you'll learn how to develop relationships and build credibility so that you can get the results you need at work. You'll also find out how being able to influence others benefits you.

17. Goals and Setting Goals

Obstacles and setbacks can get in the way of your goals. Few things are as frustrating as watching your best-laid plans fall to pieces and go off track. To succeed, you must adapt, keep your focus, and get things back on track; and this requires resilience and perseverance.

This course provides you with tools and techniques that you can use to manage obstacles and setbacks presented along your route to success. By showing you how to stay focused on your goal and proactively anticipate and plan for possible difficulties, this course helps you achieve your end goals using perseverance and resilience.

18. Leading Teams: Establishing Goals, Roles, and Guidelines

The way in which a team is built is an important factor in determining team success. Leading a team quickly and smoothly into high performance mode requires the groundwork of setting team goals, identifying project tasks and assigning the right people to them, and defining the standards of team behavior to ensure team members work together so that team objectives are met. This course covers techniques for laying the foundation for a successful team. These techniques include setting team goals, assigning roles to individual team members, and defining specific guidelines that outline how team members should behave to minimize conflict and optimize team performance.

19. Leadership Essentials: Building Your Influence as a Leader

Why is it so hard to get people to agree to a good idea? Why are some leaders constantly faced with challenges and objections? Reaching agreement as a leader does not mean you should manipulate or force people to accept your ideas and accomplish your objectives; there are ethical ways for leaders to successfully build influence. Leaders attempting to influence and persuade others are faced with the challenges of navigating through organizational politics. An effective leader recognizes that organizational politics can provide positive ways to influence others in order to accomplish goals. In this course, you will be guided through numerous methods and strategies for effectively influencing a team to accept your ideas. You'll be introduced to the importance of political awareness and the essential skills involved in using positive politics and avoiding negative politics when persuading others. You'll also have an opportunity to practice methods for influencing effectively and ethically.

20. Leadership Essentials: Communicating Vision

Today's leaders must be able to communicate vision in such a way that the audience is engaged and everyone understands and internalizes the message. Effective leadership communication gives purpose and meaning to the work that people do. Leaders should strive to communicate vision with a sense of integrity, building trust as an individual and as a leader. This course provides a general introduction to vision communication, including its nature and its purpose. You will be guided through numerous techniques and methods for a leader to successfully communicate vision, such as personalizing and multiplying a clear message, communicating enthusiasm in an authentic way, and making the organization's vision the employees' own vision.

21. Leadership Essentials: Motivating Employees

Imagine what your organization would be like if you and your colleagues were not motivated. Motivation is what drives people to accomplish things, whether it be small tasks or large undertakings. Without motivation, things simply would not get done. The ability to create an environment that encourages motivation takes both practice and skill as it's not a quality inherent in most people. As a leader, your capacity for motivating plays a key element in the success of your organization. This course provides you with an understanding of why motivating strategies are important as a leader. It also provides you with practical techniques for encouraging motivation among employees in your organization.

22. Negotiation Essentials: Planning for Negotiation

It's true that negotiating can sometimes seem a daunting task. But if you're properly prepared, you'll likely reach an outcome that benefits both you and the other party without too much stress. If you've ever gone into a negotiation without preparing, it's likely that you were reactive and unfocused, and you may have ended up with a less than desirable outcome. Proper planning would have given you the direction needed to do effective problem solving at the negotiation table. Thinking carefully about what you want to achieve, as well as what the other party wants, will pave the way for a smooth and successful negotiation. You will know which terms are acceptable to you and which are not, and you will be ready for objections from the other party. This course describes key considerations when preparing for a negotiation. It also covers how to prepare for likely compromises you'll need to make, and how having alternatives to a negotiated agreement and knowing your 'walk away' point can make negotiations go smoother.

23. Problem Solving: The Fundamentals

'The problem,' says author and psychiatrist Theodore Rubin, 'is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem.' A problem is a question or situation that presents doubt, perplexity, or difficulty. It's an issue that needs to be corrected or overcome in order to achieve a desired state. Problem solving involves goal-oriented thinking and action in situations for which no ready-made solutions exist.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, everybody solves problems relating to their personal or work life every day. However, you can greatly improve your problem-solving effectiveness by gaining a better understanding of the problem-solving process, essential skills, and required competencies, as well as an awareness of the mind traps and pitfalls that impair the process. This course takes you through the essentials of problem solving and explores some of its challenges.

24. Problem-Solving and Process Management Tools

lbert Einstein is reputed to have said, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." To solve quality and process-related problems, managers should continuously enhance their knowledge of organizational processes and quality management tools. These tools help managers find root causes of problems, an important step toward removing them. Success in ensuring quality and organizational excellence depends on how effectively managers apply these tools to solve quality and process-related problems. This course explores basic problem-solving and process management tools used for identifying, analyzing, and solving quality and process-related problems. The course is aligned with the Quality Management Division of the American Society for Quality's Certification Handbook, and is designed to assist learners as part of their preparation for the ASQ Certified Manager of Quality/Organizational Excellence certification exam.

25. Professionalism, Business Etiquette, and Personal Accountability

Taking responsibility for meeting your objectives, including deadlines and work targets, is an important component of good business etiquette and demonstrates your attitude of professionalism. While it can be difficult at times, being accountable for delivering on your objectives shows you are reliable, organized, and dedicated to your work. This course introduces the importance of personal accountability and outlines strategies for developing a personal accountability framework. This helps empower you to be your own boss, set your own standards, and carry yourself with professionalism and confidence. It provides you with techniques to set appropriate goals based on your abilities and available resources. And it shows you how to develop an action plan to achieve your goals and use techniques to better manage your energy levels.

26. Presenting your case

Have you ever attended a presentation that failed because the presenter was ill prepared or ineffective in his approach? A successful presenter must possess the proper skills to plan and deliver an effective business case presentation and employ strategies to establish and maintain the audience's attention. This course examines the careful planning and delivery of a business case presentation. It focuses on the use of visual aids and handouts in a presentation, the structure and development of a presentation in light of audience needs, and the elements involved in successfully delivering the presentation to that audience.

27. Risk Management Planning

There are a few questions that every project manager should ask at the beginning of a project: What do we hope to gain from this project? What kinds of things could keep that from happening? How should we respond if those events occur? Every project involves some degree of risk. Identifying potential risks and having a plan for dealing with them can spell the difference between a project that reaches a successful conclusion and one that does not. In this course, learners will be introduced to the Project Risk Management knowledge area. It covers the best practices outlined in A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOKÂ® Guide) Fourth Edition published by the Project Management Institute (PMIÂ®). Specifically, learners will be introduced the first process in the Project Risk Management knowledge area: Plan Risk Management. Techniques such as creating a risk management plan and preparing documentation for the risk identification and analysis processes will be covered in detail. This course provides a foundational knowledge base reflecting the most up-to-date project management information so learners can effectively put principles to work at their own organizations. This course will assist in preparing the learner for the PMBOKÂ® Guide certification exam. This course is aligned with the PMBOKÂ® Guide Fourth Edition, published by PMIÂ®, Inc., 2008. Copyright and all rights reserved. Material from this publication has been reproduced with the permission of PMIÂ®.

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29. Taking Action for Performing under Pressure

Acting effectively in high-pressure situations is not easy. Overconfidence can lead to poor judgment, and overthinking the situation can lead to paralysis. Also, your perception may become clouded by negative thoughts and emotions in times of pressure. But it's exactly at these times that you need to perceive the challenges most clearly so that you can set appropriate goals and take effective action to achieve them. This course sets out some principles to help you avoid the dangers of overconfidence and overthinking, which can impair your performance when under pressure. It then teaches a technique for clarifying your perceptions in such situations and creating an action plan to optimize your performance under pressure.

30. Diversity on the Job

Just as organizations must respond to demographic and social changes that introduce new languages, cultures, values, and attitudes to the workplace, so must you as an individual. To understand and appreciate diversity, you must develop an understanding of yourself and the ways in which you and others view the world. Your ability to use a variety of strategies to effectively deal with diverse situations in and out of the workplace is very important. Equally important is the ability to share these effective strategies openly, to leverage the diversity that exists within the organization.

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