

PERCEPTIONS OF OKLAHOMA CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS  
REGARDING SELECTED ASPECTS  
OF EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

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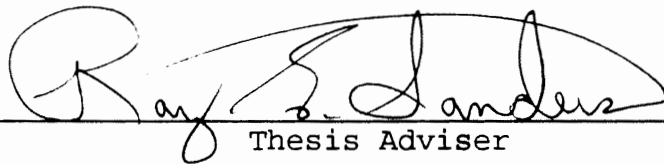
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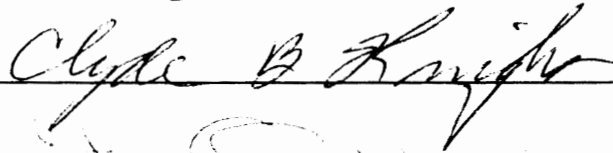
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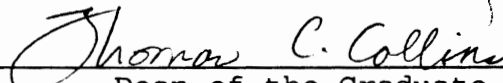
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

"Employers believe that employability skills are of primary importance" in the work force (Lankard, 1990, p.1). Grede (1983) stated that helping individuals find jobs was of primary importance. Vocational business educators were in a primary position to help individuals obtain work. Increasingly in the work force it took much more than just having the technical skill to get the job as well as keep the job; it took having employment skills such as professional appearance, positive attitude, good communication, dependability, commitment to the job, self-worth, and a strong work ethic. Employment skills that often times were not officially included in curriculum but these skills needed to be taught. Bhaerman and Spill (1988, p.42) stated "Give us youth who show up on time, work all day, dress appropriately, obey rules, get along with others, follow directions, and complete assigned tasks and we will hire them." Almost all employers were looking for these skills. Herbert M. Kliebard (1990) suggested that vocational education was the place where these skills needed to be taught. Lankard (1990) stated that integrating employability skills with vocational skills lead to employment success for all individuals involved.

### Statement of Problem

The problem of the study was that Oklahoma chief executive officers' perceptions of selected aspects of employment skills were unknown by vocational educators.

### Need For the Study

The need for the study was to aid vocational business educators in recognizing the importance of employment skills in the work society. Identifying these skills enabled vocational business educators in developing curriculum and better preparing the student for the work place. It was important for vocational business educators to realize that employment skills needed to be taught in their classrooms and it was the educator's responsibility to reinforce the importance of these skills.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine Oklahoma chief executive officers' perceptions of selected aspects of employment skills including appearance, attitude, verbal communication, written communication, nonverbal communication, dependability, work commitment, self-worth, and work ethic.



### Questions to be Answered

To accomplish this purpose, the following questions needed to be answered:

1. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive appearance among employees?

2. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive attitude among employees?

3. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive verbal communication skills among employees?

4. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive written communication skills among employees?

5. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive non-verbal communication skills among employees?

6. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive dependability among employees?

7. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive work commitment to the job among employees?

8. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive self-worth among employees?

9. How do chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceive work ethics among employees?

#### Limitations

The study was limited to top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees. Corporations were identified by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce Research and Planning Division in June 1993. Further, the employment skills were based upon subjective perceptions of chief executive officers.

#### Definitions

For the purpose of the study, the following operational definitions were used:

Appearance referred to the image an individual projects by his clothing, shoes, hygiene, hair grooming, facial hair (men), and cosmetic application (women) (Molloy, 1988; Bixler, 1984; Golden, 1986; Martins, 1988).

Attitude was "a way thinking, acting, or feeling" that showed one's disposition" (Ziglar, 1979, p. 438). It was either positive or negative.

Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) referred to the top management level (CEOs or managers) of top 50 Oklahoma

corporations with the highest number of employees. These corporations were determined by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce Planning and Research Division in June 1993.

Communication referred to the "process of exchanging information" (Kimbrell and Vineyard, 1986, p.147).

Dependability consisted of three aspects which were attendance, punctuality, and reliability (Farr, Gaither, and Pickrell, 1987).

Nonverbal communication referred to "communicating without words" and "messages expressed by other than linguistic means" (Adler and Towne, 1987, p.188)

Self worth was believing in the self in a positive manner (Ziglar, 1979 and McGinnis, 1987).

Verbal communication referred to the process of exchanging information orally. This process involved both speaking and listening.

Work commitment referred to being loyal to the organization at which one works, telling others one was proud to be part of the organization and glad to work there, agreeing with the organization's policies, caring about the fate of the organization, getting life satisfaction from the job, being a perfectionist and personally involved in work, and willing to stay in the organization even if another offer was made from a different organization (Morrow and Wirth, 1989).

Work ethic referred to the "beliefs, values, and principles that guided the way individuals interpreted and acted upon their job rights and responsibilities within the work context at any given time" (Miller and Coady, 1986, p.5).

Written communication referred to communication that was "prepared on paper (hard copy) or sometimes stored on computer disks or displayed on computer terminals" (Hemphill, 1991, p.4).

## CHAPTER II

### Introduction

"Employers believe that employability skills are of primary importance" (Lankard, 1990, p.1). Employment skills included appearance, attitude, verbal communication, written communication, nonverbal communication, dependability, work commitment, self-worth and work ethic. Employers were looking for individuals with good appearance as well as a positive attitude. According to Lankard (1990), effective written, verbal and nonverbal communication was a must for employment. Employers were also seeking employees that were dependable and had a sense of work commitment. Self-worth in an employee was an extra plus because self-worth created enthusiasm and enjoyment for work. A strong sense of work ethic, especially in the work place, was also an important employment skill.

All these skills together in an individual made a highly employable person. These skills were attainable by all individuals.

### Appearance

"You never get a second chance to make a good first impression" and the first thing people noticed about a person was their appearance (Elsea, 1984, p.7). Therefore,

appearance was a highly important employment skill. If an applicant's appearance was less than professional, the opportunity to get the job was lost. Chris L. Kleinke (1975) in a chapter entitled "Looks Aren't Everything, But..." also stated that appearance was a crucial part of the employment search. Golden (1986) in the book You Are What You Wear by Thourlby stated people assess, by appearance alone, "your honesty and friendliness; your knowledge, abilities, background and attitudes; and your intentions toward other people" in a business situation.

An individual's appearance was judged by their clothing, shoes, hygiene, hair grooming, facial hair (men), and cosmetic make-up (women) (Bixler, 1984; Golden, 1986; Molloy, 1988; Martin, 1988). Molloy (1988) stated that most individuals determined if other people in the office were professionally dressed but when it came to themselves they tended to be more lenient with the distinction of what was appropriate and what was not appropriate. An employee needed to know the proper way to dress for his position, then he dressed for that position or one step above if he desired to advance in the company. Bixler (1984) stated that there was not a right or wrong way to dress, but an appropriate way. This was true because what was appropriate to wear to the office was not appropriate to wear to an office party at a beach. It was important to fit into the

situation at hand and to project the appropriate appearance (Bixler, 1984).

#### Attitude

"Perhaps the most important factor in your job success is your own attitude" (Kimbrell and Vineyard, 1986, p.92). According to Ziglar (1979, p. 438) attitude was defined as "a way of thinking, acting, or feeling" that shows ones disposition. For the most part, attitudes were either categorized as positive or negative. According to Kimbrell and Vineyard (1986, p. 92) "people with positive attitudes are more optimistic, cheerful and outgoing while people with negative attitudes complain a lot, get angry often and withdrawn." A positive attitude about work increased productivity and was appreciated by employers as well as co-workers (Muessling, 1986; Lankard, 1990; and Stemmer, Brown, and Smith, 1992). People enjoyed working with and being around those who exhibited positive attitudes. People needed to be encouraging, open, relaxed, and self-assured when dealing with other people (Ziglar, 1979; Kimbrell and Vineyard, 1986; and Adler, 1989).

Muessling (1986) stated that attitudes were affected by changing factors; therefore, it was important to treat change at work as a new opportunity or adventure. Individuals were not born with positive or negative attitudes, these attitudes were conditioned; therefore, if a person held a negative attitude he could choose to change it

to a positive attitude (McGinnis, 1987). Kimbrell and Vineyard (1986) suggested methods to use in order to improve on positive attitude such as if the individual smiled, was willing to change negative ideas and behavior, saw other person's point of view, eliminated complaints, accepted responsibility for mistakes, gave praise to others, was considerate and polite to others, looked people in the eyes when talking to them, respected others and their opinions, didn't make excuses, and had a variety of interests. All of these characteristics aided an individual in developing a positive attitude because it was one of the top items employers looked for in an employee. He stated that employers liked to see employees having "positive responses to negative situations" (Presley, 1988, p.8).

Negative attitudes limited individual while positive attitudes gave the individual an undefined area in which to grow (Oldham, 1990). Positive attitudes allowed employees to be more productive, to be a team player, and to be a true success.

#### Written Communication

"How well you communicate your ideas will make the difference between success and failure" (Adler, 1989, p.46). Written or printed communication was "prepared on paper (hard copy) or sometimes stored on computer disks or displayed on computer terminals" (Hemphill, 1991, p.4). Written communication had advantages and disadvantages over



verbal communication. Many people preferred written communication because it served as documentation or proof. Just as in verbal communication, written communication included good grammar usage and projected the message in a clear and concise manner.

Although oral communication, according to Kimbrell and Vineyard (1986), was the faster and most convenient form of communication, written communication had its advantages. Hemphill (1991) listed four advantages of written communication. First of all, written communication saved time and money because it allowed the message to be sent without any interruptions. The second advantage was that written communication allowed both the writer and the receiver to have a written record. This was beneficial especially in legal dealings. The next advantage was that written communication allowed convenience to the writer and reader. Communication occurred without matching schedules. With the fax machines as well as the traditional mailing services the frustrating game of phone tag could be eliminated. The advantages of written communication were great, but individuals needed to know how to properly use written communication.

One of the major problem areas in business writing was the lack of clarity and conciseness (Bayless, 1988). Unlike traditional writing skills learned in the high school English courses, business writing needed to be short and to

the point because chief executive officers had no time to waste reading through flowery writing. Clarity and conciseness were accomplished by brainstorming exactly what the reader was to understand from the correspondence. Next was to be sure correspondence only included those needed points, hence, making the writing concise.

Another area of importance in written communication was the use of proper grammar. Bayless (1991) stated that good grammar was vital in written communication. Good written communication included correct spelling, correct punctuation, and proper grammar usage. According to Bayless (1991) each of these areas was an equally important skill that managers desired to have in their secretaries. Managers also demanded that written communication contained no typographical errors such as transposing letters, typing the wrong word, and deleting or inserting letters or spaces. Each written correspondence was to be completely error free. In other words, it was to be nothing less than perfect.

Written communication was a vital employment skill. People who had good writing skills had an advantage over other employees or applicants.

#### Verbal Communication

Kimbrell and Vineyard (1986, p. 147) stated that "communication is the process of exchanging information." In verbal communication the process included both speaking and listening to others. According to Elsea (1984, p.8) "As

much as eighty-five percent of your day may be spent in some form of communication-most of it speaking with and listening to others, according to a survey of business people conducted at Arizona State University's College of Business Administration." Gaining employment as well as keeping employment relied on this skill. Adler (1989, p.46) stated that "words are vessels that carry most of our ideas to others." The way in which we delivered these "vessels" relied on our knowledge of utilizing communication skills.

Kimbrell and Vineyard (1986) stated that the ability to communicate orally was a vital part of success in the business world. An important area of speaking well was using proper grammar as well as speaking clearly and concisely. Ronald B. Adler (1989) gave an example of the importance of speaking with clarity. A boss told his secretary to send Mr. Jones the same letter sent to Mrs. Smith. Although this seemed simple enough, it was possible that there were more than one Mr. Jones or there were several letters sent to Mrs. Smith and the secretary may not have known which one to send; therefore, creating confusion for the secretary as to which letter to send and to whom to send it. Adler (1989) also suggested that our choice of words possibly created misunderstanding or bad feelings when attitudes were reflected or created in others.

Several methods were used to lower the chances of misunderstandings and to heighten the chance of clarity in

communication. Adler (1989) suggested avoiding the use of unequivocal terms, which were words with more than one meaning, helped in creating clarity. Another method according to Adler (1989) was to use lower-level abstraction. Many words had different levels in which they were able to be described. When communicating with others it was important to define specifically what was needed. For example, instead of an employer giving unclear instructions to an employee such as we needed some market research; the employer gave clear description by having said we needed a short customer satisfaction questionnaire consisting of about 20 items: The questionnaire was to be sent to all district managers. The first sentence was vague, but the second group of sentences was exact in describing the task to be completed. Using these two methods decreased misunderstandings and allowed the employee to get the job done correctly the first time.

Being a good listener was also an important part of the verbal communication. Kimbrell and Vineyard (1986, p. 149-50) listed several basic listening skills: "recognize your purpose, look for the plan, give feedback, take notes, distinguish between fact and opinion, listen for more than verbal content (nonverbal communication), distinguish between important and unimportant information, ask questions, and listen for the conclusion." Each of these listening skills were important, but feedback was vital to

good communication. Feedback was the process of letting the speaker know that you were listening. A simple nod of the head and repeating what the speaker said were examples of feedback. Bill Osborn (1987, p.6) stated that "feedback is a never ending process that should lead to continual improvement." Good verbal communication only took place if both parties, the speaker and the listener, were involved in the communication process.

#### Nonverbal Communication

Adler (1989) stated that as much as 93 percent of attitudes were communicated through some type of nonverbal communication. Adler (1989) gave several examples of how nonverbal communication was a highly important employment skill. One example related to an applicant interviewing for a job. The applicant's resume showed his near perfect grades and extensive job experience. His skills seemed to be far superior than all the other applicants but at the interview he did not look the interviewer in the eye, had poor posture, and did not speak in a clear tone; therefore, because of his poor nonverbal communication skills, he did not get the job.

Nonverbal communication encompassed many aspects of communication. According to Adler and Towne (1987, p.188) nonverbal communication included body orientation, posture, gestures, facial expression, eye movement, voice tone, speech speed, touch, appearance, proxemics (the physical

distance between communicators), territoriality, and the physical environment (Adler and Towne 1987; Adler, 1989; Hinde, 1975; Knapp, 1978; and Mehrabian, 1972). In the books Communication at Work (Adler, 1989) and Looking Out Looking In (Adler and Neal, 1987) the authors stated that we cannot not communicate. Even if no words were spoken, there would always be some type of nonverbal communication glaring out even if it was as simple as a smile or a frown.

Adler and Towne (1987) as well as Knapp (1978) stated that nonverbal communication served many functions such as repeating, substituting, complementing, accenting, regulating, and contradicting. An example of repeating used as a nonverbal communication function was pointing to the right while saying go to last door on the right. This reinforced what direction in which to go. Shrugging shoulders or shaking one's head back and forth, instead of having said I don't know or no, was an example of substituting. "Complementing nonverbal behaviors signal the attitude the interactants have for one another" (Adler and Towne, 1987, p.193). Accenting was used by putting emphasis on a particular word while speaking just as using italics when writing. The rise and fall of ones voice when speaking was a use of regulating as nonverbal communication skill. Adler (1989) stated an example of contradicting used as nonverbal communication was saying yes while shaking one's

head back and forth. The verbal communication said yes but the nonverbal communication said no.

"Whatever the goal and whatever the context, business and professional communication involved both verbal and nonverbal communication" (Adler, 1989, p.67). It was vital to be aware of the signals that one sent out nonverbally. Employees with good nonverbal communication skill would succeed in communication as well as in the world of business.

#### Dependability

Farr, Gaither, and Pickrell (1987) in a chapter entitled "Employer Expectations" stated that dependability was the most important employment skill. They continued by saying that an employer often hired an applicant that was dependable with few skills over an applicant that was not dependable but had many skills (Farr, et al., 1987). Employers contended that an employee was unable to contribute fully to the company if the employee was unable to be depended upon. Farr, Gaither, and Pickrell (1987) suggested that dependability consisted of three aspects which were attendance, punctuality, and reliability.

Attendance was an important part of work. An employee who had good attendance produced more for the company and that was what the employer was wanting (Farr, et al., 1987; Bhaerman and Spill, 1988; and Muessling, 1986).

Another important area of dependability was punctuality. Being punctual meant to get to work on time, come back from breaks and lunches on time, not leaving work early, meeting deadlines, and arriving to meetings and appointments on time (Farr, et al., 1987). A general rule of thumb concerning punctuality was planning to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early for meetings, appointments, and work. This allowed time for an extra stop light, going to the bathroom, or slow traffic.

The final area of dependability was reliability. This area entailed many things. Problem-solving and decision-making skills were vital in projecting a reliable image (Lankard, 1991; Muessling, 1986; Bhaerman and Spill, 1988; Barnett, 1988; and Naylor, 1988). "Reliability means that the employer can count on you to do your job" (Farr, et al., 1987, p.16). Other aspects of reliability included

putting in an honest day's work each day; learning something new at every opportunity; getting along with co-workers, customers and supervisors; leaving personal problems at home, following supervisory directions and company policies; asking for a raise only after taking on more responsibility; keeping a clean, neat, safe work place and taking care of equipment; asking for help, but only work place and taking care of equipment; asking for help, but only after you have tried your best to solve the problem; admitting to mistakes and working at improving your weaknesses; and working until the job is done right, even if it means unpaid overtime (Farr, et al., 1987, p. 16).

Each of these areas was vital in order to be considered a reliable employee.



It was highly important to an employer that the employee was dependable. In order to have been considered dependable the individual must have been punctual with good attendance as having been reliable.

#### Work Commitment

Employers were extremely interested in employee commitment to the company. Work commitment involved loyalty to several different work-related entries (Morrow and Goetz, 1988). According to Morrow and Wirth (1989), work commitment included such areas as being loyal to the organization, telling others one was proud to be part of the organization and glad to work there, agreeing with the organization's policies, caring about the fate of the organization, getting life satisfaction from the job, being a perfectionist and personally involved in work, and willing to stay in the organization even if another offer was made from a different organization. These areas involved a high degree of organizational commitment and if an employee contained this skill, success in the organization laid in his future.

Many things affected an employee's commitment to the company such as pay, enjoying work and according to Grover (1992) level of education also affected commitment. In a study conducted by Grover (1992) he concluded that individuals with higher levels of education had more commitment to their profession and organization with which

they worked. Morrow and Goetz (1988) suggested that employees with a high degree of work commitment tended to be more motivated, more satisfied with the job, and less likely to leave the firm. Morrow and McElroy (1987) agreed with the above statement and added that work commitment also increased job involvement and organizational commitment.

Meussling (1986) stated that productivity of a firm depended on work commitment of employees; therefore, employers sought to hire individuals who would be committed to work. She continued by stating that individuals committed to work tended to be more understanding, empathetic and had a pure sense of pride for their work (Meussling, 1986). All these characteristics contributed to the organization in a positive way.

#### Self-Worth

"People who have confidence in their personal worth seem to be magnets for success and happiness" in both their personal and professional life (McGinnis, 1987, p. 13). Employers sought employees with a feeling of high self-worth. Larking and Pines (1990) stated that applicants with high self-worth got the job over applicants with low self-worth. The reason was because individuals with high self-worth presented themselves in a positive, confident manner and convinced the interviewer that they would do the job well. Some people had a hard time presenting themselves as self-confident because they felt that it lacked humility

(McGinnis, 1987). This was not true. Self-worth was simply believing in himself. If the individual did not believe in himself then no one would.

Adler and Towne (1989) stated that people were not born with a high feeling of self-worth; instead, it was a developed skill. Crook, Healy and O'Shea (1984) stated that self-worth was an ongoing process. They continued by stating that people with high self-worth experienced high levels of achievement in business as well as in their personal life (Crook, et al., 1984). In "The Employability Skills Portfolio" the authors stated that knowing one's strengths as well as weaknesses (then working on weaknesses) was a vital part of self-worth as well as an important employability skill (Stemmer, et al., 1992).

Lankard (1987) stated in order to have obtained positive self-worth individuals needed to have been confident about their physical appearance, held relationships with others, displayed good posture, had a positive attitude, knew weakness and worked on them, and knew strengths. She suggested that individuals with low self-worth evaluated each of these areas and began to set goals to improve the areas in which they were lacking and this heightened their feeling of self-worth (Lankard, 1987). Another way of building self-worth was to have had positive self talk (Ziglar, 1979; McGinnis, 1987; and Adler and Towne, 1989). Self talk was the words we said to ourselves

that other people did not hear. If the brain continued to hear negative thoughts about the self, after a while the brain began to believe that these negative thoughts were true. Saying things such as I am a winner, good job, I look good, and/or I can do it to the self were phrases that built self-worth.

Positive self-worth affected all areas of an individual's life in a successful manner. Building self-worth was an ongoing process and was able to be done by anyone.

#### Work Ethic

The work force constantly encountered dilemmas that tested work ethic. Lankard (1991, p.2) stated that employees faced decisions that had "implications for their job security, their salaries, and the success of their employing organizations"-- pressures like these risked personal as well as the company's integrity; therefore, having a strong work ethic was a vital employment skill.

Miller and Coady (1986, p.5) defined work ethic as "beliefs, values, and principles that guide the way individuals interpret and act upon their job rights and responsibilities within the work context at any given time." According to Lankard (1990) a vital area of employment skills was to practice ethical behavior. Lankard (1990,p.2) stated that strong work ethics included "exercise integrity and good judgment, respect for property, and follow company

rules." Good work ethic also included holding a strong sense of honesty, having respect for and admiration of hard work, being time and money conscientious, and being independent from others (Tang, 1991).

Bjorkquist (1991), Bhaermand and Spill (1984) stated that employers were looking for employees who showed up on time, worked hard while on the clock, were honest and respected the work environment. All of these skills were work ethics. Blanchard and Peals as quoted by Lankard (1991, p.2) stated three questions to ask when dealing with ethical dilemmas:

1. Is it legal? Will I be violating either civil law or company policy?
2. Is it balanced? Is it fair to all concerned in the short term as well as the long term? Does it promote win-win relationship?
3. How will it make me feel about myself? Will it make me proud? Would I feel good if my decision was published in the newspaper? Would I feel good if my family knew about it?

These questions allowed the employee to be aware of the issues involved and helped to better determine a proper, ethical answer.

The American College Personnel Association (1990, p. 198) stated that work ethics "should guide the behaviors of the professional in everyday practice." This meant that day in and day out good employees practiced good work ethics.

### Summary

Each aspect of the employment skills were important. Applicants with good employment skills were hired over applicants who lacked these skills.

Appearance was the first thing we noticed about people; therefore, it was vital to have portrayed a good appearance by wearing pressed clothes, polished shoes, neatly groomed hair, and exhibited good hygiene. Having a positive attitude was also an important employment skill (Presley, 1988). People with positive attitudes accepted change easily and were enthusiastic. There were three types of communication which were vital in the business world. They were verbal, written, and nonverbal communication. Both written and verbal communication required proper grammar as well as conciseness and clarity. Verbal communication also required feedback. Non-verbal communication was "communicating without words or those messages expressed by other than linguistic means" (Adler and Towne, 1987, p.188). Some examples of nonverbal communication were posture, facial expression, eye movement, body orientation, voice tone, speech speed as well as many more. Dependability, another important employment skill, meant to be punctual, reliable and have had good attendance. Employers were interested in work commitment; therefore, work commitment was another employment skill. Work commitment involved such things as being loyal to the firm, being proud of place of

employment, taking pride in work, and staying at the same firm for a long period of time. "People who have confidence in their personal worth seem to be magnets for success and happiness" in both their personal and professional life (McGinnis, 1987, p. 13). Self worth was an important employment skill because it brought out the best in people. The final employment skill was work ethic. Work ethic as defined by Miller and Coady (1991, p.21) was the "beliefs, values, and principles that guided the way individuals interpret and act upon their job." Strong work ethic involved integrity, respect, and good judgement (Lankard, 1990).

Each one of these employment skills enabled individuals to get jobs as well as secured jobs. Employers were seeking employees with these skills; therefore, people with good employment skills reached success in the world of business.

## CHAPTER III

### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine Oklahoma chief executive officers' perception of selected aspects of employment skills including appearance, attitude, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, written communication, dependability, work commitment, self-worth, and work ethic. The basic assumption at the outset was that most employees lacked these skills. Given this assumption, this research project was conducted to identify the chief executive officers perception of employment skills of current employees. This information aided vocational educators in creating curriculum that better prepared students for the work force.

### Population

The population of this research project included chief executive officers of Oklahoma's top 50 corporations with the highest number of employees. These corporations were determined by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce Research and Planning Division in June 1993.

The list consisted of the 50 top Oklahoma corporations that had the highest number of employees. Corporations were identified by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce Research and Planning Division's 1993 list of top corporations with



the highest number of employees. Employment ranged from the most number of employees to the least number of employees the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees. Population of CEOs of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations by highest number of employees were chosen because these firms gave a good representation of employment skills because of the high number of employees represented.

#### Methodology

The data gathering instrument used in this research consisted of 27 statements. These statements were converted to a five-pointed value scale to determine the degree of agreement or disagreement among CEOs of Oklahoma's top corporations with the highest number of employees regarding employment skills. The extent of the agreement ranks were as follows: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The employment skills for the instrument development were determined by interviewing instructors and administrators at an Oklahoma private business college. Each interviewee was asked to state the top nine characteristics of an employee that enabled them to be employable. The answers were then condensed to the nine items that were the most common answers. The employment skills determined by the interview were as follows: appearance, attitude, verbal communication, written

communication, nonverbal communication, dependability, work commitment, self-worth, and work ethic.

The questionnaire was developed by selecting three key aspects of each employment skill which were determined by research conducted in Chapter III. Three questions were asked about each of the nine employment skills listed above and the respondents circled one of the following rating levels on a scale of one to five according to degree of agreement or disagreement: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = undecided, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. The instrument was tested for face validity by the researcher's graduate committee.

Because chief executive officers generally had a busy schedule, it was determined that a short, concise Likert scale questionnaire would gain the best response rate.

The first mailing of the questionnaire was sent to chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations by highest number of employees. The mailing included the questionnaire with a self-contained letter (see Appendix A) and a postage-paid, self addressed envelope to for easy return of the questionnaire. Postcard reminders (see Appendix B) were mailed after the questionnaires to encourage responses. A second mailing of the questionnaires was mailed to chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations by highest number of employees that were not identified on the optional information section of

returned responses from the first mailing. The second mailing included a questionnaire, cover letter (see Appendix C) as well as postage-paid, self addressed envelope to encourage responses.

The descriptive statistics used in this study were frequency, mean, and standard deviation.

## CHAPTER IV

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine chief executive officers' of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceptions of selected aspects of employment skills including appearance, attitude, verbal communication, written communication, nonverbal communication, dependability, work commitment, self-worth, and work ethics. First, characteristics were determined that made an applicant employable; second, questionnaires were mailed to the top 50 Oklahoma corporations by highest number of employees.

### Data

The employment skills were identified by interviewing administrators and instructors of an Oklahoma private business college. These people were asked to list the top nine qualities that makes an applicant employable. The list was condensed to the nine most common employment skills which were: appearance, attitude, verbal communication, written communication, nonverbal communication, dependability, work commitment, self-worth, and work ethics.

Determining the perceptions of chief executive officers was accomplished by sending questionnaires to CEOs

of the top 50 top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees. A list of Oklahoma's major corporations with the highest number of employees were identified by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce Research and Planning Division in June 1993. The questionnaires consisted of 27 statements with a Likert Scale ranging from one to five according to level of agreement or disagreement (see Table I for point values and value descriptions). Three questions were asked about each of the employment skills identified above. Questions were varied in statements of both positive and negative terms.

TABLE I  
ASSIGNED VALUES OF PERCEPTIONS OF  
OKLAHOMA CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS  
REGARDING SELECTED ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

---

<u>Point Value</u>	<u>Value Description</u>
1	Strongly Agree
2	Agree
3	Undecided
4	Disagree
5	Strongly Disagree

---

The first mailing of the questionnaire was sent to chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations by highest number of employees. The mailing included the questionnaire with a self-contained letter (see Appendix A) and a postage-paid, self addressed envelope to for easy

return of the questionnaire. Postcard reminders (see Appendix B) were mailed after the questionnaires to encourage responses. A second mailing of the questionnaires was mailed to chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations by highest number of employees that were not identified on the optional information section of returned responses from the first mailing. The second mailing included a questionnaire, cover letter (see Appendix C) as well as postage-paid, self addressed envelope to encourage responses.

A return rate of 68% was achieved by receiving 34 total returned responses from the combination of both questionnaire mailings.

Table II represented the frequency of responses by point value of perceptions of chief executive officers regarding selected aspects of employment skills. Each question number was listed under the appropriate subject matter with the amount of the responses returned for each point value. Data of negative statements were reversed to data scale of positive statements for consistent interpretation of the table.

The point value that received the highest frequency of response was two which represented agreement with the statement. The total category of each of the nine employment skills had two as the highest frequency of response. The lowest frequency of response was five

(strongly disagree), in which each of the nine employment skills contained least responses in this category.

TABLE II  
 FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE OF PERCEPTIONS OF  
 OKLAHOMA CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS  
 REGARDING SELECTED ASPECTS  
 OF EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

Employment Skills	Question Number	Frequency of Responses				
		1	2	3	4	5
Appearance	4	14	17	2	0	1
	10	11	22	1	0	0
	25	7	19	6	2	1
	Total	32	58	9	2	1
Attitude	1	11	22	0	1	0
	13	10	21	0	3	0
	26	4	19	4	7	0
	Total	25	62	4	11	0
Written Communication	3	14	11	5	3	1
	15	9	17	6	2	0
	24	4	20	5	4	1
	Total	27	48	16	9	2
Verbal Communication	7	5	25	3	1	0
	18	4	15	5	8	2
	27	5	19	7	3	0
	Total	14	59	15	12	2
Nonverbal Communication	6	8	13	11	2	0
	12	9	21	3	0	1
	21	4	23	5	2	0
	Total	21	57	19	4	1
Dependability	5	9	25	0	0	0
	11	7	21	5	1	0
	23	6	24	2	2	0
	Total	22	70	7	3	0

TABLE II (continued)

Employment Skills	Question Number	Frequency of Responses				
		1	2	3	4	5
Work Commitment	2	8	15	4	5	2
	17	18	13	1	1	1
	22	9	24	1	0	0
	Total	35	52	6	6	3
Self Worth	8	3	27	2	1	1
	14	6	21	4	3	0
	20	6	23	3	2	0
	Total	15	71	9	6	1
Work Ethic	9	9	21	2	2	0
	16	10	22	2	0	0
	19	7	24	1	2	0
	Total	26	67	5	4	0

Table III represented the mean and standard deviation of the perceptions of chief executive officers regarding selected aspects of employment skills. All statements that were negatively stated were indicated by a (\*) star. Before compiling mean and standard deviation these negative statements were converted to positive statements to allow for consistent interpretation of the table. All statements with a mean of 2.5 or less were considered a high degree of agreement.

Each employment skill was identified with the question numbers that pertained to the specific skill. Mean and standard deviation were computed for each question as well as an overall mean and standard deviation for each employment skill.



TABLE III  
 MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF PERCEPTIONS  
 OF OKLAHOMA CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS  
 REGARDING SELECTED ASPECTS OF  
 EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

Employment Skill	Question Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Appearance	4	1.735	.828
	10	1.706	.524
	*25	1.971	.627
	Total	1.804	.675
Work Ethic	*9	1.912	.753
	16	1.765	.554
	19	1.942	.694
	Total	1.873	.670
Dependability	5	1.735	.448
	*11	2.000	.696
	23	2.000	.696
	Total	1.912	.631
Work Commitment	2	2.353	1.178
	*17	1.647	.917
	22	1.764	.496
	Total	1.922	.951
Attitude	1	1.735	.618
	13	1.882	.808
	*26	2.412	.957
	Total	2.010	.850
Nonverbal Communication	*6	2.206	.880
	12	1.912	.793
	21	2.147	.702
	Total	2.088	.797
Self Worth	8	2.118	.729
	14	2.118	.808
	20	2.029	.717
	Total	2.088	.746

TABLE III (continued)

Employment Skill	Question Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Written Communication	*3	2.000	1.101
	*15	2.029	.834
	24	2.353	.950
	Total	2.127	.972
Verbal Communication	7	2.000	.603
	*18	2.676	1.147
	27	2.235	.819
	Total	2.304	.920

#### Summary of Findings

Based on the data obtained through this research it was found that:

1. Chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 1.804 overall mean regarding appearance among employees.

2. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 2.010 overall mean regarding attitude among employees.

3. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 2.304 overall mean regarding verbal communication skills among employees.

4. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 2.127 overall mean regarding written communication skills among employees.

5. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 2.088 overall mean regarding nonverbal communication skills among employees.

6. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 1.922 overall mean regarding dependability among employees.

7. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 1.922 overall mean regarding work commitment among employees.

8. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement 2.088 overall mean regarding self worth among employees.

9. Chief executive officers in top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees perceived agreement of 1.873 overall mean regarding work ethics among employees.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine chief executive officers' perceptions of selected aspects of employment skills. The employment skills were identified by interviewing administrators and instructors from an Oklahoma professional business college. These persons were asked to list the nine top qualities that an employer was looking for in a successful employee.

The data in this study was gathered through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 27 statements with three statements pertaining to each of the employment skills. The questionnaire was distributed to 50 CEOs of the top Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees. Each response that received a 2.5 or lower average score on a one (strongly agree) to five (strongly disagree) point Likert Scale was considered to have a high degree of agreement.

The study was limited to Oklahoma corporations. Further, the questionnaire data was based upon subjective perceptions of CEO's.

### Conclusion

As a result of this research the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Perceptions of the nine employment skills remained consistent with the review of literature.

2. Because there was high agreement of employment skills, top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees either created a work environment that promoted employment skills, hired individuals that contained employment skills or a combination of the two.

3. Chief executive officers of the top 50 Oklahoma corporations with the highest number of employees viewed their employees in a positive manner.

4. Top 50 Oklahoma corporations by highest number of employees contained good employment skills; therefore, employing individuals with high levels of employment skills could have contributed to the success of the corporation.

### Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following recommendations were provided:

1. Vocational educators continued to prepare students for work by teaching employment skills.

2. Educational manuals should be developed to give educators as well as chief executive officers aids in

promoting and improving employment skills of future employees as well as present employees.

3. Further research should be conducted to examine if employment skills were equal or different throughout all levels of the career ladder.

4. Educational workshops should be conducted at businesses to promote employment skills within the corporation.

5. An employment skills guide should be developed for businesses to distribute to employees to allow employees to know what employer expectations were concerning selected aspects of employment skills.

6. Further research should be conducted to determine if chief executive officers' perceptions of selected aspects of employment skills remain the same or differ as time passes.

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## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

*Employment Skills Survey  
thanks you  
for your participation!*

Scale: 1 = strongly agree      2 = agree  
3 = undecided                    4 = disagree  
5 = strongly disagree

22. Employees at this company take pride in their work.      1 2 3 4 5
23. Employees at this company have good attendance.      1 2 3 4 5
24. The employees at this company use proper grammar in written correspondence.      1 2 3 4 5
25. The employees at this company do not wear neatly pressed clothes.      1 2 3 4 5
26. The employees at this company react negatively to change.      1 2 3 4 5
27. Overall the employees at this company have good verbal communication skills.      1 2 3 4 5

## *Employment Skills Survey*

As one of the top industries in Oklahoma, you have been chosen to participate in this survey to define employment skills of present employees. This survey is being conducted for a master's thesis in Occupational and Adult Education at Oklahoma State University.

Your answers will be kept completely confidential and your prompt response is greatly appreciated. The questionnaire will take approximately 10 - 20 minutes to complete, and the results will be mailed to you at your request.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes! Please send me a copy of the results.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want a copy of the results.

If yes, please complete the following information:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Company \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you,

Penny D. Sherrill

**Directions:** Read each of the following statements relating to employment skills and identify the extent to which you agree with the statement by circling the appropriate response. Remember your response should indicate what employees exhibit the majority of the time . . .

**Scale:** 1 = strongly agree      2 = agree  
 3 = no opinion                      4 = disagree  
 5 = strongly disagree

1. The employees at this company are enthusiastic.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Employees at this company have a low turnover ratio.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The employees at this company have an unusually high amount of typographical errors in written correspondence.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The employees at this company have good hygiene.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Overall the employees at this company are dependable.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Employees at this company have bad posture.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The employees at this company speak in a clear voice.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Overall the employees at this company have a high degree of self-worth.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Employees at this company do not have a good sense of judgment.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Overall the employees at this company dress appropriately for the position.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Employees at this company return to work late after lunch breaks.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Employees at this company greet fellow businesspersons with a business-like handshake.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Overall the employees at this company have a positive attitude.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Employees at this company take pride in their physical appearance.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Overall the employees at this company have poor written communication skills.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Employees at this company have respect for others in the company.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Overall the employees at this company are not committed to their work.	1	2	3	4	5
18. The employees at this company use slang words in their speech.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Overall the employees of this company have strong work ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Employees at this company conduct themselves with confidence.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Overall the employees at this company have positive nonverbal communication skills.	1	2	3	4	5

. . . Continue on back.

**Directions:** Read each of the following statements relating to employment skills and identify the extent to which you agree with the statement by circling the appropriate response. Remember your response should indicate what employees exhibit the majority of the time . . .

**Scale:** 1 = strongly agree      2 = agree  
 3 = no opinion                      4 = disagree  
 5 = strongly disagree

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The employees at this company are enthusiastic.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Employees at this company have a low turnover ratio.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. The employees at this company have an unusually high amount of typographical errors in written correspondence. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. The employees at this company have good hygiene.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Overall the employees at this company are dependable.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Employees at this company have bad posture.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. The employees at this company speak in a clear voice.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Overall the employees at this company have a high degree of self-worth.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Employees at this company do not have a good sense of judgment.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Overall the employees at this company dress appropriately for the position.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Employees at this company return to work late after lunch breaks.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Employees at this company greet fellow businesspersons with a business-like handshake. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Overall the employees at this company have a positive attitude.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Employees at this company take pride in their physical appearance.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Overall the employees at this company have poor written communication skills.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Employees at this company have respect for others in the company.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Overall the employees at this company are not committed to their work.                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. The employees at this company use slang words in their speech.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Overall the employees of this company have strong work ethics.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Employees at this company conduct themselves with confidence.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Overall the employees at this company have positive nonverbal communication skills.    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

. . . Continue on back.

APPENDIX B

POSTCARD REMINDER



March 19, 1994

You should have received an Employment Skills Survey last week.

I am sending this note to remind you to complete and return the postage paid survey this week.

If you need an additional copy of the survey, please call me at 405-446-5405.

Thank you for your time and help with this project.

Sincerely

Penny D. Sherrill  
OSU Graduate Student

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER FOR SECOND MAILING

April 7, 1994

Enclosed you will find the second mailing of the Employment Skills survey.

The completion of this OSU graduates research project depends solely on you filling out and returning this questionnaire.

As you can see, the **questionnaire is short**, taking approximately 10 minutes and it is **postage paid**.

So, **TAKE A BREAK,**  
**COMPLETE THE SURVEY,**  
**PUT IN THE MAIL,**  
and you will help a graduate student gain her diploma!

Your assistance and time is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely

Penny D. Sherrill

VITA

Penny Donelle Guthrie Sherrill

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: PERCEPTIONS OF OKLAHOMA CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS  
REGARDING SELECTED ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education.

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Woodward, Oklahoma, March 25,  
1969, the daughter of H.C. and Phyllis Guthrie

Education:

Graduated from Sharon-Mutual High School, Mutual,  
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from Southwestern Oklahoma State University,  
Weatherford, Oklahoma in May 1991; enrolled in  
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Professional Experience:

Oklahoma State University, Graduate Research  
Assistant, 1992;  
Wright Business School, Vocational Business  
Instructor, 1992-1993;  
Enid High School, Business Teacher, 1993-1994.

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 06-30-94

IRB#: ED-94-109

**Proposal Title:** PERCEPTIONS OF OKLAHOMA BUSINESSPERSONS REGARDING  
SELECTED ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE

**Principal Investigator(s):** Ray Sanders, Penny Sherrill

**Reviewed and Processed as:** Exempt

**Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):** NONE

APPROVAL STATUS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

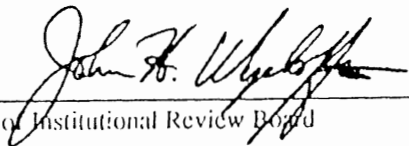
ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

---

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

HAD THE APPLICATION BEEN SUBMITTED IN A TIMELY MANNER, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN APPROVED AS EXEMPT.

Signature:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: June 30, 1994