



Piecing It Together

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

LIFE SKILLS & WORK SKILLS

It's an essential need of every single parent family home: a job. Not just any job, but a good job. Once we find stable employment, it's vital to give it our best. What we think about ourselves and our job is important.

A negative outlook causes all kinds of problems. A positive outlook sets us on the road to security and a satisfying work history. Choosing a positive attitude begins first inside your heart and then inside your home.

For all-around success at work and at home, start with a positive attitude and try to maintain it. Then sharpen your skills in three areas—working toward goals that are important to you, using your time well, and building your self-discipline muscles. Put it all together, and you'll have a winning package.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

- # 1. Set valued goals
- # 2. Creatively manage your time
- # 3. Practice self-discipline

VIDEO SUMMARY: Rick, a highly respected factory supervisor, requests personnel files from another supervisor, Ellen. They want to promote an employee to a position in quality control. Ellen advises Rick not to promote Becky, a single parent, because of Becky's negative and hostile attitude. Ellen, who feels single parents often are poor workers, is surprised to discover Rick is also a single parent. Rick points out that excellence and commitment on the job are personal choices.

Essential Skill # 1

SET VALUED GOALS

Goals come in different sizes. There are the huge ones like finishing your education, purchasing or renting a good home, landing meaningful employment, or raising children to become emotionally and physically healthy adults. Smaller goals may include daily tasks, such as finishing up a "To Do" list. Or they may be broader, like being active in the Parent-Teacher

Association, taking a vacation, or building friendships. Goals give us a direction in life. They can be stepping-stones for making dreams come true.

There is an old saying that goes like this: "Aim at nothing and you'll surely hit it." As parents and managers of our homes, we certainly don't want to approach life without aiming at goals that are truly important to us.

If we don't set goals for ourselves, someone else may do it for us. Do you ever become angry

because you feel like your life is being controlled by other people? If so, you may need to take charge and set your own goals.

Achieving goals builds hope and self-esteem. You model important life skills for your son or daughter when you set, work toward, and reach worthwhile goals. Your child feels a certain pride in you and your accomplishments, and he or she will learn how to do the same from watching you.

You don't have to change your life and the whole world in one day. It's best to start small with a few reachable goals that are really important to you. Then build up to bigger goals as you gain confidence and direction.

***No matter what goal
you've set, avoid comparing
yourself to others. Just be the
best person you can be.***

As you go about setting goals at home and at work, you may find these thoughts helpful:

- Take time to choose goals that will help you move toward things you really value. Put your goals down on paper. Keep them short and simple.
- Be patient with yourself in reaching your goals. With the right amount of effort and time, you'll get there.
- Set goals which require you to use your abilities to the fullest. This will encourage you to stretch and grow. Use your full potential to be the best you can be, for yourself and your family.
- Keep a positive mental attitude and a heart full of faith. What you think, you become. Surround yourself with positive individuals whom you enjoy—people who have dreams and a “can do” attitude.
- Focus on what's important. Small, relatively unimportant things will get you off course if you let them. You can usually tell when

someone is trying to dump something on you. Learn to say no—firmly, kindly.

- Aim for independence. In other words, don't look for others to bail you out. Finish a task once you've begun it. People sometimes ask single parents, “How do you do it all?” Their answer is they just do it. Sure, ask others for assistance when you need it, but develop a healthy measure of self-reliance by making the best of your time, talents and resources.

It helps to focus on one goal at a time. Mentally visualize yourself reaching your goal. Do this for a few moments several times a day. Just after you wake up and right before you fall asleep are excellent times for running these positive movies in your mind. Believe that you will succeed, and don't give up. Remember that success does not mean the absence of failure; it means reaching your goal. Sometimes that requires repeated efforts and lots of patience.

Essential Skill #2 **CREATIVELY MANAGE YOUR TIME**

Time management is really about managing ourselves. It's about what we do with the time we've been given in life. When we waste time, we are wasting our lives. Time is our friend if we know how to use it well. It can be also an enemy if we're disorganized.

Here are some helpful hints on how to creatively manage your day:

- Map out your week. Take some time at the beginning of the week to look at what you need to get done. This may include your job, school or church activities, medical appointments, meals, housecleaning, or recreation. Try to get the week's activities spaced evenly over the days, instead of having everything on the same day or two. By looking at the week before it



starts, you can rearrange activities to make your life less stressful.

- Pre-plan on a daily basis. Find a time in the early morning, or whenever your day begins, to review that day's activities. Mentally prepare for what's coming, be it cooking supper, a meeting at the synagogue or temple, taking children to the sitter's, or attending a child's soccer game. As a single parent, remember that putting things off can get you into big trouble. The more you pre-plan, the less stressful your day will be, both at home and on the job.

Schedule free time during the week and fiercely protect it. At the beginning of your week, take your calendar and mark off time just for you, or perhaps for you and the kids. Make that time sacred. Let nothing get in its way. Your life, work included, will be much more enjoyable.

- Keep a "To Do" list. This doesn't mean using the back of an envelope. Get a notebook for this specific purpose. Use one page per day and keep a record of what you're planning and what you've accomplished. That way, you will have a record of what you have done and you won't be left wondering if you actually performed a certain task.
- Avoid taking work home. This is essential. Your home needs to be dedicated to parenting, home management, and rest from job stresses. Manage yourself on the job so that you complete job assignments at the work site. If you work out of your home, know when to take off your work hat and enjoy the rest of your life. Occasionally, work may spill over onto the home front. Just don't make it a habit.

- Be flexible. Routines are important for single parent families, but sometimes you may need to build in "flexible routines." This may be especially necessary if you are working more than one job or work on rotating shifts.
- Don't ask your employer for special consideration because you are a single parent. This kind of thing earns single parents a bad reputation among employers and co-workers. It's not a good idea to frequently use your children as a reason for being absent or avoiding work responsibilities and opportunities.
- Take advantage of modern conveniences. In this age of invention and technology, there's no need to do everything the "old fashioned" way. Get electronic help in remembering appointments or other important things. Many tasks can be finished more easily and quickly and with higher quality if you'll take time to acquire new skills or use modern technology. Use whatever inventions you can afford to help you out.

Planning ahead and creatively managing your week may challenge you at first, but you'll get better with practice. Experienced single parents are known as resourceful people. Resourceful, self-reliant people make excellent workers and employers treasure them.

Essential Skill #3 **PRACTICE** **SELF-DISCIPLINE**

Self-discipline means following your heart to do what you inwardly know is best. This requires listening to and trusting your feelings, hunches and inner guidance. Equally important, you must wisely choose your thoughts, words and actions.

Anyone who wants to succeed in life needs some measure of self-discipline. This may mean that sometimes you won't get to do something you really want to do. Or you may have to put off

getting something you would like in order to complete a task or achieve a goal.

Self-discipline is basic to all you do. It's the ability to guide your thoughts, feelings and actions so that you can reach a particular goal.

Building self-discipline really is a question of personal determination. Here are some things you can do to strengthen your own self-discipline:

- Find an encourager or “coach.” This could be a friend or family member who loves and respects you and who wants to see you reach your goals. Ask this person ahead of time to be your personal encourager. You may wish to recruit several coaches, even among fellow single parents. Then, if you ever find yourself wavering in your determination, give one or all of your coaches a call or visit. There’s nothing like word of caring advice or hearing a special friend say, “Hang in there. You can do it!” to help you get through those trying times when you’re tempted to quit or settle for second best.
- Do it now. As soon as you realize it’s time to get up, be quiet or write that report, do it! Don’t delay. It’s when you postpone action and allow your mind to start making excuses that your will is weakened. That’s when trouble sets in.
- Challenge yourself. Walk an extra mile. Sit next to that person who in the past you have let “get on your nerves.” Remain silent rather than add to the negative gossip. Make a game of it. Use everyday situations to test your growing skills of creative self-discipline.
- Let people finish talking. Besides strengthening self-discipline, this skill builder can go a long way toward improving interpersonal communication. Make it a habit to avoid interrupting.

Relax, listen wholeheartedly and let people finish their sentences.

- Use self-discipline to live your priorities. Whether at work or at home, be clear on what comes first. You know you’re strong when you have the power to recognize and say “no” to what’s unnecessary and “yes” to what’s vital to your well-being as a single parent and employee. Don’t sweat the little things. Even though they may have their own importance, keep them in proper perspective.

You are one of your children’s most important teachers. Give your children a present that will last a lifetime: By your example, show them how to set and reach goals, and how to creatively use the priceless gift of time. Teach them the freedom and power that come as we strengthen our self-discipline skills.



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NOTES:

Personal Action Plan

Think about Life Skills & Work Skills and the three target skills: *Set Valued Goals*, *Creatively Manage Your Time*, and *Practice Self-Discipline*. Now zero in on one of these areas and choose one small but important change you really want to make in the next few days. Visualize yourself successfully following through. Tell a supportive friend or family member about your goal.

Write your action plan in the space below.

Beginning Date _____

Signature _____