Work Studies
Module 5: Managing Work and Life Commitments

Using opportunities and keeping work–life balance

It is important that a person is continually aware of the opportunities that are available to them. During high school, you should be looking at what you want to do when you finish. Each step in the education process leads to a qualification that makes it possible to proceed to the next step. Qualifications can also be achieved laterally. This means that once a qualification has been achieved at the tertiary level, it is possible to study for the same level but in a different course of study. Generally, though, people tend to move in a vertical direction to gain qualifications.

Not so with employment. In the 21st century, it has become normal practice to continually move from one job to another, or to move around within an organisation. This happens to secure promotion but, more often, to move laterally and to develop new skills.

There are a number of combinations of study and employment that will set a person on the desired career pathway. The process for seeking employment begins with becoming familiar with the type of jobs on offer. Securing a job requires effort and time. Job seekers fall into two main categories:

1. The **passive job seeker** will use one or two avenues when looking for work. These will usually be the internet and the local newspaper.

2. The **active job seeker** will use as many avenues as they can think of when looking for employment. These will include:
   - the internet
   - local newspapers
   - newspapers
   - Job Network employment agencies
   - Centrelink
   - group training companies
   - the direct approach
   - community noticeboards
   - government employment sector
   - New Apprenticeship Centre
   - family and friends.

People seeking employment direct from school are most likely to find a job with one of the methods outlined above. Sometimes, students graduating from university, technical and further education colleges (TAFE) or a private college and/or school will secure a full-time job with a cadetship, apprenticeship or traineeship.

Employment opportunities are usually created over a period of time and will incorporate compulsory and post-school education, learning and training, as well as experience in the workplace. Education and training occur in institutions such as schools, TAFE, private providers and university. As well as this formal experience through education and training, opportunities are provided in informal ways. Talking to friends, family, teachers and people in industry provides the means to develop a network of people, some of whom could act as mentors or could pass on ideas about work and the pathways to get there.
The opportunity to work provides a number of benefits that help you to develop as a person. Work helps in the following ways.

1. **Development of life management strategies**
   Life management strategies provide you with the self-confidence to plan and organise your social and career life so that you get the most satisfaction from living and working while, at the same time, making a substantial contribution as a member of the community. Work helps us achieve better skills for living.
   Developing life management strategies is as simple as making sure that you:
   - plan for what you expect to happen and what you would like to do
   - organise how you will achieve these goals.

2. **Balancing work and social life**
   Your job or career will often dictate the type of social life that you are able to enjoy, so you should take this into consideration when deciding on a career. For example, if you enjoy socialising with friends on weekends, then the hospitality industry is probably not the job for you because it requires working nights and weekends. Obviously, some jobs will require certain sacrifices, such as having to work overtime when you arranged to go for a long-planned night out on the town. At the same time, work provides an ability to form strong, supportive friendships.

3. **Balancing work and family responsibilities**
   Current thinking about why people are working longer hours and the general reluctance to take time off, or take holidays, is that organisations are creating competitive working environments. Workers feel that they must continually perform at a high standard to keep their jobs. They are concerned about not being at work and being seen as replaceable in their job.
   Working long hours and not leaving enough time to socialise or to spend with your family can:
   - create stress
   - lead to depression
   - lead to ill-health
   - cause anger and resentment when family responsibilities are sacrificed.
   Balancing work with social life and with family responsibilities is as important as the job you do or the career you are striving towards.

4. **Maintaining good health**
   A characteristic of good work habits is that as an individual you ensure that you look after yourself by eating healthy food and getting the right amount of exercise and rest. Overwork, excessive drinking, smoking, drug taking, lack of sleep, overeating or eating the wrong foods can all contribute to low job performance and can eventually impact on your health, leading to serious health issues.
   Balancing life and work is very important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, both in mind and in body.
5. **Maintaining support networks and accessing support systems**

A support network is a group made up of people who could help you get a job, who could offer advice, or who could act as mentors while you attempt to establish yourself in life. Once you have developed a support network, you should be able to call on any one of the people in this group to:

- help you with making decisions about your career path
- motivate and guide you while you establish your career
- support you with your job hunting through their contacts
- help you understand the challenges you face and the skills you need for employment.

Developing a support network is very important because people in your network can help you to achieve your career goals.

Support systems can be useful when looking for work, financial support, further training, guidance and counselling. Agencies can include:

- group training companies
- Centrelink
- skills training centres
- tertiary institutions
- careers counselling.

6. **Developing interests outside of work**

While at school, a student’s whole focus can be concerned with the life at school. This will involve the daily school routine and the associated social interaction with friends. Often these friends have been together for many years. Work, although different, also has the same characteristics. The longer people work together, the closer the friendships that are formed. The involvements at work also mean that people may become over-involved and live only for work. This is a particular problem if a person is self-employed and needs to work to cover all the costs of operating a business and the many deadlines to meet.

A good, healthy work attitude involves a balance between the time spent at work and a life outside of work. Involvement with leisure and recreation groups enables a person to have a broader mix with other people.