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# It's Not My Fault

CTAE-FS-9 Ethics and Legal Responsibilities: Learners commit to work ethics, behavior, and legal responsibilities in the workplace. Used with permission of Career Solutions Publishing

## Understanding and Goals

### Unit Understandings, Themes, and Concepts:

#### Enduring Understandings:

Students will learn to recognize and control their own defensiveness to improve job performance. Defensiveness is a very common, human reaction to criticism that can affect success in the work place. Learning to accept criticism can lead to self improvement and better job performance.

### Primary Learning Goals:

#### Essential Questions:

- Why is defensiveness harmful to both your performance and people's perception of you?
- How can you work to overcome defensiveness when handling criticism in the workplace?

### Students with disabilities:

For students with disabilities, each instructor should refer to the student's IEP to be sure that the accommodations specified in the IEP are being provided within the classroom setting. Instructors should also familiarize themselves with the provisions of Behavior Intervention Plans that may be part of a student's IEP. Frequent consultation with a student's special education instructor will be beneficial in providing appropriate differentiation within any given instructional activity or requirement.

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## CSP Mini-Lesson 8, Spring 2008

**Mini-Lesson Standards:** (1) Receive, interpret, and respond to verbal and nonverbal messages in a manner appropriate to a given situation. (2) Work to satisfy customer/client expectations. (3) Use strategies appropriate to a given situation to prevent and resolve conflicts.

**Mini-Lesson Correlations:** Interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, communication

### It's Not My Fault!

Manuel works as a cashier at Apex Office Supply, a large and busy store in your town. Matt, one of the salespeople, helps out when the lines get long at the registers. This morning Matt was helping a couple who wanted to buy a printer. They had a rebate and a coupon that were to be taken off at the register. Manuel could tell by the way Matt acted that he had never done a transaction like this before. Manuel offered to help, but Matt said, "I don't need any help."

## It's Not My Fault! (Continued)

After several unsuccessful attempts to run the rebate and coupon through the system, Matt became frustrated. The husband started asking questions and making suggestions about how to do the transaction. At first Matt ignored him, but when the man's wife made a comment about how long the transaction was taking, Matt said, "It's not my fault. The computer's not working right."

Overhearing the conversation, Manuel reached over to punch a few buttons on Matt's register and said, "You did something wrong. Just void the transaction and start over. Here, I'll show you how." Matt pushed his arm away, and growled, "Manuel, mind your own business."

What is Matt's problem? From the list below, check each statement that you believe fits the situation. In the lines beneath, explain why you believe the statement is true.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Matt is defensive.

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## It's Not My Fault! (Continued)

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Matt's actions were justified in this situation because he was just trying to do his job and people were annoying him.

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3. \_\_\_\_\_ Matt's behavior is especially out of place in front of customers.

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4. \_\_\_\_\_ Manuel should have been more tactful with Matt.

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## It's Not My Fault! (Continued)

5. \_\_\_\_\_ Manuel should have called a supervisor and complained about Matt.

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## A Better Way

In your own words, describe how you think Matt should have handled the situation when he began to have problems with the transaction.

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Describe how you think Manuel could have handled the situation better.

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## Overcoming Defensiveness

Defensiveness occurs when people feel threatened. It is often a cover-up for insecurity, although most people who are defensive won't admit they are insecure. Individuals who have good self-esteem usually aren't defensive. They accept help with appreciation and can say, "Thank you for helping me," without thinking they have belittled themselves.

Evaluate your own personality. Are you defensive when someone gives constructive criticism or points out a mistake that needs correcting? Think about what you can do to overcome defensiveness. If you don't usually react defensively, make a few suggestions for others who have this problem.

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## Instructor's Guide

This lesson is about defensiveness, an often natural reaction when a person makes mistakes in front of others. Defensiveness is a personality trait that will harm your students' careers if it is not conquered before they go to work.

New workers often do things incorrectly in their first few weeks or months at a job because they do not have the experience needed to understand a situation or a task. They may be questioned about their actions, given advice about ways to change, or reprimanded. If they react negatively, use bad language or are rude, their opportunities for success and promotion will be diminished.

You can prepare students for work by helping them find other, more appropriate responses to constructive, or even non-constructive, criticism. Here are a few suggestions. Ask students for other ways to overcome unnecessary defensiveness.

1. Ask for help before a problem occurs. Don't view asking for assistance as a weakness.
2. Understand that suggestions, assistance, and recommendations are about mishandled tasks and should not be considered as personal attacks.
3. Assume that criticism is meant to be constructive.
4. Recognize that not responding is more professional than giving a poor response.
5. Say, "thank you," when someone offers helpful assistance, even if you do not follow through on the advice.

## Instructor's Guide (Continued)

To expand this lesson, ask students to analyze and discuss the situation below:

This morning your supervisor told you that a customer had complained about the service you provided. You started to explain and your supervisor said, "Don't be so defensive, just make sure it doesn't happen again." That remark upset you and made you want to explain even more. What should you have done?

To further expand the lesson, view this Web site:

<http://www.gesher.org/Articles/conflict%20resolution/defensive%20behavior.html>

## Solutions to Activities

### It's Not My Fault!

   x    Matt is defensive.

When Matt is unwilling to take help, he shows that he thinks he has to know everything. He probably believes he will look weak if he allows someone to show him how to do a task.

   x    Matt's behavior is especially out of place in front of customers.

If Matt has a problem with Manuel's actions, he should wait until after all customers are gone to tell Manuel.

   x    Manuel should have been more tactful with Matt.

Manuel should not have reached over to Matt's computer without permission from Matt.

### A Better Way

Suggested answers are given. Other answers are acceptable.

**Matt's situation:** When the customers appeared with a transaction that Matt did not know how to handle, he should have asked a supervisor for help immediately. When he proceeded without help and made a mistake, he should have called a supervisor or accepted Manuel's assistance.

## Solutions to Activities (Continued)

### A Better Way (Continued)

**Manuel's situation:** Manuel meant well, but, by injecting himself into Matt's situation when Matt didn't want his help, he escalated the problem. Manuel's comment, "You did it wrong," was unnecessarily harsh and made Matt look bad in front of customers. Manuel should have asked for Matt's permission before reaching over to Matt's computer.

### Overcoming Defensiveness

Answers will be specific to each student's personality.

## Related Materials

Activities in this lesson are similar to the material found in *It's for Real Workplace Ethics*.

You may download a free issue on our Web site. *It's for Real Workplace Ethics, NEW Series III*, will available for fall classes. Samples will be available by mid-March. Please contact us if you would like to be placed on the list for a sample.

For more information about *It's for Real*, or other CSP products, please visit our Web site.

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