

# Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success

Evaluation Report  
May 2017



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Key Findings

- Trainers demonstrate mastery of program content and interact well with participants
- Trainers are able to act in the moment and tailor material and examples in a way that is relevant to clients
- Trainers have good rapport with clients
- Generally, trainers adhere to the curriculum and activities as presented in the manual
- The training is engaging
- Participants relate to the character scenarios
- Participants respond well to activities, especially those that involve self-reflection and group work
- Working Smart provides a way for participants to interact with others and participants enjoy the social component of the training
- Working Smart improves participants' self-confidence
- Working Smart fosters new perspectives
- Working Smart improves participant soft skills knowledge by 3 points, or 9% from pre- to post-test
- 40% of participants improve their test score by at least 10 percentage points from the pre- to post-test
- Self-ratings of self-awareness, self-management, and communication increase from pre- to post-test

## Recommendations

- Consider implementing checks to ensure that trainers are always covering lessons in the detail outlined by the manual and facilitating the content in an interactive manner as outlined in the manual
- Examine lessons in module 5. These were noted to be confusing by some participants and others wanted to see more problem solving and critical thinking throughout the training
- Update character scenarios to include situations that are more complex and highlight examples when employees may be placed in compromising situations
- Provide more information on proper facilitation of the curriculum in train the trainer sessions
- Better advertise Working Smart in the community
- Collect additional data to make results more generalizable to the client population and to be able to make more confident claims of program efficacy
- Collect additional data on employment outcomes including whether the Working Smart certificate helps recipients obtain employment and to gain employer perspectives of Working Smart employees

## OVERVIEW

### Description of Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success

Developed by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Workforce Development Partners, the Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success training teaches participants soft skills that will help them be successful and productive in the workplace. The program was developed based on feedback from local employers about essential soft skills that they want employees to have. The training consists of 16 lessons across 5 modules: self-awareness, self-management, work ethic, communication skills, and problem solving skills. Participants complete the training over a minimum of 24 instruction hours and must receive an 80% passing score on module quizzes in order to receive certification.

The purpose of the Working Smart program is to better equip job seekers with important soft skills needed in today's workplace and in life. In addition to learning new skills, participants will also learn how to apply skills in their everyday lives, have an opportunity to network with others, and have something to include on their resumes. Furthermore, employers who are aware of the Working Smart program will know that potential employees with a Working Smart certification have been trained in important soft skills.

### Goals of Evaluation and Methods Used

Charlotte Works – Community Partnerships, funded through the Charlotte Mecklenburg Workforce Development Partners, collaborated with the Center for Applied Research to conduct an evaluation of the Working Smart program. Charlotte Works and its partners have received informal feedback about the value and efficacy of the program, but have not previously had a formal evaluation of the program. The primary goal of the evaluation was to receive feedback from trainers and trainees regarding their experiences with the program and to determine whether the program is successful in increasing participants' knowledge of soft skills upon completion of the program. The evaluation included both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection consisted of session observations, informal interviews, focus groups, surveys, and pre- and post-tests. Below is a brief description of each component of the evaluation, followed by detailed report sections on methods and findings.

#### **Curriculum Review**

Prior to collecting data the evaluators attended the train the trainer session conducted on June 13 – June 16, 2016. Attending this training provided evaluators with a thorough understanding of the program curriculum and how the program should be implemented.

#### **Session Observations**

A total of nine sessions over the course of the evaluation were conducted. Observations of the Working Smart training was conducted in various settings by different instructors.

This provided a way to see the training in action, how participants respond to the program, and how instructors implement the curriculum.

### **Trainer Perspectives**

Several methods were used to obtain trainer feedback on the Working Smart program: a focus group with master trainers, pre- and post-training surveys completed by attendees in a train the trainer session, and informal interviews with trainers after teaching a session.

### **Client Perspectives**

Several methods were used to obtain trainee feedback on the Working Smart program: a focus group with trainees and pre- and post-tests completed by participants.

### **Program Efficacy**

Participants completed pre- and post-training tests regarding their knowledge of soft skills and their confidence in applying soft skills prior to and after completion of the program. Statistical testing was used to determine whether participant knowledge and confidence in skill application increased from pre- to post-test.

## **SESSION OBSERVATIONS**

After receiving a thorough overview of the content of the Working Smart training and how the material should be facilitated to clients, the evaluators observed several sessions. Session observations provide a way to see the program in action being taught in a variety of settings and with different populations. The purpose was to gain insight on how clients respond to the training and to see how the program functions across different populations. Specifically, observations focused on examining how the program is actually being facilitated by instructors, how instructors interact with clients, and how clients respond to the program and with others.

Between July – October 2016, the evaluators observed a total of 9 sessions taught by 7 trainers and each of the 16 lessons was observed at least once. The evaluators used an observation guide (see Appendix) to make notes about the setup of the room, trainer and client interaction and responses to the training, and debriefing questions with the trainer after the session was completed.

### **Information about the Sessions and Participants**

Basic information about each of the observations including organization/location of training, length of training time, group type, and number of participants is presented below in Table 1. Sessions from a variety of populations were observed including adults from NC Works, men at Jail Central, youth from The Relatives and CMS/CMPD, and young adults from CPCC. Sessions lasted from just over an hour to about two and half hours. The number of participants in each session ranged from 3 to 13.

<b>Table 1. Session Information</b>			
<b>Organization/ Location</b>	<b>Group type</b>	<b>Length (hours)</b>	<b># of participants</b>
NC Works #1	WIA Adults, 40+	2.5	6
NC Works #2	WIA Adults, 40+	2.3	4
NC Works #3	WIA Adults, 25+	1.8	5
The Relatives #1	Youth/young adults, 16-24	1.2	4
The Relatives #2	Youth/young adults, 16-24	1.5	3
Jail Central #1	Male inmates, 18+	2.3	13
Jail Central #2	Male inmates, 18+	2.5	11
CMS/CMPD	Youth, first time offenders, 16-20	1.6	6
CPC class	Young adults, 18-24	2.4	8

In addition to being of all ages, participants were also racially diverse (Table 2).

<b>Table 2. Sex and Race of Participants</b>			
<b>Race</b>	<b>Sex</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
African American	35	13	48
Caucasian	9	2	11
Latino	0	1	1
Total	44	16	60

**Trainers: Interactions with Clients and Curriculum Adherence**

Prior to the sessions, trainers set up materials, reviewed notes, and passed around sign-in sheets. All trainers were set up prior to the start time and prepared to teach. Some trainers had little interaction with clients prior to the start of the session, while others greeted participants, had conversations with participants, and answered questions. In some instances, it was obvious that the trainer had strong rapport with clients.

During the sessions, all trainers actively engaged with participants and seemed comfortable teaching the material. Many trainers provided personal examples that clients could relate to and in all instances, at least some of the clients in each session seemed to relate well to the trainer. Most trainers had clients participate in group activities and activities that required them to get out of their seats, which further increased participant engagement. Additionally, trainers did a great job of facilitating discussions when people had differing opinions and allowed people with different perspectives to share their viewpoints. During an observation at Jail Central, a few clients began to get into a verbal argument (not related to the curriculum), but the trainer was able to diffuse the situation.

In order to engage clients who were more hesitant to participate, trainers would call on participants to get them involved. Other trainers said things like, “Does anyone else have

something to share” in an attempt to give quieter participants an opportunity to participate. In other instances, for example the group at Jail Central, the trainer knew the men well and did not call on those who were not actively participating because he sensed the client could be having a bad day, did not want to call on someone to read aloud who he knew was a poor reader, etc. Thus, trainers knew how to actively engage participants in a way that made them feel comfortable. Trainers also had a sense of when participants were struggling and stepped in to further clarify instructions or provide additional examples.

Trainers working with youth populations were also able to provide relevant examples and personal stories that youth could relate to. When clients got off topic, trainers were able to get everyone focused again and ignored silly comments as a way to discourage remarks that were not appropriate or that were off topic. The youth populations also presented challenges such as standing up to leave to go eat. In order to keep the participant in the room, the trainer was able to act on the spot and adjusted the schedule so that lunch could be eaten at that time. These examples show that trainers are working to best meet client needs and can be flexible as situations arise and in rearranging the schedule.

Overall, trainers adhered to the content and format of the trainer handbook and tailored examples and scenarios in a way that made sense with the population. Some were more structured than others in following the handbook, but almost all of them closely followed the curriculum with a few exceptions. One trainer spoke very quickly and moved at a fast pace. This seemed to work well with most of the clients in the room, but there were a few who seemed to lag behind and have more difficulty with quickly picking up the material. Furthermore, a few lessons were covered very quickly (e.g., one lesson was covered in 15 minutes) due to limited time left in the day. In these instances, many of the activities were cut out and the content was very limited. A final observation was that a few trainers tended to do all of the activities as a large group. For example, instead of having participants move around the room or work in small groups, the trainer just called on people to answer questions.

### Clients: Interactions, Engagement, and Responses to Material

Although there were differences from session to session, clients generally interacted with each other. In most instances, there was minimal conversation between participants prior to the start of the session, with participants just greeting each other as they came into the room. In other groups, clients were conversing both about the class and about life in general prior to the start of the session. Once the session started, participants began interacting with one another during activities and group discussion. There seemed to be a strong sense of cohesion among those who were closer to the end of the training and those in more homogenous groups (e.g., the CPCC course group, and the young men in the CMS/CMPD who had previously known each other for a few months as part of the program they were completing). Clients shared personal examples of situations that they had encountered and others seemed to relate well and appreciate this input.

During the training, participants were generally very engaged. Participants appeared to be listening, taking notes and completing workbook activities, and most actively participated by

volunteering to read scenarios, answer questions, and participate in group discussions. The ice breaker activities also worked well with getting clients engaged and ready to participate in the day's lesson(s). One of the clients in the CPCC course noted that the Working Smart training was her favorite class. About half of the sessions had at least one individual who was quiet, but typically these individuals still participated and contributed to group discussions and activities.

Clients responded particularly well to the character scenarios. They volunteered to take on roles, in one instance flipping a coin to determine who got the main role, read the lines with emotion and expression, and often had strong opinions about the characters' situations and actions. A particular scenario that many clients connected with was 'Benny'. Some of the youth in The Relatives group were parents and the males related to Benny's anger towards Maria's new husband and the females related to Maria agreeing that Benny really was not a father to his children. The clients from Jail Central also related to this scenario as they themselves were in jail and many had children.

Furthermore, clients liked activities that allowed them to reflect on themselves and their experiences. For example, clients liked learning about personal beliefs and their own communication styles. Similarly, they enjoyed sharing and hearing others discuss difficult work situations that they had experienced. Particular lessons that participants seemed to most connect with were those on branding and self-awareness.

Overall, it seemed that clients were able to grasp the concepts and content presented. Some did appear to struggle at grasping more nuanced material that required critical thinking. Youth struggled with distinguishing the differences between thoughts, feelings, and physical signs and with the harmful vs. helpful statements activity. At times, participants shared how they would react in a situation that was not appropriate, but the trainer would have the group discuss why the response was not appropriate and ask them to come up with other ways to respond.

## TRAINER PERSPECTIVES

One aspect of the evaluation was to collect feedback from trainers about the program. Data collection methods included a pre- and post-training survey from a train the trainer session and a focus group with master trainers.

### Train the Trainer Session

Pre- and post-training surveys (see in Appendix) were completed by attendees of the train the trainer session conducted on June 13–16, 2016. The purpose of the pre-training survey was to obtain insight on attendees' previous experiences with soft skills training, what they hoped to gain by attending the training and becoming certified to teach the Working Smart curriculum, and their confidence in teaching soft skills. The purpose of the post-training survey was for attendees to rate the quality and usefulness of the training and to assess their confidence in teaching soft skills.

Surveys were completed online and reminders were sent via email by the Charlotte Works Partnerships manager.

### Pre-Training Survey

The pre-training survey contained four open-ended questions regarding previous experiences with soft skills training and what participants hoped to learn by attending the training. Additionally, attendees were asked to rate their confidence in teaching soft skills from the five content modules covered in the training.

Only six attendees completed the pre-training survey. Of these, 3 (50%) had not received soft skills training in the past. Those who had previously received training in soft skills had done so via online resources, videos from the Department of Labor, and various in person trainings (e.g., motivation training, employability skills, and communication skills in the workplace). When asked which soft skills their clients typically lack, respondents noted the following: communication (83%), problem solving and decision making (50%), and collaboration, work ethic, self-awareness/management, confidence, and resume writing (each 17%).

Attendees anticipated that the following soft skills would be covered in the Working Smart training: dealing with conflict and criticism, communication, decision making and problem solving, self-awareness and self-management, work ethic, people skills, and interviewing skills. The main skills or experiences that attendees were hoping to gain were: learning additional content and scenarios to use with and empower clients, a refresher on current knowledge, and ways to be more effective when relating to clients.

Finally, attendees were asked to rate their confidence in teaching the five modules of soft skills prior to the training (Table 3). Overall, respondents were mostly to very comfortable in teaching clients on each of the five soft skill content areas. Respondents were most confident in teaching clients about work ethic and least confident in their ability to teach clients about self-awareness.

<b>Soft Skill Area</b>	<b>M (SD)</b>
Self-awareness	4.00 (1.10)
Self-management	4.33 (0.52)
Work ethic	4.50 (0.55)
Communication	4.17 (1.17)
Problem solving	4.17 (1.17)

### Pre-Training Survey

The post-training survey asked participants to rate the quality (from 1-very poor to 5-excellent) and usefulness (1-not at all useful to 5-extremely useful) of each of the 16 lessons covered in the training. Additionally, attendees were asked to rate their confidence in teaching soft skills from the five content modules.

A total of 14 attendees completed the post-training survey. Average scores given for the quality and usefulness of each lesson are presented below in Table 4. Respondents rated all lessons highly in terms of quality and usefulness. The lessons rated as having the highest quality were self-change (lesson 2), cognitive cycle (lesson 3), and dealing with stress (lesson 4). The lowest quality rating was given to the options and outcomes session (lesson 16). In terms of usefulness, attendees found expressing concerns (lesson 12) as most useful and options and outcomes (lesson 16) as least useful.

<b>Table 4. Ratings of the Quality and Usefulness of Lessons</b>		
<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Quality M (SD)</b>	<b>Usefulness M (SD)</b>
Lesson 1: Personal Branding	4.64 (0.63)	4.64 (0.63)
Lesson 2: Self-Change	4.71 (0.61)	4.71 (0.61)
Lesson 3: Cognitive Cycle	4.71 (0.61)	4.57 (0.85)
Lesson 4: Dealing with Stress	4.71 (0.61)	4.71 (0.47)
Lesson 5: Warning Signs	4.64 (0.63)	4.71 (0.47)
Lesson 6: Personal Reactions	4.57 (0.65)	4.71 (0.47)
Lesson 7: Staying Calm and Clear	4.57 (0.65)	4.71 (0.61)
Lesson 8: Employer Expectations	4.64 (0.63)	4.71 (0.47)
Lesson 9: Code-Switching	4.64 (0.63)	4.71 (0.47)
Lesson 10: Active Listening	4.64 (0.63)	4.79 (0.43)
Lesson 11: Four C's of Communication	4.64 (0.63)	4.71 (0.61)
Lesson 12: Expressing Concerns	4.64 (0.63)	4.86 (0.36)
Lesson 13: Handling Feedback	4.64 (0.63)	4.79 (0.43)
Lesson 14: Problems and Goals	4.50 (0.86)	4.64 (0.50)
Lesson 15: Facts vs. Opinions	4.29 (0.83)	4.57 (0.76)
Lesson 16: Options and Outcomes	4.07 (1.07)	4.36 (0.75)

Attendees were also asked to rate their confidence in teaching the five modules of soft skills after the training and a comparison of pre- and post-training ratings are presented in Table 5. Given that only six participants responded to the pre-training survey, it was not possible to statistically test the difference in pre- and post-training confidence scores. However, the average rating for confidence level in teaching increased for each of the five content areas after completing the train the trainer session.

<b>Table 5. Comparison of Pre- and Post-Training Confidence in Teaching Soft Skills</b>		
<b>Soft Skill Area</b>	<b>Pre-training M (SD)</b>	<b>Post-training M (SD)</b>
Self-awareness	4.00 (1.10)	4.79 (0.43)
Self-management	4.33 (0.52)	4.79 (0.43)
Work ethic	4.50 (0.55)	4.79 (0.43)
Communication	4.17 (1.17)	4.79 (0.43)
Problem solving	4.17 (1.17)	4.71 (1.47)

### **Master Trainer Focus Group**

A focus group was conducted with 6 master trainers, one of whom attended by phone, on June 28, 2016. The purpose of the focus group was to gain insight from master trainers about the Working Smart program, what skills clients typically lack, and how the training benefits clients. The focus group lasted approximately one hour.

### **Working Smart Addresses Gaps in Soft Skills**

Master trainers noted that clients often lack soft skills needed for the workplace including:

- Communication
- Code-switching
  - Different communication styles at work verses at home or with friends
  - Distrustful of authority/responding appropriately to supervisors
- Lack of reference points (e.g., constructive criticism seen as ‘disrespectful’ instead of helpful)
- Work ethic (e.g., being on time to work, not being on cell phone at work)
- Don’t understand the negative perception of job hopping

The Working Smart training teaches clients about these soft skills and “gives them new tools for their toolbox”. Master trainers noted the following as top benefits of the training:

- Interactive and co-participatory nature of the training
  - Builds teamwork skills
  - Provides practice communicating with others and exposes participants to diversity in individuals, experiences, and opinions
- New perspectives and re-branding
  - Teaches them that they have control over their lives in terms of actions and responding to situations at work and in life
  - Gives clients a new outlook
- Improves communication

*“The Working Smart training opens their eyes to different possibilities and helps them to look at themselves and their lives differently.”*

*“They learn that they have control over who they want to be.”*

- Group dynamic allows them see how their communication affects others in the room
- Introduces proper language to use for job interviews
- Learning how to code switch
  - Erases the perception of ‘being fake’. You aren’t being fake, you’re just responding differently in different situations.
- Increased self-esteem and confidence
  - Clients not only learn skills, but become confident in applying these skills
  - Relatable characters and the opportunity to hear about others’ experiences allow them to see that they are not alone

*“The Working Smart training helps to remove the negative lens through which they view things.”*

Master trainers also spoke of specific examples of clients who had benefited from the training. For example, one client expressed that she had been very reluctant to take the course because she was not sure that she needed it. However, after the second day of training, she told the trainer that the Working Smart program was “blowing her mind” and that she would never have thought about the material in the way that it was presented. Others spoke

about how clients have come back to them after a job interview and said that they were able to apply the skills they had learned to be successful in the interview.

### **Usefulness of the Working Smart Program with Different Populations**

All master trainers thought that the Working Smart program is useful for all populations and types of people. Soft skills training is often overlooked, not easily available, or is outdated. Working Smart provides a solution to these issues. They noted that professionals or those with more experience may exhibit more resistance because they feel they already know the material. However, typically by the end of the training these individuals see the value of Working Smart and note that it has challenged what they know. Master trainers did think that the training can be more difficult for individuals with learning disabilities. Often these individuals struggle with the material or don’t catch on as quickly as others in the class, and this can make it more difficult to teach. Lastly, master trainers think the program is particularly helpful for those who lack social skills because it forces them to interact with others and provides them with support.

### **Trainee Employment**

Master trainers were not able to speak to whether or not Working Smart has helped clients obtain and maintain employment. Since their role is just to facilitate the training, they don’t have follow up or contact with participants after the training. Similarly, master trainers are not in contact with employers to have input on how employers perceive the Working Smart program. As previously noted, some master trainers have had clients tell them that they were able to use the skills and practice received in Working Smart during job interviews.

## CLIENT PERSPECTIVES

Feedback from clients on the program was another important component of the evaluation. Data collection methods for clients were open-ended feedback from the pre- and post-tests, a focus group, and informal feedback from trainees obtained during session observations.

### Feedback from Pre- and Post-Tests

The pre- and post-tests contained a few open-ended questions asking participants questions about why they were attending the training (pre-test), what they hoped to learn (pre-test), what they actually learned (post-test), how they plan to apply the content (post-test), and suggestions for improving the Working Smart program (post-test). Feedback from the post-tests were overwhelmingly positive, with clients noting how much they enjoyed the program and that they found it very beneficial.

### Reasons for Participation

Clients reported various reasons for participating in the Working Smart training and the most common responses are listed below:

- Gaining new skills or learning something new
  - Improve employment prospects
  - Self-improvement
  - Stress management
- Employment
  - Obtain a certificate to add to resume
  - Improve skills that will increase employment prospects or preparation
  - Become better informed about current workplace expectations
  - Become qualified to teach the curriculum (for those in a train the trainer session)
  - Obtain interview skills
- Required
  - Needed for WIOA funding
  - Required by supervisor (for those in a train the trainer session)
  - Prerequisite for other training programs

### Skills They Hope to Learn

Clients listed the following as skills that they hoped to gain by attending Working Smart:

- Specific skills
  - Communication
  - Work ethic
  - Self-awareness
  - How to apply skills
  - How to handle conflict

- Employment related
  - How to navigate today's workplace
  - Skills needed to obtain and maintain employment
  - How to better promote oneself
  - Resources for teaching the curriculum (for those in a train the trainer session)
- Personal or life related
  - Motivation
  - Coping skills

### **Benefits of Completion**

Clients were also asked how they thought completion of the Working Smart program would help them obtain employment or in their current job. Common responses are listed below:

- Skills and knowledge acquisition
  - Communication
  - Problem solving
  - Workplace conflict
  - Confidence
- Interview preparation
- Refresher on skills/update on today's workplace
  - Expectations of the workplace
- Certification

### **Most Useful Aspects**

On the post-test, clients were asked to list what aspects of the program they found most useful. In addition to noting that these skills would be useful in the workplace, many clients also commented on how these skills would be useful at home and in everyday situations.

- Awareness of soft skills
  - Bringing awareness and reflection to items they already felt like they knew but never really thought about
  - Self-observation
- Specific skills/lessons
  - Internal reactions
  - Dealing with conflict and stressful situations
  - Communication
  - Problem solving
  - Anger management

- Format of teaching
  - Interactive
  - Group activities
  - Instructors
  - Meeting others
  - Quotes

*“My communication skills were really bad, I barely left my house, lots of anxiety. I figured this would help me build interpersonal skills even if I already knew the material. It’s seemed to help, I feel I’ve gotten a little more confident since being here.”*

*“I like the people in here, we all get along well.”*

### Applying Skills

Clients listed the following as key takeaways for applying skills from Working Smart:

- Evaluating situations before reacting
- Being more understanding
- Communicating more positively
- Improving listening skills
- Approaching situations with an open mind
- Responding appropriately, confidently, and positively during interviews

### Suggestions for Improvement

Overall, clients enjoyed the program and many thought the program was fine as is. Some suggestions for ways to further improve the program were:

- Bringing the scenarios up to date and making them less employee centric
- Greater focus on
  - Problem solving
  - Critical thinking
  - Time management
  - Proper facilitation of the program (for those in a train the trainer session)
  - Lessons 14-16 were listed by several as being confusing or needing more details
- Adaptations of the program for different populations (e.g., youth)
- Shortening the length
- Advertising better

### Client Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with a group of clients on August 17, 2016 at the beginning of the Working Smart session on this day. There were 5 participants: 4 female, 1 male; 2 African Americans, 1 Caucasian, and 1 Latino; aged from late 20s to mid-60s. The purpose of the focus group was to gain insight from clients about the Working Smart program, what their expectations were prior to beginning the program, what their experience in the training has been like, and how they think completing the program will be beneficial to them. The focus group lasted approximately 1 hour.

### **Expectations of the Program**

Clients were informed about the Working Smart program through various agencies including Centralina Area Agency on Aging, NC Works, and the Senior Community Service Employment Program. Clients were participating in the training for a variety of reasons including: touching up on skills, hoping for a soft skills training program that would address the current workplace environment, learning more skills and knowledge, and showing potential employers that they are doing something to improve themselves.

### **Learning how to Apply Skills**

Overall, clients were satisfied with their experiences thus far in Working Smart and had learned new skills. In terms of content areas or lessons that were most helpful, they mentioned the cognitive cycle, being aware of reactions and how these reactions can be perceived by others, and communication skills. Most notable was that while clients said they knew a lot of the material, but the program has allowed them to reflect more critically on these concepts and see how they can apply the information to their lives. Another participant stated that she loves learning something new every day.

***“With this program, you not only learn the content, but how to articulate it and how to apply the skills.”***

### **Social Skills and Connecting with Others**

Another important piece with this group was the social and interactive nature of the program. Many of the individuals in this group described themselves as introverted and had situations that may have made them feel isolated in the larger community (e.g., being unemployed for a long time, recently moved to the area with no friends or family, an individual who was learning English, having issues with social anxiety). Everyone spoke about how they enjoyed meeting each other and how it has helped them develop confidence in speaking with others.

### **The Program is Engaging**

Clients loved the interactive nature of the program and described the program as “hands on” and “engaging”. One participant noted that her attention span is low and that her mind often drifts. She has found that due to the interactive format of this program she has been able to focus and participate. Clients also liked the scenarios and the ability to take on the character roles. The interactive nature made the content seem very relatable to clients.

***“When I see that everyone else is participating, I want to participate too.”***

### **Less Helpful Aspects and Ways to Improve the Program**

Two clients felt that the program was overall good as is and did not have suggestions for improvements. Some mentioned that there were certain “common sense” things that could have been skipped, such as not being on your cell phone at work. However, they acknowledged that some individuals may not be aware of these issues, and thus it would be helpful for those individuals. A few felt that the scenarios were not realistic and overly simplified and described them as “fluffy bunnies and rainbow situations.” In further discussing what was meant by this,

they stated that the scenarios could be made more realistic by showing different angles and acknowledging that situations are rarely this simplistic. Another client felt that the scenarios never presented situations in which the employer is in the wrong. He thought it would be helpful to include “real world” scenarios that present situations where an employer may be in the wrong or put the employee in an uncomfortable or compromising situation.

All clients felt that this program would be very useful for the younger generation and those just starting in the workforce. They recommended marketing the program to those in high school and in college.

### **How the Program Will Help with Employment**

All of the clients were currently unemployed and spoke about how completing the Working Smart program could help them in finding employment. Several clients thought that the program would help them during job interviews. Specifically, they felt that they would be able to summarize key information and use terminology and skills that will show the interviewer that they are competent with soft skills. Another noted that having the back and forth communication during the training has helped her with communication and interpersonal skills that would be important during interviews and on the job. One client did not think the program would help obtain a job, but would help once employed. Regarding perceptions of whether having the certificate will make them more marketable, some felt that this depends on whether employers know about this program and if it is relevant for them. Others felt that it will be beneficial on a resume to show employers that you have different skills and “something extra”.

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRICULUM**

A key focus of the evaluation was to examine the efficacy of the program, specifically whether or not participant knowledge of soft skills increases after completing the program and whether self-rating of soft skills increases. Data were collected from pre- and post-tests.

### Feedback from Pre- and Post-Tests

Pre- and post-tests (see Appendix) were created with feedback from Charlotte Works and community partners and adapted questions from those included in the training workbook. There were a total of 32 questions, with 2 questions per lesson. Question types included true/false statements (14 items), fill in the blank (12 items), and multiple choice (6 items). Responses were scored as correct or incorrect and this was used to create a sum score of number of correct responses (ranging from 0 to 32). There were also 5 questions asking respondents to rate themselves on the five soft skills (from 1-poor to 5-excellent): self-awareness, self-management, work ethic, communication, and problem solving. Finally, demographic questions including sex, age, race, education level, and occupational field were asked as part of the pre-test. In order to match pre- and post-tests, respondents were asked to write their initials and year of birth on the first page as an identifier. All surveys were completed in class; pre-tests were given on day 1 prior

to training content being discussed and post-tests were given on the final day after all training content was completed. Pre- and post-test data were collected from August 2016 – May 2017.

### Demographic Information

A total of 115 participants completed the pre-test. Demographics of respondents are presented in Table 6. Participants worked in a wide range of occupational fields including customer service, education and instruction, banking, social services, administration, and skilled labor (e.g., automotive).

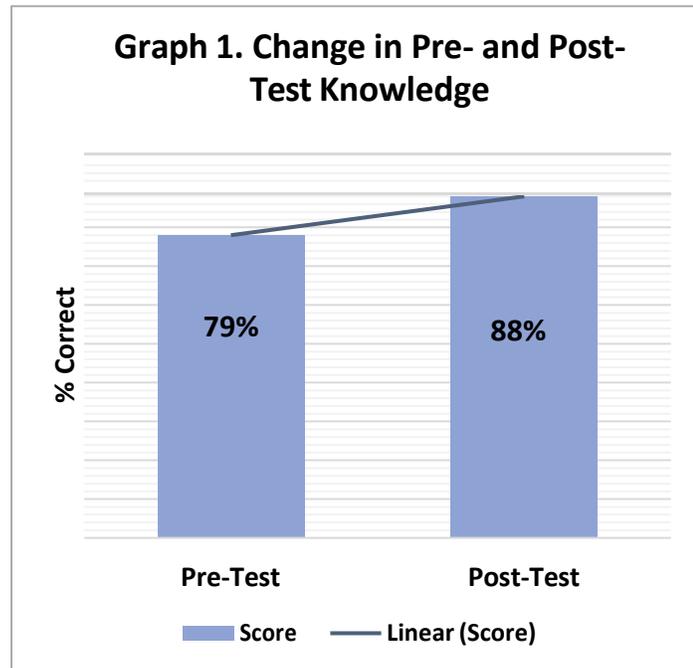
<b>Table 6. Demographic Characteristics of Pre-Test Responders</b>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Pre-training M (SD) or # (%)</b>
<b>Age</b>	38.56 (15.43)
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	51 (48%)
Female	56 (52%)
<b>Race</b>	
African American	67 (64%)
Asian	1 (1%)
Caucasian	23 (22%)
Latino	4 (4%)
Native American	1 (1%)
Biracial	8 (8%)
<b>Education level</b>	
Less than HS	13 (14%)
HS/GED	24 (24%)
Some college, no degree	21 (21%)
2 year degree	8 (8%)
4 year degree	23 (23%)
Master's or higher	12 (12%)

### Program Efficacy: Change in Pre- and Post-Test Knowledge

*Pre-Test Knowledge* - Among the 115 individuals completing the pre-test, the average score was a 25.30 (SD = 3.74), with scores ranging from 12 to 32. This equates to an average of approximately 79% on the pre-test, ranging from 38% to 100%. These results suggest that the majority of participants start the program with a good knowledge base of soft skills.

*Post-Test Knowledge and Comparison to Pre-Test* - A total of 63 individuals completed both the pre- and post-tests. Post-test scores were matched to pre-test scores and a paired samples t-test was used to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in pre- and post-test scores. The average number of correct responses on the pre-test for those with both pre- and post-test completion was 25.27 (SD=3.79), or about 79%, and the average number of correct responses on the post-test was

paired samples t-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in pre- and post-test scores  $t(62)=8.28, p <.01$ . In other words, participants had a higher post-test score (2.97 points or 9% higher) compared to the pre-test score. These results suggest that the Working Smart training program is effective in increasing participant knowledge of soft skills.



Another method to further examine how participant knowledge changed from pre- to post-test was to examine the percent change in scores. The percentage of change in scores from pre- to post-test was broken down into six categories (Table 7). These data demonstrate that only a handful of participants scored better on the pre-test than the post-test and that 40% of participants increased their score from the pre- to post-test by 10 percentage points or more.

<b>Table 7. Percent change in Pre- and Post-Test Scores</b>	
<b>Change of...</b>	<b># (%)</b>
Decrease by 5-10%	4 (6%)
No change ( $\pm 5\%$ )	11 (18%)
Increase by 5-10%	23 (37%)
Increase by 10-19%	19 (30%)
Increase by 20-29%	5 (8%)
Increase by 30%+	1 (2%)

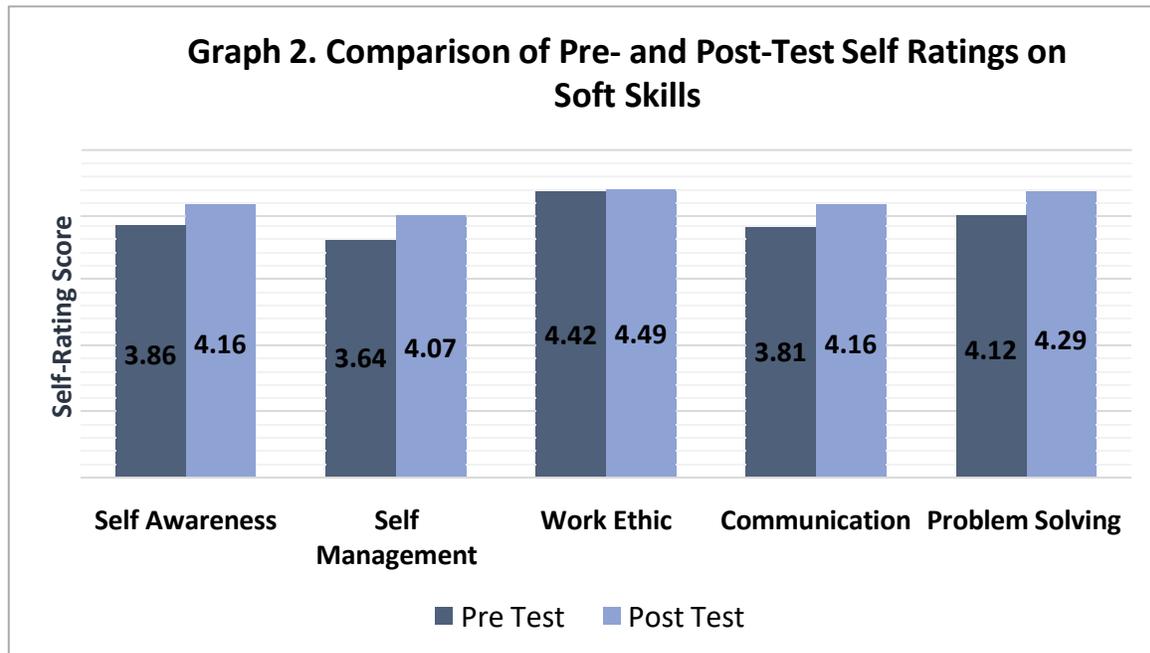
**Program Efficacy: Change in Pre- and Post-Test Self-Rating of Soft Skills**

Participant self-ratings of soft skills on the pre- and post-tests are shown in Table 8 and in Graph 2. On average, participants rated themselves as at least ‘good’ on each soft skill on the pre-test. The lowest self-rating was given for self-management and the highest self-rating was given for work ethic. On the post-test, participants gave themselves an average rating of at least ‘very good’ on each soft skill with self-management still being the lowest rated skill and work ethic still being the

highest rated skill. Paired samples t-tests were used to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in self-rating of each of the soft skills pre- and post-training. Although post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores for every soft skill, statistically significant differences were found for self-awareness, self-management, and communication skills. These findings demonstrate that the Working Smart program is successful in improving participants' self-ratings of self-awareness, self-management, and communication skills. For work ethic and problem solving, participants rated themselves very highly on these skills on the pre-test, which may explain why no significant score difference was found at the post-test.

Soft Skill	Pre-Test Rating M (SD)	Pre-Test Rating M (SD)	Score Difference
Self-awareness	3.86 (0.85)	4.16 (0.81)	0.30*
Self-management	3.64 (1.00)	4.07 (0.72)	0.43*
Work ethic	4.42 (0.73)	4.49 (.74)	0.07
Communication skills	3.81 (1.05)	4.16 (0.88)	0.35*
Problem solving	4.12 (0.80)	4.29 (0.75)	0.17

Note. \*represents a statistically significant difference,  $p < .05$



# CONCLUSIONS

## Main Findings and Suggestions for Improvement

The evaluation of the Working Smart program provides valuable insight on trainer and trainee perceptions of and experiences with the training, in addition to preliminary evidence demonstrating that the program is effective in increasing participant knowledge of soft skills and self-rating in applying some of the soft skills. The evaluation included both qualitative and quantitative data and data collection methods included observations, focus groups, informal interviews, surveys, and pre- and post-tests. Main findings and suggestions for improvement are provided below.

### Facilitation of Working Smart

- *Trainers are prepared, demonstrate fluidity in teaching material, and interact well with participants.* In all session observations, trainers had an obvious rapport with clients, used relatable examples, and were able to manage and facilitate discussions even when conflict or disagreement arose. Trainers also used good techniques in trying to engage quieter participants.
- *The training is engaging.* Session observations showed that participants were actively engaged in the training by participating in discussion and activities, taking notes, and seeming to enjoy the material and activities. Additionally, survey and focus group findings show that participants loved the hands-on aspect of the training and found that it held their attention.
- *With a few exceptions (discussed below), the content and format covered follows the trainer handbook.* Generally, trainers did a great job of covering all content in a lesson and had participants complete activities. In some instances, activities or examples were modified, but this was always done in a way that was relevant based on the client population.

### Suggestions for Improvement

1. In a few instances, trainers rushed through the material, cutting out at least half of the examples and activities in the lesson. In one instance, due to time being almost over, a lesson was covered in 15 minutes. If it is important that trainers cover each lesson in depth and complete most or all of the activities in the handbook, Charlotte Works may want to consider stressing the importance of this to trainers and/or placing checks to ensure that lessons are being covered in accordance with the handbook.
2. Most trainers did a great job incorporating several activities during each lesson. A few trainers tended to do all of the activities as a group, just calling on people to answer questions. Again, Charlotte Works may want to place checks to ensure that trainers are facilitating the content in an interactive way by using activities as outlined in the handbook.

### Program Content

- *Participants particularly enjoy the character scenarios.* The majority of participants found the character scenarios relatable and enjoyed taking on character roles.
- *Activities that involve self-reflection or learning about oneself are well received.* Participants liked activities where they learned something about themselves, such as personal communication styles, self-awareness, and branding. Participants also enjoyed sharing personal examples with the group. Additionally, master trainers noted that the branding activity tends to be powerful for clients in showing them that they have control over their future.
- *The program covers important soft skills.* Master trainers noted that their clients often lack soft skills related to communication, code-switching, and work ethic. All of these skills are covered in the curriculum. The soft skills that clients listed that they hoped were covered in the training included communication, work ethic, self-awareness, and how to handle conflict. Again, all of these skills are covered in the Working Smart curriculum.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

1. Consider re-examining Module 5: critical thinking skills. Lessons 14-16 were the lowest rated (although they were still rated highly) lessons in quality and usefulness by trainers from a train the trainer session. Similarly, a few clients provided feedback on the post-test that lessons 14-16 were a bit confusing and listed problem solving and critical thinking as areas that could use improvement. Session observations also revealed that some clients seemed to struggle with more nuanced material, such as critical thinking. Perhaps it would be useful to incorporate critical thinking skills throughout each lesson.
2. Youth populations had more difficulty understanding some of the key concepts. One suggestion is to provide a slightly altered training program for youth populations that uses terminology and examples that are more relatable and can be more easily understood by younger populations. Charlotte Works has already been working on a modified version of the curriculum for youth and this will be rolling out in the next month or two.
3. Update workplace scenarios to reflect the complex nature of situations that occur in the actual workplace. Participants from the focus group as well as a few responses on the post-test noted that the scenarios were over-simplified and never presented situations where employers may put employees in compromising situations. These individuals thought that the curriculum could be strengthened by including more real life scenarios and examples.
4. A few individuals from a train-the-trainer session noted that it would be helpful to include more training on proper facilitation of the curriculum.

### **Benefits of the Program**

- *Learning important soft skills.* Both master trainers and clients noted that the Working Smart program provides valuable information on skills needed to be successful in the workplace. Some of the skills noted as most beneficial were: code-switching (master trainers), communication skills (both master trainers and clients), internal reactions (clients), anger management/conflict (clients), and keeping an open mind (clients). In

addition to learning soft skills, Working Smart was noted by all as helping clients learn how to apply skills.

- *Strategies for job interviews.* Many clients stated that the training has or will help them with job interviews. Specifically they noted that the training has provided them with confidence, speaking points, and how to respond positively.
- *Interacting with others.* The ability to interact with others was noted as a strong point of the program. Master trainers think that this helps build teamwork skills, provides practice with communication skills, and exposes participants to diversity of individuals and opinions. Clients enjoyed interacting with each other and many times this provided a way for clients to see that others have had similar experiences in life, trying to find a job, etc.
- *A new perspective on life.* Beyond learning skills for the workplace, Working Smart provides skills for being successful in life and helps to build confidence. Master trainers noted that the training gives clients a new outlook and opens their eyes to different possibilities for their futures.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

1. A few clients thought that the program could be better advertised in the community.

### **The Working Smart Curriculum Increases Participant Knowledge and Self-Rating of Soft Skills**

- Data, based on completed pre- and post-tests of 63 clients, demonstrate that client knowledge of soft skills increases by almost 3 points, or 9%, from the pre- to post-test. Additionally, there were statistically significant increases in self-ratings of self-awareness, self-management, and communication skills from pre- to post- training. These results provide preliminary evidence that the Working Smart curriculum does increase participant knowledge of soft skills and some self-ratings of soft skills.

### **Additional Considerations**

- These results were based on feedback from 63 clients and thus may or may not be generalizable to the entire population of Working Smart clients. Further data collection should be conducted before stronger claims of generalizability can be made.
- Participant knowledge of soft skills is relatively high. The average pre-training test score was 79%, suggesting that on average, participants have a decent level of soft skill knowledge prior to the training. Charlotte Works could consider whether or not training is needed for those who score high on a pre-test.

### **Evaluation Challenges**

Overall, conducting the evaluation went smoothly and according to plan. There were a few challenges.

### **Communication Difficulties**

There were a few issues with communication that seemed to be due to multiple individuals being involved and lack of communication with all parties. In one instance for example, we inquired about conducting a focus group during a session observation with the lead trainer/coordinator of

the site. We received no response from this individual regarding the focus group and thus did not bring materials to conduct a focus group. Upon arriving, the trainer for the session thought we were conducting a focus group. Another example is that many trainers were not aware of the pre- and post-tests. It may be that Charlotte Works contacted the lead trainers/site coordinators about the pre- and post-tests, but that the lead trainers did not disseminate this information to all of their trainers.

### **Difficulty Obtaining Pre- and Post-Tests**

Several challenges were present regarding obtaining the pre- and post-tests. These challenges included receiving fewer surveys than anticipated (i.e., a longer time to collect data), surveys that were missing initials and year of birth (making it impossible to match surveys), batches that were out of order and missing pages, and instances where it was obvious that trainers had reviewed answers with participants. Regarding slower than anticipated data collection, this may have been due to there being fewer sessions than anticipated and also because many surveys could not be used if they were impossible to match or in instances where answers were reviewed. Again, it seems that communication issues may have contributed to initials not being written on the surveys and answers being reviewed. It's possible that individual trainers did not have a thorough understanding of the pre-and post-tests and their purpose.

### Next Steps

The results of the evaluation provide valuable information on how the training is facilitated, trainer and client perceptions of the program, and preliminary evidence of efficacy in increasing participant knowledge of soft skills. Overall, data from session observations, focus groups with master trainers and clients, and surveys is overwhelmingly positive. Trainers do a great job teaching the content and facilitating client engagement and interaction, clients are learning important soft skills, and how to apply these skills. In addition to learning skills and tools to be successful at work, the program provides strategies for dealing with stress, allows participants to network and build relationships with others, and increases their self-confidence. Working Smart is preparing clients with relevant and needed soft skills in today's workplace and is also helping individuals improve themselves and opening their eyes to new possibilities. Finally, the evaluation provides initial evidence that the curriculum is effective in increasing participant knowledge of soft skills and self-ratings of 3 of the 5 soft skills.

The following are a few next steps for future evaluation work that would provide further evidence of program effectiveness.

1. **Employment.** The main goal of Working Smart is to provide clients with skills needed to be successful in the workplace. Furthermore, it is assumed that completion of the program may help completers obtain and maintain employment. Future evaluation work could focus on employment outcomes. For example, it would be useful to gain employer perspectives of this program and on employees who are certified. Specifically, do employers view this training as beneficial? How do Working Smart certified employees differ from employees without this training? Are employers satisfied with the soft skills demonstrated by Working

Smart certified employees? Similarly, it would be useful to explore perspectives of clients after completing the program. How has Working Smart helped them in obtaining or maintaining employment? How do they put the skills they learned to use? These types of data could further contribute to existing evidence of the effectiveness and utility of Working Smart.

2. Ongoing data collection. In order to increase the generalizability of the pre-and post-test findings, more data need to be collected. Currently, results are based on data from 63 clients. If 600-1000 clients are receiving this training per year, current results are based on data from about 5-10% of the population. Collecting additional data would allow for greater generalizability or confidence in saying that the results apply to the entire Working Smart client population. An additional consideration would be to conduct additional client focus groups. This would provide more information about client experiences with the training and to receive input from varied groups and populations.

In conclusion, the Working Smart training program is an engaging and interactive soft skills training program that is relevant for diverse populations and across different settings. Program completion increases client knowledge of soft skills and clients report feeling more self-confident and ready to be successful at work and in life.

# APPENDICES

## Observation Guide

Group _____	Group Type _____
Location _____	Demographics _____
Date ____/____/____ Start	Number of trainers _____
time _____ End time _____	Number of participants _____
_____	

Setting Diagram
-----------------

### Prior to training

Describe setting:

Describe participant interaction:

Describe trainer interaction with group:

### During Training

Describe participant engagement:

Did the trainer(s) have any difficulty engaging participants? If so, why?

What parts of the training did participants react to or engage with the most?

What insights did participants report out in response to activities?

### After training

Describe debrief with the trainer(s):

What, if any, clarifying issues were discussed?

Overall, did the trainer present the material as designed? If no, where did it vary?

Additional comments:

## Pre-Training Trainer Survey

We are asking you to participate in a survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research on behalf of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Workforce Development Partners. The purpose of the survey is to gain insight on your experience with soft skills training and what you hope to gain from the Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success training. The information you provide in this survey will provide valuable information.

You can choose whether or not to participate in this survey and stop at any time. There are no expected negative effects of participating. Your participation will not cost you anything.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact Jordan Lyerly of the Center for Applied Research at 704-330-3809.

### Section I – Expectations of the Working Smart: Soft skills for Workplace Success training

1. Have you received any soft skills training in the past? If so, what was your experience with that training?
2. In your experience working with clients, what soft skills do clients lack that you hope this training will address?
3. What specific soft skills do you expect to be covered in the Working Smart training?
4. What skills or experience do you hope to gain from Working Smart that will enhance your ability to teach soft skills?

### Section II – Current comfort level in teaching soft skills

For the following questions, please rate your comfort level, from 1-not at all comfortable to 5-very comfortable, in teaching the following soft skills.

Soft Skill	1 Not at all comfortable	2 A little comfortable	3 Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	4 Mostly comfortable	5 Very comfortable
Self-awareness skills					
Self-management skills					
Work ethic					
Communication skills					
Problem solving skills					

## Post-Training Trainer Survey

We are asking you to participate in a survey conducted by The Center for Applied Research on behalf of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Workforce Development Partners. The purpose of the survey is to gain insight on your experience with the Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success training. The information you provide in this survey will provide valuable information.

You can choose whether or not to participate in this survey and stop at any time. There are no expected negative effects of participating. Your participation will not cost you anything.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact Jordan Lyerly of the Center for Applied Research at 704-330-3809.

### Section I – Quality and usefulness of lessons included in the working smart training

For the following questions please rate the quality, from 1-Poor to 5-Excellent, of the Working Smart training provided for each lesson topic.

Lesson topic	1 Very poor	2 Below average	3 Average	4 Above average	5 Excellent
Lesson 1: Personal Branding					
Lesson 2: Self-Change					
Lesson 3: Cognitive Cycle					
Lesson 4: Dealing with Stress					
Lesson 5: Warning Signs					
Lesson 6: Personal Reactions					
Lesson 7: Staying Calm and Clear					
Lesson 8: Employer Expectations					
Lesson 9: Code-Switching					
Lesson 10: Active Listening					
Lesson 11: Four C's of Communication					
Lesson 12: Expressing Concerns					
Lesson 13: Handling Feedback					
Lesson 14: Problems and Goals					
Lesson 15: Facts vs. Opinions					
Lesson 16: Options and Outcomes					

For the following questions please rate the usefulness, from 1-Poor to 5-Excellent, of the Working Smart training provided for each lesson topic.

Lesson Topic	1 Not at all useful	2 Slightly useful	3 Moderately useful	4 Very useful	5 Extremely useful
Lesson 1: Personal Branding					
Lesson 2: Self-Change					
Lesson 3: Cognitive Cycle					
Lesson 4: Dealing with Stress					
Lesson 5: Warning Signs					
Lesson 6: Personal Reactions					
Lesson 7: Staying Calm and Clear					
Lesson 8: Employer Expectations					
Lesson 9: Code-Switching					
Lesson 10: Active Listening					
Lesson 11: Four C's of Communication					
Lesson 12: Expressing Concerns					
Lesson 13: Handling Feedback					
Lesson 14: Problems and Goals					
Lesson 15: Facts vs. Opinions					
Lesson 16: Options and Outcomes					

**Section II – Current Comfort Level in Teaching Soft Skills**

For the following questions, please rate your comfort level, from 1-not at all comfortable to 5-very comfortable, in teaching the following soft skills.

Soft Skill	1 Not at all comfortable	2 A little comfortable	3 Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	4 Mostly comfortable	5 Very comfortable
Self-awareness skills					
Self-management skills					
Work ethic					
Communication skills					
Problem solving skills					

## Master Trainer Focus Group Guide

Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this group discussion about your experiences as a Master Trainer of the Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success training. My name is Jordan Lyerly and I am with the Center for Applied Research. I'll be moderating the discussion today.

As you know, we are collaborating with Charlotte Works to evaluate the Working Smart program. You were invited to participate because you're a master trainer for Working Smart. We're interested in learning about your experiences as a master trainer, how you interact with clients, and what you think makes the training successful.

There are no right or wrong answers but rather different experiences and different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it's different from what others have shared. I'm just as interested in negative comments as positive comments. As the moderator, I'll be guiding the discussion but I want to hear what you have to say so I'll need you all to do most of the talking.

I want to quickly address the fact that there's a microphone sitting in the middle of the table. I'm recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments and it's not possible to take notes fast enough to capture everything. You will never be named or identified in any reporting. You are completely anonymous in this room so please be very honest about your experiences.

**Before we get started are there any questions? OK then let's begin.**

### **What works well?**

For our discussion today, focus on your role training clients, not training trainers. In what ways does the Charlotte Works program provide clients with the skills they need to be successful in obtaining and maintaining employment?

1. What specific skills do clients typically lack prior to the training?
2. How does the training address these skills?
3. What are the top three benefits of this program in your opinion?
4. Is there a specific type of client or population that struggles with this training? Is there a population that you feel this training does not work well for?
5. Can you provide examples of clients who have benefitted from the training?
  - a. How has the training provided them with skills they needed improvement on?
  - b. Have clients gone on to obtain and maintain employment?

6. What positive feedback do you receive from employers regarding clients who have completed the Working Smart program?

**That is all of my questions. Thank you again for participating in this discussion. I've passed out an exit survey where you can write down any other comments you might like to share.**

## Client Focus Group Guide

Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this group discussion about your experiences as a participant in the Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success training. My name is Jordan Lyerly and I am with the Center for Applied Research. I'll be moderating the discussion today.

The Center for Applied Research is collaborating with Charlotte Works to evaluate the Working Smart program. You were invited to participate because you're completing the Working Smart training. We're interested in learning about your experiences as a participant in this course.

There are no right or wrong answers but rather different experiences and different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it's different from what others have shared. I'm just as interested in negative comments as positive comments. As the moderator, I'll be guiding the discussion but I want to hear what you have to say so I'll need you all to do most of the talking.

I want to quickly address the fact that there's a microphone sitting in the middle of the table. I'm recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments and it's not possible to take notes fast enough to capture everything. You will never be named or identified in any reporting. You are completely anonymous in this room so please be very honest about your experiences.

**Before we get started are there any questions? OK then let's begin.**

1. How were you informed about this program?
2. What were your expectations of the program and why did you attend. In other words, what were you hoping to gain?
3. What has your experience been like attending this training so far?
4. What information or skills that you've covered so far have been the most useful for you?
  - a. Has there been anything that has not been useful?
5. In thinking about what you've covered so far in this training, has this information been new to you? In other words, is this the first time you've heard about or covered these topics, or has this been information that you already know.
6. How well do you feel you relate to the content provided?
  - a. How have you applied the information and skills you've learned into your life.
7. How do you think being Working Smart certified will...
  - a. Will help you find employment if you are currently unemployed

- b. Will help you in job (whether you are currently employed or how will it help you in a future job if you are currently unemployed).

**That is all of my questions. Thank you again for participating in this discussion. I've passed out an exit survey where you can write down any other comments you might like to share.**

## Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success - Pre-Test

**Background and Purpose.** We are asking you to take a survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research on behalf of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Workforce Development Partners. The purpose of the survey is to gain insight on the experiences and skills you gain in the Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success training. The information you provide in this survey will provide useful information. You are being asked to participate because you are a client/participant of the Working Smart training program.

**Procedure.** You will complete one survey today and a second survey at the end of the Working Smart training. There will be 4 sections to today's survey: what you know about soft skills, how you rate your skills, a few open ended questions on your experiences, and background information.

**Risks and Benefits.** You can choose whether to participate in this survey and can stop at any time. There are no expected negative effects of participating. Your participation will not cost you anything. Your responses will provide useful information.

**Confidentiality.** Your name will not be tied to your survey responses, so you will remain anonymous. In order to be able to match the two surveys you take, we will ask you to provide your initials and year of birth. After we have matched the two surveys, your initials and date of birth will be removed from the data file.

**Questions.** If you have questions about the survey, please contact Jordan Lyerly of the Center for Applied Research at 704-330-3809.

**Consent.** Please check the box to the right if you agree to take the survey.

In order to match the two surveys you complete, please provide your initials (first, middle, and last) and your year of birth. For example John Henry Doe born in 1972 would write, JHD1972.



**Section I – What you know about soft skills**

Listed below are questions to see what you know about soft skills. Don't worry if you aren't sure what the answer is. You will learn about these topics in your training.

**Part A. True/False.** Circle whether you think each item below is true or false.

	True	False
If you are getting ready for change within 30 days, you are in the Planning Stage.	T	F
Policies about overtime pay are usually part of an employer's "unwritten rules".	T	F
Our second thoughts about problems are often more accurate than our first assumptions.	T	F
It's important to have a suggestion or solution in mind when you bring up a problem.	T	F
In communication, being <u>correct</u> is described as being direct and not making people guess what you mean.	T	F
We should try hard to <u>forget</u> the mistakes of our past.	T	F
Looking thoughtful and saying, "Tell me more" is an example of good listening.	T	F
Being able to label our feelings often makes it <u>easier to understand</u> and gain control over them.	T	F
Sarcasm is a helpful way to respond to criticism or feedback from a supervisor.	T	F
Creating new routines for your life is especially important when dealing with long-term chronic stresses.	T	F
A plan should describe who will be involved, and exactly what we will do or say.	T	F
Our perceptions of a situation can be thrown off by strong emotions.	T	F
A "code-switcher" is a mental statement that helps us shift quickly from one perspective (such as home) to another (such as work)	T	F
It is usually best to say what you have to say, and just let other people deal with it.	T	F

**Part B. Fill in the blank.** Which term goes with each definition below? Each term in the word bank will only be used once.

**Word Bank**

Values	Beliefs	Summarizing	Situation
Anger	Internal reactions	Courteous	Short
Stressful situation	Their house, their rules	Outcome	

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Shows we understand by repeating back what we heard
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Lasting ideas about how things really are
3. \_\_\_\_\_ A company/person's most important ideas
4. A goal statement should describe a positive \_\_\_\_\_ for a problem.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ A common emotion shown when someone reacts aggressively
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Our thoughts, feelings, and physical signs

7. A problem statement should describe how you feel about the\_\_\_\_\_.
8. \_\_\_\_\_An overwhelming problem
9. \_\_\_\_\_Having to do something at work that you'd never do at home
10. Poor problem solvers only think of \_\_\_\_\_ - term consequences.
11. In communicating with others, being\_\_\_\_\_ is being friendly but still direct and not overly casual.

**Part C. Multiple choice.** Select the answer to each question below.

1. Alan is angry and in shock. These warning signs are a ...
  - A. Feeling
  - B. Behavior
  - C. Thought
  - D. Physical sign
2. Thinking, "this won't last forever" is which type of strategy to deal with stress?
  - A. Calm your body
  - B. Clear your head
  - C. Act the opposite
  - D. Ignore the problem
3. In conversation, showing respect and paying close attention is an example of
  - A. Staying calm and clear
  - B. Active listening
  - C. Asking for suggestions
  - D. Explaining your side
4. Betty is a seriously overweight person in Stage 2 of the Stage of Change. She knows she is unhealthy but hasn't done anything about it yet. To work through this stage, she needs to:
  - A. Be honest about the real effects of past behavior
  - B. Learn about/gain motivation to improve her current condition
  - C. Come up with specific steps to improve the situation within 30 days
  - D. Stick with the plan for at least 6 months
5. Charlie is keeping to himself, hoping everyone leaves him alone. His behavior would be classified as...
  - A. Aggressive
  - B. Passive aggressive
  - C. Avoidant
  - D. Dependent
6. David (a mechanic) likes how it feels when he can make a rough engine purr. His reason for working most fits which need?
  - A. Survival
  - B. Social

- C. Satisfaction
  - D. Self
7. You are worried about what might happen if your daughter drops out. What type of stress are you experiencing?
- A. Daily stress
  - B. Chronic stress
  - C. Physical stress
  - D. What-if stress

**Section II – Self-rating of skills**

How would you rate yourself at the following skills? Please circle your answers.

Skill	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent
Self-awareness skills	1	2	3	4	5
Self-management skills	1	2	3	4	5
Work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
Problem solving skills	1	2	3	4	5

**Section III – Open response**

1. Why are you attending the Working Smart training?

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2. What do you hope to learn or gain from the Working Smart training?

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3. How do you think this training will help you in getting a job? If you are currently employed, how do you think this training will help you in your current position?

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**Section IV – Background information**

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years

What is your race/ethnicity?

- African American
- Asian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American
- White/European-American
- Biracial
- Prefer not to answer

What best describes your highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school degree or ged
- some college but no degree
- Associate's (2 year) degree
- Bachelor's (4 year) degree
- Master's degree
- Terminal degree (e.g., phd, jd, md)
- Prefer not to answer

What is your occupational field (e.g., healthcare, construction, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for completing this survey!**

## Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success - Post-Test

**Procedure.** Today you will complete the second survey of your experiences with the Working Smart: Soft Skills for Workplace Success training. There will be 3 sections to today's survey: what you know about soft skills, how you rate your skills, and a few open ended questions.

In order to match the today's survey with the first one you completed, please provide your initials (first, middle, and last) and your year of birth. For example John Henry Doe born in 1972 would write, JHD1972.



**Section I – What you know about soft skills**

Listed below are questions to see what you know about soft skills.

**Part A.** True/False. Circle whether you think each item below is true or false.

	True	False
If you are getting ready for change within 30 days, you are in the Planning Stage.	T	F
Policies about overtime pay are usually part of an employer’s “unwritten rules”.	T	F
Our second thoughts about problems are often more accurate than our first assumptions.	T	F
It’s important to have a suggestion or solution in mind when you bring up a problem.	T	F
In communication, being <u>correct</u> is described as being direct and not making people guess what you mean.	T	F
We should try hard to <u>forget</u> the mistakes of our past.	T	F
Looking thoughtful and saying, “Tell me more” is an example of good listening.	T	F
Being able to label our feelings often makes it <u>easier to understand</u> and gain control over them.	T	F
Sarcasm is a helpful way to respond to criticism or feedback from a supervisor.	T	F
Creating new routines for your life is especially important when dealing with long-term chronic stresses.	T	F
A plan should describe who will be involved, and exactly what we will do or say.	T	F
Our perceptions of a situation can be thrown off by strong emotions.	T	F
A “code-switcher” is a mental statement that helps us shift quickly from one perspective (such as home) to another (such as work)	T	F
It is usually best to say what you have to say, and just let other people deal with it.	T	F

**Part B. Fill in the blank.** Which term goes with each definition below? Each term in the word bank will only be used once.

**Word Bank**

Values	Beliefs	Summarizing	Situation
Anger	Internal reactions	Courteous	Short
Stressful situation	Their house, their rules	Outcome	

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Shows we understand by repeating back what we heard
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Lasting ideas about how things really are
3. \_\_\_\_\_ A company/person’s most important ideas
4. A goal statement should describe a positive \_\_\_\_\_ for a problem.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ A common emotion shown when someone reacts aggressively
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Our thoughts, feelings, and physical signs
7. A problem statement should describe how you feel about the \_\_\_\_\_.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ An overwhelming problem
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Having to do something at work that you'd never do at home
10. Poor problem solvers only think of \_\_\_\_\_ - term consequences.
11. In communicating with others, being \_\_\_\_\_ is being friendly but still direct and not overly casual.

**Part C. Multiple choice.** Select the answer to each question below.

1. Alan is angry and in shock. These warning signs are a ...
  - A. Feeling
  - B. Behavior
  - C. Thought
  - D. Physical sign
2. Thinking, "this won't last forever" is which type of strategy to deal with stress?
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  - C. Act the opposite
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4. Betty is a seriously overweight person in Stage 2 of the Stage of Change. She knows she is unhealthy but hasn't done anything about it yet. To work through this stage, she needs to:
  - A. Be honest about the real effects of past behavior
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  - C. Come up with specific steps to improve the situation within 30 days
  - D. Stick with the plan for at least 6 months
5. Charlie is keeping to himself, hoping everyone leaves him alone. His behavior would be classified as...
  - A. Aggressive
  - B. Passive aggressive
  - C. Avoidant
  - D. Dependent
6. David (a mechanic) likes how it feels when he can make a rough engine purr. His reason for working most fits which need?
  - A. Survival
  - B. Social
  - C. Satisfaction

D. Self

7. You are worried about what might happen if your daughter drops out. What type of stress are you experiencing?
- A. Daily stress
  - B. Chronic stress
  - C. Physical stress
  - D. What-if stress

**Section II – Self-rating of skills**

How would you rate yourself at the following skills? Please circle your answers.

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
Self-awareness skills	1	2	3	4	5
Self-management skills	1	2	3	4	5
Work ethic	1	2	3	4	5
Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
Problem solving skills	1	2	3	4	5

**Section III – Open response**

1. What did you find most useful about the Working Smart training?

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2. How can you use what you learned in finding employment, or if you are currently working, how will you use what you learned in this training in your current job position?

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3. What changes would you make to the Working Smart training?

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**Thank you for completing this survey!**