A PAPER PRESENTED

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ON

WORK ETHICS, DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES AND DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND COMPETENCES OF CLERICAL STAFF

AT THE TRAINING WORKSHOP ORGANIZED FOR CLERICAL AND DATA PROCESSORS, ORGANIZED BY CENTRE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (CHRD).

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WORK ETHICS, DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES AND DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND COMPETENCES OF CLERICAL STAFF

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Preamble

It is with deep sense of humility and honour that I stand most respectfully today to deliver the lecture on Work Ethics, Desirable Attributes, and Development of Skills and Competencies of Clerical Staff.

The topic simply means - how to become a good, efficient and productive clerical staff. May I thank the Centre for Human Resource Development for mounting this programme which would enable staff at this cadre to develop their personal and organizational skills.

The disarray in work ethics, morals, social discipline, and general civility in our country has reached an alarming rate that if nothing is done to solve the problem, the lofty ideas of our founding fathers to make this institution a centre of excellence will fail because the human element which will stir the ideas is not right. People do not want to work honestly and diligently, thus services are woefully inefficient and ineffective to promote the growth of the University. Federal University of Technology, Owerri was started on a right track and what was accomplished to a point was both impressive and inspiring. At a point, it took a wrong turn, resulting in collective exhaustion and a nearly dismantle of the works gained.

Employees are expected to observe the highest standards of ethics and also comply with all applicable laws and regulations. Unfortunately, lawlessness and a culture of impunity prevails at all levels and have permeated the psyche of many Nigerians. The lawlessness observed in the 'new generation' of workers mirrors the extent of decay in the societal norms. Our common goal as a group is now obstructed by suspicions, greed, grudges, petty disputes and ethnic allegiances.

At a wedding ceremony recently, the preacher said "Man, now you are the head of the family, while the woman is the neck that carries the head". A little boy in the crowd shouted sir, what are we, the children?.

The above story explains the hierarchical structure of any organization. The framework or structure of an organization is pyramidal or triangular shaped. At the top is the Head (Chief Executive), next in the order of hierarchy is the Senior Management Staff (neck) and then the bulk of staff who carry out the most difficult tasks - (that includes you. I will call the bulk of staff at this level the heartbeat of the organization). Every segment of the organizational structure is indispensable. The achievement of the organization relies on the productivity and efficiency of every staff for maximum growth.

It is, therefore, necessary to apply work ethics, and confidentiality in daily office practice. Just as we have individual responsibilities, we also have a collective responsibility to make the system work by keeping to rules and regulations. This collective responsibility is missing in the system and now is the time to recapture the lost values.

There is a misconception that people who work in clerical field do so because they are not qualified for other positions. With increase in unemployment in our dear country Nigeria, a lot of graduates had taken to clerical work as a stepping stone to a higher cadre. Generally, for most clerical positions, the entry qualification is Senior Secondary Certification Examination or its equivalent in GCE/NECO.

This lecture, therefore, provides opportunity for the clerical officers/Data Processor to harness the necessary values required for complete self actualization in their profession.

What are Clerical Skills?:

These are a set of simple, practical but necessary skills that an individual must have to perform the basic office work in areas of employment. The skills entails a wide range of office related abilities from filling, data handling (storing and retrieval), to dealing with the public and knowing how to operate general office equipment such as computer, scan, photo copying, phone systems, mailing, receiving, and follow-up on tasks. These are the important administrative requirements for the smooth functioning of any office and will help to keep the office organized. Different clerical positions require different levels of specific skills. Depending on your clerical field, you may need to be familiar with accounting procedure (basic mathematics knowledge) or be proficient in more than one language.

How to Set-up an Effective Filing System

STEP 1: *Filing Methods:*

The filing system must be organized so that everyone can find what they are looking with ease. Difficulty in accessing required information often leads to piling of paper to be filed on the desk. The following filing methods of filing could be adopted:

Alphabetical: This type of filing is best when most files of clients, patience, and customers. The files are arranged alphabetically according to the clients' name.

Subject or Category: Most file systems are organized by subjects or categories. They work well if properly set and most confusing when not.

Numerical/Chronological: This works best when your files consist mainly of numbered or dated material like purchase orders or receipts. It is the system which FUTO adopted in keeping its records. Personal files are numbered using staff identity number, example Sp 801, SP 802, SP 803.............

STEP II: *Fill your file draw with hanging folders.*
It will never be removed as it is a place holder for the manila envelopes.

STEP III: *Sort your papers into files by category.*
The names of files should determine which paper goes into them. This is why a good clerk should always keep a file index on the table for ease of reference.

STEP IV: *Place each file in a manila folder and label it clearly.*

STEP V: *Place the manila folders into the hanging folders.* For thick files or files that are hard to divide into subcategories, use box bottom folder (preferably in alphabetical order).

STEP VI: *Label the hanging folders with the same names as on manila folders.*

STEP VII: At the end of year, replace all old files by putting the old ones in a new file jacket, transferring all the information to the new folder (including the old file jacket). Files that are no longer required are closed with the date of closure indicated on the back of the file and transferred to the archives.

According to Records Management Guidelines, a single personal file should be generated and maintained for the expected life span of a person. The file should be maintained for seventy-five years after the date of birth or seven years after separation from the institution, after which it is forwarded to the archives for filing.

NUMBERING FILES

The purpose of reference number is essentially internal to the University. To the outsider, it is useful to quote reference for easy of locating relevant papers when reply is received. The University therefore adopted the following system:

i. The first part denotes the main office that is involved, e.g.

VC - Vice-Chancellor's Office.
REG - Registry
BUR - Bursary
SAAT - School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology
SMAT - School of Management Technology

ii. The second part, denotes sections where such divisions are relevant e.g.

Reg/Sen/
Reg/Cou/
Reg/Adm/
Reg/RS/

iii. Numbers come after the letters - details can be left for each Unit

HANDLING OF MAILS

RECEPTION OF MAILS: Receiving mails involve the following processes:
Receiving and signing for the in-coming mail (s).
Stamping and dating the in-coming mails.
The in-coming mails are registered as appropriate.
Collating and forwarding mails to the Secretary for her necessary action.

DESPATCHING OF MAILS

The following processes are involved in dispatching of mails:
The mails are duly registered.
The mails are signed-out by the clerk receiving the mail.

WORK-PLACE CONFIDENTIALITY

Institutions recognize its responsibility to collate, manage, disclose information and comply with legislative requirement. Confidentiality in the workplace is all about privacy, discretion, secrecy, and concealment of generated information. Confidential matters in the office can be classified into Secret, Top secret, Confidential information, and Classified materials. Data classification is the process of assigning value to your data by labeling or tagging it with a sensitivity mark at the point it is created. Un-classified data tend to give equal importance to all documents. It therefore enables you to know who should or should not have access to the document. Classification is very important part of an organization's security strategy. On recruitment, personal and sensitive information are solicited directly from the person and documented by the Personnel Unit.

The University respects the individual rights and under-takes to keep personal and sensitive information as confidential as possible. The employer has a specific legal and ethical responsibility to protect personal information (Functus officio). As an employee, you must protect the interest of your current and previous employers to the best of your ability, and prove that you are worthy of their trust. If you leak information, you may be liable for damages. Understanding your strength and personal values will help to avoid potentially uncomfortable work environment.

The workplace ethics demand that staff must protect the confidentiality of information acquired during the course of work. Information should not be disclosed to a third party unless you are specifically authorized to do so. In a normal course of work within the organization always request for a written directive before disclosing someone's confidential record (this provision applies to all personnel staff).

CONFIDENTIAL RECORD

There are two kinds of information that cannot be disclosed anyhow. They are:

1. **Personal Information:** This is defined as information or opinion about an individual (whether true or false) whose identity can be easily ascertained from the information given.

2. **Sensitive Information:** This information involves the person's race, religious belief, political inclination, sexual preferences, health status, disability, membership of professional body, criminal records, remuneration, leave documents, interview discussions and results, assessment of staff promotions, discussion of students' admission and discipline etc

USE AND DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

Staff should not disclose personal and sensitive information unless authorized The work environment should be conducive for the maintenance of confidentiality.

There should be an adequate, properly ventilated and properly lit file room with steel cabinets.

The file room should be located in a secured area.
Staff should only access required information.

PROTECTING THE PRIVACY OF STAFF RECORD

The following guidelines if applied in everyday work practices should facilitate the maintenance of confidentiality of staff record:

- Ensure that personal files are closed and turned face down on the desk when not in-use.
- Ensure that the file cabinet containing these sensitive and personal information are properly secured under lock in the coordinator's office or storage room.
- Monitor the typing and photocopying of sensitive document.
- Do not give out official document to road side traders as waste papers.
- Classify documents accordingly - confidential/secret document should be stamped such.
- Destroy by burning or shredding any official document that is not needed
- Ensure that computers are properly positioned in the office to avoid visitors reading what is on the screen.
- Ensure that the computers are shut down when you are not on sit.
- Printed information should be collected promptly from shared printers and papers not needed should be shredded immediately.
- Work stationed screensavers should be set for activation after five minutes.
- Information on staff should not be discussed in social environment.
  Personnel staff should be environmentally alert while discussing personnel matters on the phone.
- Confidential information should be retained and must be archived.

SOURCES OF LEAKAGE

There are many sources of information leakage in an office. These include: **Members of Committees and Secretaries:** These classes of workers are always fingered as the main source of information leakage. This is because they are privy to the sensitive discussions and decisions reached at meetings. How true is this? From my personal experience, the very bosses who sit at meetings where decisions are taken are the foremost source of leakage. For example, in an appraisal exercise, one can see the 'big men' sending congratulatory messages through their handsets to their friends who have been promoted. The implication is that the information has leaked before the meeting ended. If you are sure of your values, politely defend yourself anytime fingers are pointed at you for leakage. Saying nothing means that you are responsible for the leakage.

Computer Operators, Clerks and Messengers: The dirty politics that bedevils organizations resulting in social insecurities have succeeded in making these classes of workers spies for their town's men who occupy higher positions.

Environmental Risk Factors: These include un-availability of office spaces and facilities which encourage leakage through eaves dropping.

REASONS FOR LACK OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Insensitivity: You should be part of the organization where you work, and should show a sense of belonging.

Corruption: People divulge information on the promise of money or any other thing they can gain.

Carelessness: Due to flippant tongue, lack of proper storage, and careless disposal of official document.

Political affiliation, personal aggrandizement, and unethical practices are all reasons for information leakage.

WHAT SHALL WE DO TO STOP THIS?

1. Interviewing, recruiting on merit.(abuse of regularization interviews)
2. Induction of newly recruited staff.
3. Seminars/workshops.
4. Training staff on the job should be e-compliant.
5. Giving awards to outstanding staff as an incentive. This should motivate other staff.
6. Appropriate disciplinary measures should be meted on people who break the rules of ethics and confidentiality.

COMPETENCE

Competence is the ability to do a job properly. Intelligence is only an aspect of competence. It includes the acquisition of required skills, experience, and attitude to perform a particular function effectively. To be competent a person is required to interpret the situation in the context and have a repertoire of possible actions to take.

COMPETENCE = (S + E + K + A)
(Skill + Experience + Knowledge + Ability)

The attributes of a competent professional include the following:

Self direction and initiative: You should have a goal/aim and the common sense of achieving it.

Personal Discipline: The ability to behave in a controlled and calm way even in a difficult situation.

Self efficacy: The ability to produce desired result.

Appearance: Your look tells the story of who you are.

Flexibility: This is the ability to adapt to new situations; or to change or be changed according to circumstance.

Inter personal skills: You must have good relationship with others.

Work ethics: You should be dedicated tc work, or believe in moral value of hard work by conforming to acceptable standard.

Dependability: You must be reliable.

Accountability: You should be responsible to somebody or for something.

Positive mental attitude: You should always be in control of your emotions.

Keeping commitment: A planned activity or arrangement should not be avoided.

Time management: Should make judicious use of your time. Time wasted cannot be regained.

Creativity: The ability to use the imagination to develop new and original ideas.

Definition of Workplace Ethics

The corporate world has its own set of rules and tricks which promote customer relationships that are based on honesty and integrity.

"*Workplace ethics is a set of values based on hard work and diligence. It is also a belief in the moral benefit of work and its ability to enhance character*" (Wikipedia). It is supposed to improve our lives and invoke good feelings, and if used on daily basis would eradicate scandals. Steven Malanga (2011) refers to work ethics not just as "*hard work but also a set of accompanying virtues that are important for development and sustenance of free market.*" It is also about your attitudes, values, communication, respect, humility and accountability, and how you get along with others in the workplace. It demonstrates many things about whom or how a person is.

There is difference between personal and professional ethics. Personal ethics focus on morals and principles while professional ethics demand adherence to corporate rules.

Contribution Ethics: Demand that an employee contributes positively to the progress of the organization. We belong to the world and must perform to global standards of ethics and integrity. People with a contribution ethics have always been rare and are the driving force in the world's economy. The key to improving your contribution ethics include the following:

Always make yourself useful. You have gone to work to be productive and not to socialize. Offer assistance to other staff who got stuck in performing their task. (just help).Believing in your self, asking for help when necessary, prioritize your tasks and spending time wisely enhances your organizational skills.

- **Always bring something to read.** In the absence of any work (I doubt) keep yourself busy reading to improve the needed vocabulary for the administrative work. This avails you of continuous learning, respect for the right of others, and mannerly behavior. Do not engage in personal discussion as this may distract other staff, and also do not loiter.

- Assume the best by being reliable, loyal, honest, and dependable. This is achieved through **self discipline**.
- Give time without attention by being cooperative, assertive, and displaying a customer service attitude.
- Being right is overrated, if your target is usefulness, then progress matters.
- Being wrong is underrated - admitting you are wrong is wisdom gained.
- Demonstrate how your ideas will work.
- Think like a hero, work like an artist (a hero's mind aims at helpfulness while an artist's is exploratory)

INCULCATION OF WORK ETHICS

One of the primary functions of an administrator is to supervise staff under him. To inculcate work ethics, it is therefore necessary to have an excellent attendance record by being punctual. It is a habit once formed becomes an integral part of your lifestyle.

- *Avoid procrastination:* Treat every mail that is on your table immediately and avoid taking work home. It is not healthy to carry office work home as it will among other things strain your family relationship.
- *Integrity that is the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles and or professional standards should be part of your work ethics:* Be honest and treat others with respect. Have high regards for yourself and be your own best friend. Respect for ourselves guides our morals; while respect for others guides our manners. Do not forget that the way we conduct our business is as important as the result

- *Be independent and self-reliant:* You should have above average initiative to direct the affairs of the office in the absence of the boss. Understudy the activities in the office. It marvels to know that the more you learn, the more you realize that you do not know many things.

- *Keep your desk clean and organize:* The first way to know an uninformed and unorganized clerk is that he scatters files and documents on his table.

- *Be a team-player:* Go that extra mile to help fellow workers out if possible.

- *Appear self-confident:* This is enhanced by the knowledge of what is expected of you on duty e.g. being ready with relevant document for meetings.

- *Avoid gossip:* Do not openly criticize others. It is not everything one hears that he relays to others - confidentiality.

- *Use work ethics with mails:* Double check your write-up, proof read your letters and allow a third eye to vet before sending out mails.

- *Use good phone etiquette:* I found myself waiting for four minutes for a bank worker to finish a meaningless discussion with a friend before attending to me. I became impatient and tapped on the glass protector for attention. Using her left hand, she made a signal to me directing me to the next person while she continued with her call. In advanced countries, phones are not used in the office expect for official matters.

- *Cry in private:* Many times people often breakdown at work from personal problems at home or from bad experience with a colleague in the office. Wipe your tears. Get your emotions back together and return to work as soon as possible. (Always cry in the rain).

- *Balance-out*: Taking care of yourself and incorporating work ethics. A well behaved person from a good background easily balances out the expectation of duties and its applications.

- Behave professionally during extra-curricular activities such as party time: Do not scramble for food or pile food in your plate nor drink to stupor because it is free. Dress appropriately and try to mingle with everyone.

Managing Ethics in the Workplace

There are various steps in managing ethics in the workplace. These include the following:-

- Organizations should state clearly their policy on work ethics and also list the consequences of breaking such rules. The policy on work ethics should be issued to employees on assumption of duty.
- Organization should provide Guidance Counselor's with whom employees can freely discuss ethical related matters.
- Create a friendly workplace environment in which the employee can report ethic violations and remain anonymous.
- Supervisors should be self exemplary to other staff by being punctual and dedicated to work.
- Provide adequately furnished staff offices.

Five Strategies for Maintaining Ethics in the Workplace

- Spoil them with kindness.
- Do not use foul language in everyday speech.
- Compliment someone who is genuinely deserving the praise
- Say what you mean, mean what you say, but don't be mean when you say what you mean.
- Make decisions as if your actions were going to be tomorrow's headline in the NTA Newsline.

CONCLUSION

Life without control, or standard of behaviour, or call it rules and regulations will be chaotic. Life is an organized chain of activities, disruption at any level distorts the synchronization of life. This is the way it was, and ought to be. Today's generation has a great task to preserve knowledge, ethics and confidentiality in all spheres of life by going back to the basics.

Thank you.

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