



Supporting Workplace Initiative Skills: A Guide for Mentors

Purpose: This guide is designed to help mentors support high school students in developing initiative—a key trait for success in the workplace. Students participating in this initiative are enrolled in the Corporate Work Study Program at Providence Cristo Rey High School. Through their weekly Corporate Work Study class, students explore and practice behaviors that demonstrate responsibility, independence, and motivation.

This guide complements classroom instruction by outlining the components of workplace initiative, providing practical examples, and offering creative, game-based strategies that mentors can use to help students recognize and grow these habits on the job.

1. Self-Starting

Definition: Taking action without being told and looking for ways to contribute.

Examples:

- Beginning a task right away without needing a reminder
- Offering to help a coworker who looks busy
- Cleaning up a shared space without being asked
- Organizing materials or documents when there's downtime
- Finding tasks to do when finished early

Mentor Strategies:

- Ask the student to create a daily checklist of responsibilities.
- Challenge students to identify one extra task they could take on independently.
- Share examples of how professionals show initiative in your workplace.
- **Game Idea:** Try the "Proactive Points" challenge: each time a student identifies and completes an unassigned task, they earn a point toward a reward.
- **Game Idea:** Play "What If?"—present scenarios where something goes wrong or needs attention and ask, "What would you do?"

Discussion Prompts:

- What are ways you've taken initiative at school or work?
- How can you recognize when something needs to be done?
- Why do employers value employees who take initiative?

Monthly Integration Idea: Identify a recurring weekly or monthly task (e.g., cleaning up a shared area, stocking supplies) and assign the student to monitor and complete it independently. Reflect on their performance during regular check-ins.

2. Time Management

Definition: Using time wisely to complete tasks efficiently and meet deadlines.

Examples:

- Prioritizing urgent tasks over less important ones
- Breaking large projects into smaller steps
- Avoiding procrastination by starting early
- Managing distractions and staying focused
- Checking in regularly on progress

Mentor Strategies:

- Help students organize their tasks with a simple planner or to-do list.
- Model how to break a project down into manageable chunks.
- Discuss strategies for staying focused during long or repetitive tasks.
- **Game Idea:** Use "Beat the Clock," where students complete a short task within a timed window to simulate deadline pressure.
- **Game Idea:** Try "Task Tetris"—give a student a list of tasks with time estimates and challenge them to schedule them effectively in a simulated workday.

Discussion Prompts:

- What strategies help you stay focused and on schedule?
- How do you decide what to work on first?
- What's the cost of poor time management in the workplace?

Monthly Integration Idea: Have the student track their daily tasks and time spent for one week. Meet at the end of the week to discuss time use and brainstorm ways to improve efficiency or prioritize better.

3. Problem Solving

Definition: Thinking critically and creatively to overcome obstacles or find solutions.

Examples:

- Figuring out a new way to organize supplies more efficiently

- Troubleshooting a computer issue before asking for help
- Finding a missing file or fixing an error on your own
- Offering a new idea to improve a current process
- Staying calm and solution-oriented when a mistake is made

Mentor Strategies:

- Let students try to solve a minor issue before offering a solution.
- Praise problem-solving attempts, even if they don't work perfectly.
- Discuss a workplace problem together and brainstorm solutions.
- **Game Idea:** Use "Solution Sprint," where students brainstorm five possible solutions to a challenge in under five minutes.
- **Game Idea:** Play "Fix-It Puzzles," giving students a scenario with a common workplace error and asking them to walk through a fix.

Discussion Prompts:

- How do you feel when you solve a problem on your own?
- What makes a good problem solver?
- How can mistakes be learning opportunities?

Monthly Integration Idea: Assign a "problem of the month" related to the student's role or worksite. Ask them to investigate the issue, suggest improvements, and present one idea during a mentor check-in.

4. Goal Setting and Follow-Through

Definition: Setting personal goals and working steadily to meet them.

Examples:

- Deciding to improve at a specific skill and tracking progress
- Sticking with a task even when it's challenging or repetitive
- Reviewing goals and adjusting steps as needed
- Asking for feedback to stay on track
- Taking pride in completing a task thoroughly

Mentor Strategies:

- Help the student set a small weekly goal and check in on progress.
- Celebrate accomplishments to reinforce perseverance.
- Offer feedback on both effort and outcome.
- **Game Idea:** Use "Goal Tracker Bingo," where students complete squares by meeting various initiative-related mini-goals.

- **Game Idea:** Try "Work Backwards," where a final goal is provided and the student has to map out steps to reach it in reverse order.

Discussion Prompts:

- What's a goal you're working on this month?
- What helps you stay motivated when a task gets tough?
- How do you know when you've done your best work?

Monthly Integration Idea: Use a goal-setting template to identify one professional goal for the month. Document progress weekly and hold a short reflection session at the end of the month to celebrate or revise the plan.

Final Tips for Mentors:

- Be observant: Watch for signs of student hesitation and celebrate small steps forward.
- Be clear: Offer specific suggestions for ways the student can show initiative.
- Be encouraging: Share how initiative has helped you succeed.
- Be flexible: Let students try their own solutions even if they're not perfect.
- Be affirming: Recognize and affirm effort just as much as results.

By supporting students in developing initiative, you help them become more independent, engaged, and confident workers—skills that will serve them well beyond their high school work study experience.