12 Learning About Yourself

Key Terms

self-concept
self-assessment
interests
aptitude
ability
personality
habit
values
lifestyle goals
short-term goal
long-term goal
standards
standard of living
resources
human resources
nonhuman resources

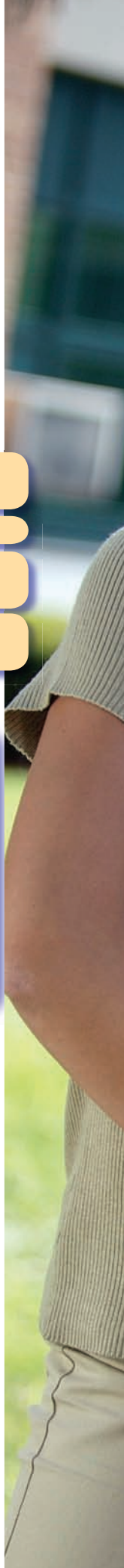
Chapter Objectives

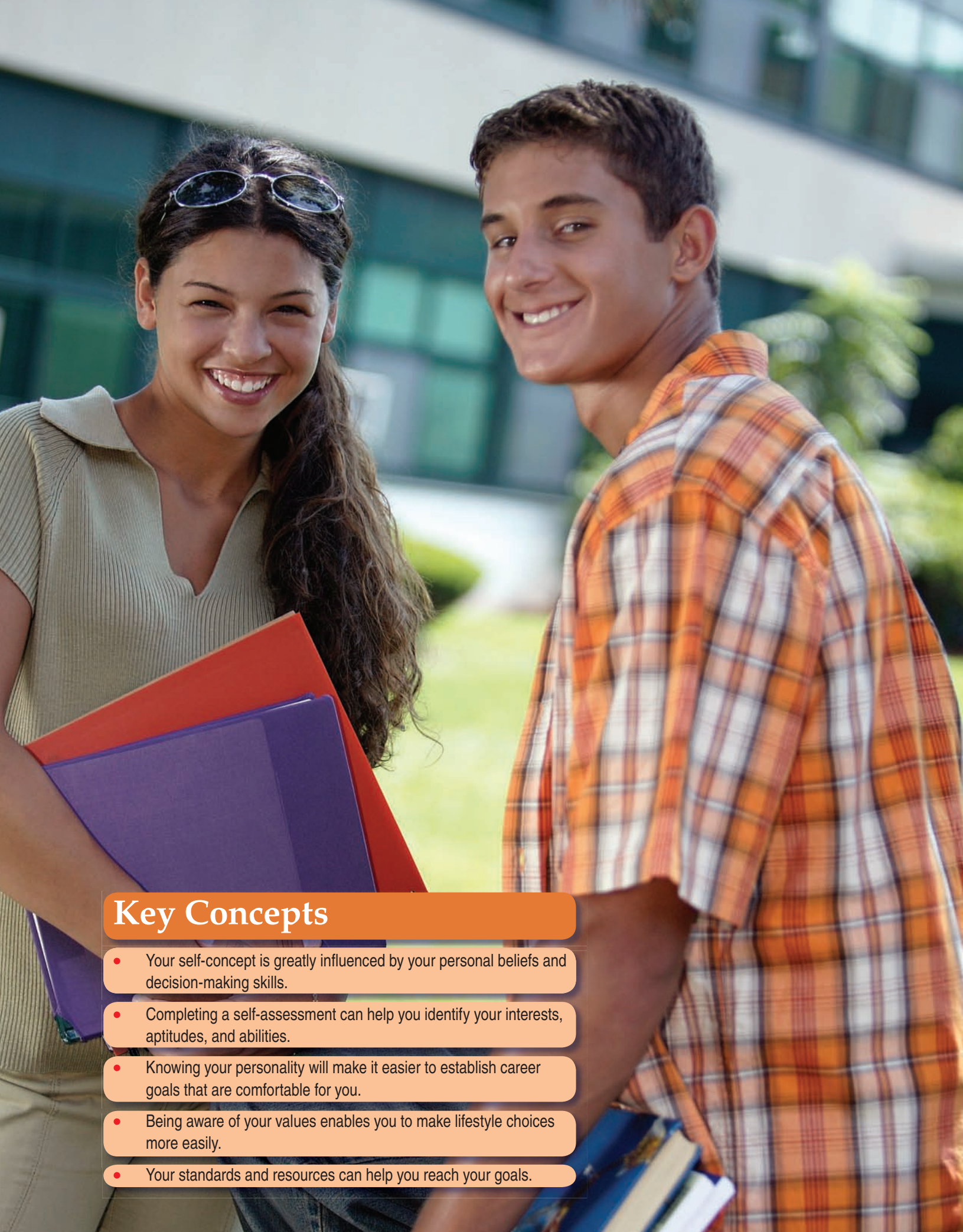
After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- **explain** how your self-concept and a self-assessment help you understand yourself better.
- **identify** how personalities may influence life choices.
- **describe** several personality traits and explain how they may influence life choices.
- **analyze** how identifying your values, goals, standards, ethics, and resources can help you understand yourself better.

Reading Advantage

As you read the chapter, record any questions that come to mind. Indicate where the answer to each question can be found: within the text, by asking your teacher, in another book, on the Internet, or by reflecting on your own experiences. Pursue the answers to your questions.





Key Concepts

- Your self-concept is greatly influenced by your personal beliefs and decision-making skills.
- Completing a self-assessment can help you identify your interests, aptitudes, and abilities.
- Knowing your personality will make it easier to establish career goals that are comfortable for you.
- Being aware of your values enables you to make lifestyle choices more easily.
- Your standards and resources can help you reach your goals.

Have you taken time to sit quietly by yourself and think about your strengths and weaknesses? Do you know what you want to do in life? How do you define *success* and *happiness*? What are the characteristics and qualities that make you the person you are?

Success and happiness in life involve more than just letting things happen. Success and happiness involve learning about yourself and making the best use of your skills. To be successful you need to know as much as possible about yourself. What skills do you have? What do you do well? What type of work appeals to you? Would you be more successful in a business or an educational setting? Is your personality more suited to becoming a teacher or an engineer?

What are the principles and beliefs that you consider important? Is earning a lot of money important to you? Is having a challenging and responsible job important? Do you want to have a family? In other words, what do you want to achieve and how will you achieve it?

Your answers to these questions are the foundations from which you will make all your decisions. The more you know about yourself, the better prepared you will be to make decisions about your education, career, and lifestyle.

Your Self-Concept

Part of learning about yourself is thinking about your self-concept. **Self-concept** is the mental image you have of yourself, 12-1. As you go through adolescence, you may feel two interacting forces pulling you. One force is the need to become increasingly independent. The other force is a need to feel good about who you are and what you do. Development and constant changing of your self-concept is a lifelong process.

As you attempt to become more independent, your self-concept is very important. As you develop your self-concept, you may be directed in many ways. Your close friends may help you believe in your own ability to cope with pressure. On the other hand, some peer groups can have a negative influence. Classmates who believe it is okay to lie or cheat are examples of negative influences. Your personal beliefs and decision-making skills will greatly influence your self-concept.

For you to develop a strong, positive self-concept, it is important to

- believe in your capabilities
- believe you can control your life
- exercise self-discipline and self-control
- use effective communication skills
- demonstrate flexibility and integrity

You will find that these skills do not develop in isolation. They are dependent on one another. For example, deciding not to experiment with drugs will require you to use your decision-making skills and communication skills. Self-discipline and self-control must be used also.

Thinking It Through

When people have a negative self-concept, what might they do to feel better about themselves?

It is important to have a person in your life who exerts a strong positive influence and steers you clear of risky behavior and its pitfalls. This person may be a mentor, coach, big brother or sister, or just a special friend. It is helpful to have basic positive values to rely on and a special person to talk with when you are facing negative temptations. Adolescence is a time when you develop the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that will directly impact your self-concept for the rest of your life.

Photo courtesy of SkillsUSA

12-1 Positive accomplishments lead to positive self-concepts about yourself.

Self-Esteem

When you have a positive self-concept, you also have confidence and satisfaction in yourself. This is self-esteem. It is a feeling of self-worth. Positive self-esteem means you recognize and value your uniqueness. You are proud of who you are and what you do, 12-2.

Self-esteem is a type of self-respect. People with high self-esteem believe they can handle life's challenges. People with low self-esteem often tend to see themselves as failures and, consequently, avoid everyday challenges.

Making a Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is the process of taking stock of your interests, aptitudes, and abilities. Through self-assessment you are better able to plan your future. You will find it easier to select hobbies and elective courses in school. You will also find it easier to make plans for your life. Sometimes self-assessment techniques may involve thinking exercises or written or electronic testing. Whatever method is used, take the process of self-assessment seriously.

What Are Your Interests?

To know and understand yourself, you need to analyze your interests. Your **interests** are the activities, events, and ideas you like. What do you enjoy doing the most? How do you like to spend your time? What are your hobbies? What do you like most in school? What would you do if you had spare time? Make lists for each answer. Your lists of answers should help you identify careers that will be interesting to you.

Sometimes people have a hard time determining their interests. One day a person may have a strong interest in becoming a teacher but later have little interest in teaching. It is important for you to get involved in a variety of positive activities. Interests are learned, so unless you

12-2

Pride in your accomplishments is a sign of high self-esteem.

have tried something, you do not know for sure if you have an interest in it. You are more likely to meet people and develop different interests as you experience new activities.

In your work-based learning experience, you may discover new career interests. You may also realize that an earlier career interest now seems uninteresting. Learning about different careers and occupations helps you determine what careers interest you. Job shadowing experiences can also be a good way to help you understand what duties are involved with a job.

If you find it hard to identify your interests, talk to others. Listen to those who know you well. Your friends and family members may be able to help you recall the activities you have enjoyed the most or the projects you have done well. Also ask others about their careers and what they like most and least about them.

Another way to become more aware of your interests is to take an activities preference inventory. Most high school guidance departments are prepared to give preference tests to students. The inventory is designed to help you determine if you prefer working with people, objects, or ideas. You are usually given several activities and asked to select the one activity that appeals to you most. After completing the inventory, you are given a key to interpret the results.

If the inventory indicates you would primarily enjoy working with people, you may want to consider a career in social work, teaching, sales, or health care services. If the inventory points to objects, you might want a job as a fashion illustrator, auto technician, baker, or machine operator. An interest in ideas would suggest careers in publishing, advertising, or marketing. These are only a few examples of the types of careers related to people, objects, and ideas.

Keep in mind that one person or test cannot tell you what to do with your life. They can only provide direction and help you consider possibilities of which you may not have been aware. It is up to you to make the final decisions about your career goals. The information in 12-3 may help you become more aware of your interests and understand how interests relate to choosing a career.

Reflect Further

What career do you think you have an aptitude for?

What Are Your Aptitudes?

To be successful in a career, you need to have more than just an interest in it. You also need to have an aptitude for it. An **aptitude** is a person's natural physical and mental talents for learning. If you have an aptitude for a certain skill, you will be able to learn the skill easily and perform the skill well.

Career Interest Concepts	
Concepts	**Examples**
There are many interest areas in a career.	A grain farmer may have an interest in growing vegetables, working for himself, and operating machinery. The farmer might also have an interest in athletics or upholstering, but these interests are not needed in farming.
People have interest areas they do not want to pursue as a career.	An auto technician may have gardening as a hobby but may not want an occupation as a farmer or horticulturist.
Genuine interest is important for success in any career.	Working at something you like is more pleasant.
Everyone has many interests.	A person may have interests in music, athletics, mechanical things, and people.
Different careers may involve similar or the same interests.	A salesperson, politician, teacher, and lawyer are interested in working with people and, in some way, influencing them.

12-3
As you think about your career interests, consider these basic concepts.

If you have an aptitude for writing, for example, perhaps you could become a successful newspaper writer or Web site contributor. On the other hand, if you do not have this aptitude and still try to become a writer, doing well in that career may forever be a struggle for you. Be realistic about your aptitudes. Become aware of your mental and physical limitations as well as your strengths.

What Are Your Abilities?

You are born with certain aptitudes, but you must develop your abilities. Everyone has an ability of some kind. An **ability** is a task or skill you have already developed. Abilities are learned through training and practice.

Abilities are developed more easily if you have related aptitudes. For example, if you have physical aptitudes for rhythm and coordination, you will probably excel quickly in a ballroom dancing class. If you have very little aptitude for dancing, hard work and genuine interest can help you overcome low aptitudes and develop abilities. By taking dancing lessons on a regular basis and practicing dancing, you can develop the ability to dance.

Your interests, aptitudes, and abilities all need to be considered in career planning. Most people are usually interested in the activities they do best, but sometimes that may not be the case. A person may want to become a professional basketball player but not have the physical aptitude for the sport. Sometimes a person may have the ability to play a musical instrument but not have the interest to do so. The ideal situation is to have the mental and physical aptitudes and abilities that relate to a career that interests you, 12-4.

Thinking It Through

Why do you need to consider your interests, aptitudes, and abilities when career planning?

Extend Your Knowledge

Aptitude Tests

To learn more about your aptitudes, ask your guidance teacher if your school gives any aptitude tests such as the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB). By taking these tests, you will get a better idea of the kinds of careers in which you have the best chances for success.

12-4

This worker combined his interest in helping people with his therapy skills and became a physical therapist.

Your Personal Characteristics

Your personal characteristics make you distinct and separate from everyone else. These characteristics are a combination of your personality traits and your behavioral habits.

Personality Traits

Everyone has a personality. **Personality** influences how a person thinks and feels. It influences how you interact with different people in different situations. Your personality even influences the way other people feel about you.

Different careers require different personality traits. That is why it is important to consider your personality when establishing your career goals. Suppose a person has a quiet, reserved personality and likes to spend a lot of time alone reading. This person probably would not enjoy a career in sales. Being successful in sales requires an outgoing personality and spending much time talking with others. Knowing your personality will make it easier to establish career goals that are comfortable to you. See 12-5 for a list of personality traits and some career areas that complement each.

Reflect Further

How do you think others would describe your personality? Is it possible for a person to completely change his or her personality?

Habits

When you do something the same way every time it is called a **habit**. Your daily life includes many habits, such as the way you stand, sit, talk, walk, and gesture when speaking. The habits you form are a part of your personality, and they influence the way others see you.

Habits can be good or bad. For example, arriving to work and school on time every day is a good habit. Being late frequently is a bad habit. It is wise to examine your habits periodically. Do you have good grooming habits? Do you have annoying mannerisms? What new habits would you like to establish? What old habits would you like to change? See 12-6.

Personality and Careers

Personality Trait	Ideal Career Area
Helpful	Food, hotel, and passenger services
Artistic	Decorating, creative writing, performing
Detail-oriented	Reporting, bookkeeping, engineering
Enterprising	Sales, promotions, demonstrations
Questioning	Inspections, research, repair services
Protective	Child care, law enforcement, emergency services
Social	Teaching, interviewing, coaching

12-5

You will be happier if you select a career that suits your personality traits.

Your Values

Values are the principles and beliefs that you consider important. The values you have influence your decisions and actions. That is why it is important for you to become aware of them. To most people, friendship, honesty, good health, and compassion are important. Education,

12-6

Food habits are some of the hardest habits to change.

Thinking It Through

How can your habits have a negative or positive influence on the way others see you?

popularity, new cars, a happy family life, and money are also important to many people. Examine *what* is important to you and *why*. Identifying the ideals and objects that are important to you will help you develop your career goals, 12-7.

For instance, being able to wear blue jeans and casual clothes to work may be important to you. Then you probably would not be happy in a situation where suits or dress clothes are required. If you prefer a quiet, comfortable environment, you would probably dislike a noisy, bustling factory.

Identify your values. Then rank them in order of importance. Your values guide your behavior and help you develop a sense of direction in your life. Being aware of them will also enable you to make lifestyle choices more easily. For example, suppose you list a challenging job and a well-paying job as two of your values. However, you rank a challenging job near the top of your list and a well-paying job lower down. Therefore, you could probably conclude that a challenging job would be more important to you than a boring job with higher pay.

Ethics

Have you ever heard people say, "She is not ethical" or "He lacks basic ethics"? They are referring to the set of moral values that guide the person's conduct. It is important to remember that the ethics of individuals determines the ethics of a group.

When a person calls in sick to school on a sunny spring day, takes credit for another student's work, or lies to a friend, the ethics of that person are not positive. It may be said the person's behavior is unethical.

Several things influence the ethics of people. School pressures, family demands, work conditions, finances, peer pressure, and even goals may influence ethics. The way people handle these influences determines their ethics.

12-7

If you value spending time with young children, you would probably enjoy a career working with or teaching children.

In the Real World

Reporting Travel Expenses

Juliet is going on a business trip. It is a good opportunity for her to find new clients for her company and enjoy herself at the same time. She realizes the importance of doing a good job, but if she spends too much, she may upset her boss and get stuck with the bill. It is very important for Juliet to abide by the company's policy on travel expenses.

Juliet also has to take a mental inventory of her own values and ethics. She knows these will affect how she reports her travel expenses.

While most companies do not object to employees rounding up expenses to the nearest dollar, they consider it dishonest to turn in a receipt for an expense an employee did not have. For example, Juliet's employer says she is allowed to spend $32 on dinner. She knows it is dishonest to turn in a receipt for the entire $32 if she just grabs a hamburger and cola. In some restaurants, Juliet will be offered the temptation to cheat. Some eating establishments present the customer with the actual bill, along with a blank bill on which the customer may write any amount.

On her trip, Juliet meets an old friend from another company and they decide to go out together to eat. After the meal when the checks are presented, Juliet learns that her friend Cara is not required to turn in receipts for meals. Cara is simply reimbursed a certain fixed amount per day.

Cara pays for her meal, knowing that her reimbursement is automatic. Juliet considers taking Cara's receipt and turning it in with her expense account. The boss will probably think that Juliet was being a good salesperson by taking a potential client to lunch. In this way, Juliet will make some extra money.

Juliet does not tell Cara her plan, but Cara knows and simply hands her receipt to Juliet. Before heading back to their hotels, the friends promise to meet again tomorrow.

"Let's go to a real expensive place tomorrow," Juliet said. "We deserve it."

"Can you afford it?" Cara asked.

"I'll find a way," replied Juliet.

Questions to Discuss

1. Is Juliet, Cara, or both guilty of unethical behavior?
2. If ethical behavior had been used, how would this story change?
3. What should Juliet do when she makes out her expense account after the trip?

When conflicts of ethics arise, it is helpful to carefully study all the pros and cons of different possible reactions to a situation. Take a long-term view and decide what decisions or behaviors are best for you. What actions will you take to resolve the conflict? Will your actions conflict with your conscience? Are these actions acceptable by society's standards?

Your Goals

Goals are what you want to attain. A person's goals are usually based on his or her values. For example, John likes listening to music on a good stereo system. However, John's system does not work very well anymore. John has set a goal to buy a new stereo system in a year by saving a portion of each paycheck. As this example shows, goals and values are related. Values express thoughts and feelings and goals put them into action. Like values, goals influence and shape the decisions you make.

Have you thought about your goals? What do you want to do with your life? What do you want to accomplish?

The first step in setting and achieving goals is to make a list of what you really want from life. These are your **lifestyle goals**. Deciding where you want to live, if you want a family, and how much money you need to make to be comfortable are all examples of lifestyle goals. Also be sure to include both short-term goals and long-term goals. A **short-term goal** is a goal you want to reach tomorrow, next week, or within a few months. Getting an *A* on your next English assignment, becoming an officer in a school organization, and improving your tennis game are examples of short-term goals. A **long-term goal** is a goal that may take several months or years to achieve. Completing school, starting a career, and buying a car are examples of long-term goals. See 12-8.

Thinking It Through

Why do values and goals differ for different people? Why do values and goals usually change as people grow older?

12-8

Getting married after you complete your education and begin your career is an example of a long-term goal.

One important factor to remember when setting goals is to be realistic. Do you really want to reach that goal? Is it possible for you to reach? What will it cost in terms of time, energy, and money? Is the goal in keeping with your values? Setting well-defined, realistic goals can help you develop a sense of direction and purpose in life.

Standards

Standards are accepted levels of achievement. There are standards for dress, cleanliness, food and drug safety, and school grades, to name a few examples. Electrical products must meet certain safety standards before they are given a seal of approval. People in professions such as law and medicine must meet certain standards before they can practice their professions, 12-9.

Individuals also have their own personal standards, called standards of living. A person's **standard of living** refers to the goods and services considered essential for living. For some, an elegant residence, gourmet food, and frequent world travel are essential. For many people, their standard of living consists of a comfortable home, occasional restaurant meals, and weekend trips close to home.

Standards are closely related to values and goals. You will have high standards for whatever you consider important and set goals to achieve. For example, if you place importance on making the school honor roll and set aside time to study regularly, your standards for grades would be high. On the other hand, if you do not care much about clothes and pay little attention to the quality and style of clothing you wear, your standards for clothes would not be high.

What are your standards regarding work? Do you strive to do your very best on the job or do you just put in your hours? Do you have high standards for the way you look and dress? What are your standards for education? Knowing your own standards and what you expect from life can help you understand yourself better. This can help you establish satisfying lifestyle goals.

Resources

Resources are all the things you have or can use to help you reach your goals. To know yourself well, you need to recognize your resources. What resources do you have? What are your human resources? What are your nonhuman resources? **Human resources** are the resources you have within yourself such as skills, knowledge, and experience. See 12-10. Determination, motivation, and imagination are also valuable human resources. **Nonhuman resources** generally are the material things you have or can use to achieve goals such as money, tools, clothes, and community resources. Time is also a nonhuman resource.

12-9
Paramedics must pass certification tests to assure they are skilled in giving aid to people in life-threatening situations.

Identifying your resources helps you identify your strengths and weaknesses. For example, if you know you have artistic talents (a human resource), you will probably be successful pursuing a career in art. If you want to go to college or postsecondary training but do not have enough money (a nonhuman resource), you may apply for a scholarship, get a loan, or work part-time. Knowing your strengths and limitations can help you set realistic goals for your life and career.

Photo courtesy of the National FFA Organization

12-10
Your skills, knowledge, and experiences are valuable human resources.

Reflect Further

What do you consider your most valuable human and nonhuman resources?

Summary

Learning all about yourself can help you make decisions about the career that is right for you. As you learn about yourself, your interests, aptitudes, abilities, personality, habits, and values, you will be able to make decisions about your life, education, and career.

Before you choose a career, you need to know and understand yourself. You can start by looking at your interests. What do you enjoy doing the most? To be successful in a career, you need to have more than an interest in it. You need to consider your aptitude or ability to perform the duties required for that career as well.

You also need to consider your personality when choosing a career. Matching your personality with a suitable career will increase your chances for success and happiness on the job.

Knowing your values can help you make choices in your career and set your lifestyle goals. You can use your values to help guide your behavior and give some direction in your career choice. Once you know your values, you can also use them to help you set goals. The way you achieve your goals will depend on your own personal standards and the resources available to you.

Facts in Review

1. Name four perceptions or skills important for a positive self-concept.
2. Why is it important for you to learn as much about yourself as possible at this point in your life?
3. What is *self-assessment*?
4. What two things can you do to help you identify your interests?
5. What is an activities preference inventory?
6. Explain the difference between an aptitude and ability. Give an example of each.
7. How is it possible to overcome low aptitudes?
8. Why is it important to consider your personality when choosing a career?
9. How do values influence personal behavior?
10. What determines the ethics of a group?
11. How are standards closely related to values and goals?
12. What nonhuman resource does everyone have in common?

Developing Your Academic Skills

1. **Language Arts.** Choose a character from a story or novel you are currently reading. Write a report on how the character's self-concept influences his or her successes or failures.
2. **Social Studies.** With a partner, debate how ethical and unethical behavior played a part in American politics in the last 10 years. Should ethics be an issue to consider when electing leaders? Why or why not?

Information Technology Applications

1. Using a software program of your choice, create a chart of your interests, aptitudes, and abilities. Do your interests complement your aptitudes and abilities? What might the chart indicate about your future careers? Write a brief summary of your findings.
2. Using word-processing software, create an ethics survey. Write a list of questions to ask other students. For example, ask students how they feel about cheating on homework or tests in school. Also question whether students feel stealing products or coming in late to work is cheating on the job. (Make sure the survey forms do not include blanks for names.) Tally the survey results and write a report for the school paper.

Applying Your Knowledge and Skills

1. **Problem Solving and Critical Thinking.** List twelve things you like to do. Beside each activity on your list, note whether it involves mainly people, objects, or ideas. Evaluate your responses to see if you can form any conclusions about your interests and how they might influence your job choices.
2. **Employability and Career Development.** Ask your guidance counselor about taking an aptitude test. If available, take an aptitude test and discuss the results with your counselor.
3. **Ethics and Legal Responsibilities.** Describe how people could show that they place importance on the following: honesty, friendship, education, good health, and compassion.
4. **Systems.** Make a list of your lifestyle goals. Be sure to include several short-term and long-term goals you might want to achieve.
5. **Employability and Career Development.** Make a list of possible careers that would match your interests and aptitudes. Then write down any transferable skills that would correspond to these careers.

Developing Workplace Skills

Write several paragraphs describing yourself by using the following terms: abilities, aptitudes, values, ethics, habits, interests, personality, resources, self-concept, self-esteem, and standards. (You may use singular or plural forms of the terms.) Underline or circle the first use of each term. Share your paper with a trusted teacher, counselor, or friend, and ask for his or her comments.