



# MHA Labs Practice Guide

MHA Labs is the manifestation of a grassroots movement to radically improve the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills development of youth and young adults from cradle to career. Our researchers and users collaborate to better understand how 21<sup>st</sup> century skills develop across the lifelong learning spectrum from early childhood through employment. Our designers and users then translate research findings into practical, meaningful products that improve individual achievement and system outcomes.

## Stakeholders:

Youth & Their Peers  
Parents & Families  
Teacher & Professors  
Out-of-School Time Teams  
Counselors & Mentors  
College & Career Advisors  
Workforce Developers  
Employers & Supervisors  
Foundation Officers & Policy Makers



## The Building Blocks

MHA Labs 21<sup>st</sup> century skills system focuses on a common set of easy-to-understand 21<sup>st</sup> century skill targets called **The Building Blocks**. To address cultural and contextual differences, MHA Labs researchers, subject matter experts and practitioners isolated the core human success factors deemed most critical for college, career and life success.

### Personal Mindset

- » Needs minimal supervision to complete tasks.
- » Attempts to complete tasks independently before asking for help.
- » Follows rules/directions as required by the task/situation.
- » Maintains focus on tasks despite internal (e.g., emotional) and/or external distractions.
- » Avoids actions that have produced undesirable consequences or results in the past.
- » Strives to overcome barriers/set-backs, seeking assistance when needed.
- » Adapts approach in response to new conditions or others' actions.

### Planning for Success

- » Sets and prioritizes goals that reflect a self-awareness of one's capabilities, interests, emotions, and/or needs.
- » Breaks goals into actionable steps.
- » Accurately estimates level of effort and establishes realistic timelines.
- » Manages time to complete tasks on schedule.
- » Applies existing/newly acquired knowledge, skills, and/or strategies that one determines to be useful for achieving goals.
- » Monitors progress and own performance, adjusting approach as necessary.
- » Demonstrates a belief that one's own actions are associated with goal attainment.

### Social Awareness

- » Recognizes the consequences of one's actions.
- » Balances own needs with the needs of others.
- » Takes into consideration others' situations/feelings.
- » Develops and implements strategies for navigating in different contexts (i.e., manages different patterns of behavior, rules, and norms).

### Verbal Communication

- » Organizes information that serves the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
- » Uses and adjusts communication strategies as needed based on the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
- » Signals listening according to the rules/norms of the context and audience.
- » Seeks input to gauge others' understanding of the message.
- » Asks questions to deepen and/or clarify one's understanding when listening to others.

### Collaboration

- » Completes tasks as they have been assigned or agreed upon by the group.
- » Helps team members complete tasks, as needed.
- » Encourages the ideas, opinions, and contributions of others, leveraging individual strengths.
- » Provides feedback in a manner that is sensitive to others' situation/feelings.
- » Clarifies areas of disagreement/conflict that need to be addressed to achieve a common goal.
- » Seeks to obtain resolution of disagreements/conflicts to achieve a common goal.

### Problem Solving

- » Defines problems by considering all potential parts and related causes.
- » Gathers and organizes relevant information about a problem from multiple sources.
- » Generates potential solutions to a problem, seeking and leveraging diverse perspectives.
- » Identifies alternative ideas/processes that are more effective than the ones previously used/suggested.
- » Evaluates the advantages and disadvantages associated with each potential solution identified for a problem.
- » Selects and implements best solution based on evaluation of advantages and disadvantages of each potential solution.

# MHA Labs Quick Start To 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill Building!

Every action requires 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Therefore every action is an opportunity to identify skills and give skill-building feedback. The more you practice this simple activity, the easier it will be to engage in MHA Labs recommended 3 step skills development practice.

## Strengths-based storytelling is the fastest way to start identifying skills and providing feedback

- » Think of a class, program or job where you want to promote 21<sup>st</sup> century skills– this is **your context**.
- » Think of a student, participant or employee that exemplifies success. Recall a few stories where you were really happy with their performance– this will be **your strengths evidence**.
- » Use any of the MHA Labs Building Block tools to identify every skill that you think contributed to the success of this person.
- » If you repeat steps 2-5 with additional youth, you will begin to see consistency in the skills that drive success in your context. You can then document these skills as your class, program or job objectives - these become **your skill expectations**.
- » Next, write a brief feedback script on the youth you chose. Unlike “Good Job” praise, skill-building feedback conversations include 5 components—**context**, **expectation**, **evidence**, **feedback**, and **suggestion**. MHA Labs provides Feedback Planning worksheets for your convenience.

**Example:** “Carlos, as the leader of your of service learning project (**context**), I was counting on you to address conflicts that arose on the team (**expectation**). I noticed every time someone on the team got frustrated or angry you immediately diffused the situation by breaking down the problem and getting the team to agree to a solution (**evidence**). This showed not only your skills in collaboration but also problem solving. How did you learn this leadership style? (**feedback conversation...**) I didn’t realize you take care of your siblings and cousins every afternoon. Since you are clearly skilled at conflict resolution at home and at school, I would like to propose that you become a peer facilitator for our new restorative justice program. Would that interest you? (**suggestion**)”

- » Within the next 24 hours give this person your feedback. Be sure to engage them in a conversation by using feedback question prompts rather than dictating your comments. This deepens understanding and reveals new insights. When done, ask how the experience went to gauge your new feedback method.
- » Afterward, celebrate. You just did the core practice of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills development.

## 4 Reasons To Start With Strengths:

### Strengths intensify performance:

Typically youth success is communicated as “good job” praise or a letter grade. Successful youth need to know their exact skill strengths and how they can be applied to intensify performance.

### Strengths drive growth:

A strengths-based inventory can be effectively used to address growth areas or performance issues. Over time, youth learn to automatically use their own strengths to solve problems.

### Strengths foster self esteem:

Too many youth who perform poorly in academics believe they are failures. You can now legitimately acknowledge their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills strengths to increase self esteem and create a positive skill-building relationship.

### Strengths cultivate happiness:

Most people are conditioned to focus only on what is not working. This can have a negative effect on personal well-being and motivation. Starting with strengths creates a positive culture for both you and youth.

# MHA Labs High Impact 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill Building Practice!

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## Planning & Preparation

- » **Review MHA building blocks.** Begin to familiarize yourself with the 35 core skills. They will immediately connect to skills you work on every day.
- » **Identify skill expectations that are already present** in your current lesson, program or job tasks. Examine your curriculum, program plans or job descriptions. Wherever you see the an aligned skill, write it on a Post-It® and tag the activity.
- » **Identify performance evidence** by naming the results you expect to see at the end of your lesson, activity or work assignment. Add evidence reminders to the post-it.
- » **Identify potential feedback prompts** that will promote real-time reflection on skills growth. Write the prompts onto your post-it.
- » **Identify instructional strategies** that can deepen the skill building experience. Write this strategy as the final addition to your skill-up post-it.
- » **Examine the results of your planning process** and see where you are already strong. Identify skills that were not addressed. Brainstorm where you can adjust and enhance activities to include more opportunities for skill-building. Add a post-it to mark the update.
- » **Next time you edit your documents, add the post-it content** and you will have a 21<sup>st</sup> century skills aligned portfolio.

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## Action & Feedback

- » **Fully engage youth in the skills development process.** Dedicate time at the beginning of a school year, program cycle or job to engage youth in understanding the 35 skills.
- Activity:** Skills Improv works anywhere. Place a set of scenarios into a hat that relates to your class, program or job. Teams pick a scenario and act it out. The audience then identifies as many of the 35 skills being demonstrated. This builds a supportive peer environment as well as knowledge of the Building Blocks.
- » **Make skills transparent** by publicly posting the skill objectives needed for the week's related tasks. Feel free to incorporate related terms that translate the building blocks into your own language and culture – for example "persistence" as a personal mindset.
- » **Conduct the activity as planned.** You may be repeating an activity for the 100th time, but now you are observing for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in action. To assist, use accessible tools like Post-its® to record in-the-moment examples of evidence or customize more advanced tracking apps.
- » **Provide real-time skill-building feedback** with youth as often as possible. A skill-building feedback conversation includes 5 components - context, expectation, evidence, feedback, and suggestion.

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## Reflection & Improvement

- » **Engage in reflection and continuous improvement.** Take time to reflect on the experiences and evidence you have collected. This information can provide thoughtful analysis of a youth's overall performance. When viewed in aggregate across youth, this information provides a holistic analysis of your 21<sup>st</sup> century skill building practice.
- » **Use MHA Labs series of appraisal tools** to create a data supported reflection and improvement practice.

### Human Achievement Quotient (HAQ):

A formative, observed assessment used to gauge 21<sup>st</sup> century skills development in a school, program or work context. The data is protected for formative use only.

### Human Achievement College and Career (HACC) Recommendation:

A summative "point-in-time" observed assessment used to evaluate youth for workforce and college preparedness. This is used to translate youth performance into a college and/or employer recommendation.

### MHA Employee Appraisal (MEA):

A summative "point-in-time" employee performance review used to evaluate employee performance for development, promotion, and retention.

## MHA Labs Skill-Building Toolkit



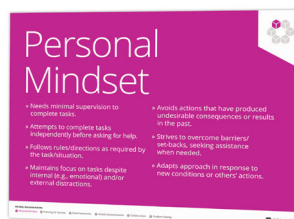
MHA Building Block Flash Cards



MHA Building Block Keychain Cards



MHA Post-It® Planner



MHA Building Block Individual Posters



MHA Worksheets and Assessments

» Visit [mhalabs.org](http://mhalabs.org) to download or order free or low-cost tools.

# MHA Labs 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill-Building Feedback Method!

## The Art and Science of Feedback

Providing timely feedback is vital to skills development - Yet too few people do it. Why? Fear to give it and fear to receive it. People are extremely reluctant to give feedback for fear of being negative. People are extremely defensive receiving feedback for fear of failure. MHA Labs makes a critical distinction between performance judgment and judgmental feedback. A person may meet/exceed an expectation (positive) or not (negative), but the feedback you give in both circumstances should be non-judgmental and developmental.

In response, MHA Labs developed a simple method to promote skill-building feedback and minimize the tendency to use judgmental language. Skill-building feedback incorporates 5 core components—**context**, **expectation**, **evidence**, **feedback** and **suggestion**. Incorporating this method into your own personal communication style can transform your skill-building practice.

### MHA Labs Skill-Building Feedback Structure

At / During / With...  
**CONTEXT**

My expectation was /  
I had hoped...  
**EXPECTATION**

I noticed you / I thought you...  
**EVIDENCE**

I felt / That was / What do you...?  
**FEEDBACK**

Next time, let's try...  
**SUGGESTION**

**Page two provided a clear example of strengths-based feedback. Now explore more complex growth feedback.**

**Situation:** Michelle is alienating everyone on her service learning team by refusing to do what the team leader Jamie needs her to do.

**Instead of replying...** "Michelle, there is no need to yell. Just do what Jamie tells you to do and finish the project on time."

**Now try the Skill-Building Feedback method...** "Michelle, on your service learning team (**context**), I was hoping that you would begin to use some of the collaboration skills we have been working on (**expectation**). I noticed every time someone on the team asks you to share in the tasks you yell "no, you can't tell me what to do" (**evidence**). Now you respond enthusiastically when I have assigned you tasks so I know you can take direction. Why do you think it is harder from your classmates? (**feedback conversation ensues...**) Oh, I didn't realize you were worried that they will make fun of you. How about tomorrow you agree to do the tasks and I will facilitate a team debrief where everyone on the team gets recognized for their contribution. (**suggestion**)"

## MHA Labs Skill-Building Feedback Method is fortified by the "Seven Keys to Effective Feedback"

Wiggins, Grant. "Seven Keys to Effective Feedback." Educational Leadership ASCD, September 2012: Volume 70, Number 1

- 1 References back to a goal or expectation and shows progress towards meeting that goal
- 2 Provides tangible examples of results and makes the experience transparent
- 3 Provides actionable next steps to close the gap in where they are now to where they need to be
- 4 Is broken down to user-friendly language that the receiver can readily understand
- 5 Is delivered during or soon after when the experience is fresh
- 6 Given on a regular basis to allow for practice and adjustment
- 7 Remains consistent in what evidence or level of performance determines success