

Soft Skills for a Job-Seeking Student

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Soft skills can be characterized as a combination of traits such as: personal habits, interpersonal skills, social graces, communication, language, leadership abilities, etc. that distinguish how you interact with other people.

Whilst hard skills (such as numeracy, ability to work with words, etc.) are the actual competencies required for the job, soft skills ensure you are able to work effectively as a part of the team. You may see examples of soft skills listed in a job posting such as: teamwork, flexibility, creativity, or communication skills. Employers may use behavioural questions during your interview to determine your comfort with soft skills. Ideally, an employer wants a candidate who possesses all the and/or technical skills for the post, but also has soft/interpersonal skills that will enable them to work well with others.

When it comes to looking for a job, soft skills can be overlooked as a skill set that doesn't require much development and attention, and that is where you would be wrong! When you are spending 8 hours a day or more with your fellow co-workers, soft skills make it easier to connect and work together collaboratively in a work environment. While it may be challenging to develop and pick up on specific soft skills due to a disability (e.g., eye contact) it is important to develop strategies to navigate challenges with a particular soft skill.

The following are some of soft skills employers most desire in their employees:

1. Honesty and integrity
2. Strong work ethic
3. Emotional intelligence
4. Self motivated
5. High energy/positive attitude
6. Team player

Retrieved from: <https://www.workitdaily.com/soft-skills-job-seekers/>

Networking Skills

One area that will greatly assist you in enhancing your interpersonal skills is networking, both virtually and in-person. For further information on networking, see the [Professional Networking Tips](#) in the "for Students" section of the portal. Networking can assist you to learn how to make appropriate small talk, improve your listening skills, work on your information recall, etc., all while adding to your skill set.

Professionalism and Social Etiquette

A key component to soft skills that will largely influence both your ability to network and your success on-the-job is professionalism both during the job search process and upon

receipt of a job. The following are some suggested considerations for making a strong first impression both during the interview stage and after an offer has been made.

Punctuality

From the interview to the first day on the job and beyond, if you are going to be held up due to unforeseen circumstances, notify your employer or client before the set time (you did get their name and number when they called, right?).

- **Be courteous.** Treat everyone respectfully from the administrators /secretary/front desk personnel. Remember, from the moment you walk into the office and wait to be called in, you are likely being watched. So act professionally with whom you come into contact with. You never know who might be on the hiring committee.
- **Ability to leave technology behind when required.** Turn off your cell when in any meeting or let the organizer know that you may need to leave the room to take a call that you are expecting. When you do receive the call, be sure to excuse yourself when the call comes in (and don't forget to turn your cell off again).
- **Fashion sense.** Dress code will vary depending on place of employment. Dress appropriately for the job. Ensure clothing is clean and current with the market. This can be especially hard depending on your social location. Reach out to networks to help with marketing your clothing decisions especially if your disability is of a visual nature. Ask managers in a reputable clothing department for advice on what is appropriate to wear to an interview or networking event. Don't be afraid to receive constructive feedback on your clothing decisions. Attempt to keep your clothing decisions simple and not too flashy (i.e., neutral, solid colours).
- **Nods, smiles and tone of voice.** If you can't communicate visually, gestures such as nods, smiles and tone of voice would be a skill one may wish to develop. Be personable but too animated.
- **Confidence.** When meeting someone, provide a confident opening greeting and if not able to make direct eye contact then at least face the person in the direction they are in.
- **Honesty and integrity.** Be yourself and be honest. Remember that everything these days can be easily verified (e.g., social media profiles, transcripts). Be sincere and honest in your interview response (e.g., your answer should reflect your own strengths and abilities not what the interviewer wants to hear).
- **Be personable.** Employers are looking for individuals who cannot only do the job, but also fit in with other employees. So, when asked a question, don't over share, but also don't respond with short answers – personalize your responses and let others know who you are.
- Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

Ability to Admit You Don't Know the Answer

No one is able to know everything and it is always better to admit it than to try to muddle through. A simple statement that articulates that while you don't have direct experience you can apply your knowledge of what you would do in a given situation.

Capability to Not Under-Sell Yourself

Whether you have a little or a lot of work experience, volunteer experience or a combination of both, there are probably many kinds of skills you already have:

- Aspects of teamwork and leadership
- Clear communicator (written, verbal or both)
- Being self-motivated
- Ability to collaborate
- Decision making skills
- Ability to deal with conflicting personalities
- Administrative and/or financial skills
- IT skills
- Public speaking skills

Soft skills are increasingly sought by employers as an additional way to sort through candidates. When an organization hires employees with the correct skill set, both hard and soft, they are setting themselves up for success. Consider this scenario given the current state of the economy:

ABC Company is restructuring. Some staff have to be laid off. Who would you choose to let go?

1. The friendly employee with great presentation skills, an excellent work ethic, and is well-liked or;
2. The technically perfect employee who doesn't like to admit he makes mistakes, who treats those who work for him rudely, and is inflexible.

While it may seem that technical skills were the only reason someone was hired, it is generally a combination of hard and soft skills that opened that door and will continue to open more doors in the future. All of us have the ability to improve our soft skills...make yours shine and be that individual that everyone wants to hire and keep!