

Top 10 Soft Skills --- Forbes Magazine

Are you able to work effectively in a team? That's the skill employers most want when they are recruiting new college grads. The next most important skill: ability to make decisions and solve problems.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) a Bethlehem, Pa. non-profit group that links college career placement offices with employers, ran a survey from early August to mid-September where it asked hiring managers what skills they prioritize when they hire college grads. Though the survey sample is small—NACE collected responses from just 200 employers—the wisdom is sound. New and recent grads should pay attention.

Despite all the emphasis in the news about the need for computer software and programming skills, the most important qualities employers seek are basic teamwork, problem-solving and the ability to plan and prioritize.

Here are the 10 skills employers say they seek, in order of importance:

1. Ability to work in a team
2. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
3. Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work
4. Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell and influence others

The good news for grads: No matter what you have studied in school, whether anthropology or French or computer science, you will have had to learn the top five skills on the list. The trick is to demonstrate that you have those skills through your cover letter, résumé and interview. Think about class projects where you have been a team member or leader and jobs where you have had to plan and prioritize. Describe those skills specifically in your résumé and cover letter.

For instance if you staffed a campus snack bar, say you worked on a team of five people and handled food orders. Or if you worked in the library, include the size of the staff and that you handled requests from 50 students a day at the circulation desk. Even a job as a counselor in a summer camp can involve team work, decision-making and planning. Make sure you spell out those responsibilities briefly but specifically. Say you worked on a staff of 20 counselors, supervised the daily activities of 35 campers and organized group activities.

The survey makes clear that employers want universal skills you can learn across academic disciplines and in any job where you are working with others. The trick is to communicate clearly that you have those skills.

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