

Soft Skills

What Are Soft Skills?

Non-verbal cues, in a conversation with anyone, can say more than the actual words. Managing the cues to create a better situation requires the use of soft skills. In a work environment, there are two types of skills: hard and soft.

Hard skills are the technical skills you use each day to perform your job. Some examples would be your computer skills or procedural knowledge you apply in your job.

Soft skills, the topic of this lesson, are the subtle behaviors and communication styles that help make a work environment or interaction with another person easier to manage. Soft skill examples include communication skills, such as voice inflection and gestures. They also include attributes such as adaptability and flexibility. Other soft skills include:

- Problem Solving
- Creative Thinking
- Conflict Resolution
- Time Management
- Self-Motivation

Why do Soft Skills Matter?

Soft skills are the difference between adequate candidates and ideal candidates. In most competitive job markets, recruitment criteria do not stop at technical ability and specialist knowledge. Particularly with graduate schemes, recruiters will be looking for people who can become leaders, and leadership, itself, depends on several key soft skills.

An instructive example of the difference made by soft skills is a medical doctor. A doctor is required to have an extensive repertoire of hard skills, especially the ability to diagnose and prescribe treatments for an array of ailments. But a doctor who does not have the soft skills of emotional intelligence, trustworthiness and approachability is not likely to be very highly regarded by their patients. Similarly, a salesperson who may have an unrivalled and exhaustive knowledge of their market will find it difficult to close a deal and retain their clients if they lack the soft skills of interpersonal skills and negotiation.

Soft skills are not just important when facing external customers and clients. They are equally important when it comes to interacting with colleagues. Soft skills relate to how you work with others (whereas hard skills relate to you, in isolation, as an individual). Employers value soft skills because they enable people to function and thrive in teams and in organisations as a whole. A productive and healthy work environment depends on soft skills. After all, the workplace is an interpersonal space, where relationships must be built and fostered, perspectives must be exchanged, and occasionally conflicts must be resolved.

What are the Key Soft Skills?

This section is an extensive, but not exhaustive, guide to what should be considered as some of the key soft skills.

Communication

As a soft skill, **communication** is not about multiple syllables or rousing speeches. Able communicators can adjust their tone and style according to their audience, comprehend and act efficiently on instructions, and explain complex issues to colleagues and clients alike. Communication is also an important aspect of leadership, since leaders must be able to delegate clearly and comprehensibly.

Self-Motivation

Having the **positive attitude** and the **initiative** to work well without round-the-clock supervision is a vital soft skill for any employee. Not only does it demonstrate reliability and commitment, but it shows that you can fit efficiently into an organisational structure without the need for constant oversight.

Leadership

Leadership is a soft skill you can show even if you're not directly managing others. Leadership can be thought of as a collection of various other soft skills, such as a general positive attitude and outlook, the ability to communicate effectively, and an aptitude for both self-motivating and motivating others.

Responsibility

Self-awareness is a seldom talked about but highly valued soft skill; knowing when to accept responsibility for any mistakes you have made demonstrates a healthy level of humility, and a willingness to learn and progress.

Teamwork

Like leadership, good **teamwork** involves a combination of other soft skills. Working in a team towards a common goal requires the intuition and interpersonal acumen to know when to be a leader, and when to be a listener. Good team players are perceptive, as well as receptive to the needs and responsibilities of others.

Problem Solving

Problem solving does not just require analytical, creative and critical skills, but a particular mindset: those who can approach a problem with a cool and level head will often reach a solution more efficiently than those who cannot. This is a soft skill which can often rely on strong teamwork too. Problems need not always be solved alone. The ability to know who can help you reach a solution, and how they can do it, can be a great advantage.

Decisiveness

Knowing the distinction between **decisiveness** and recklessness implies a soft skill in itself. Decisiveness combines a number of different abilities: the ability to put things into perspective, to weigh up the options, to assess all relevant information and, crucially, to anticipate the consequences, good and bad.

Ability to Work Under Pressure and Time Management

Many jobs come with demanding deadlines and occasionally high stakes. Recruiters prize candidates who show a decisive attitude, an unflinching ability to think clearly, and a capacity to compartmentalise and set stress aside. **Time management** is closely related to the ability to work under pressure, as well as within tight deadlines. Employees who manage their time well are able to efficiently prioritise tasks and organise their diaries, while adopting an attitude which allows them to take on new tasks and deadlines.

Flexibility

Naturally, people can be wary of leaving the comfort zone formed by their repertoire of hard skills. **Flexibility** is an important soft skill, inasmuch as it demonstrates an ability and willingness to acquire new hard skills, and an open-mindedness to new tasks and new challenges. Employers often seek candidates who can show a willing and upbeat attitude, since many jobs come with the possibility of secondments.

Negotiation and Conflict Resolution

This is another of those soft skills which employers look for in potential leaders. To be an adept negotiator is to know how to be persuasive and exert influence, while sensitively seeking a solution which will benefit all parties. Similarly, **conflict resolution** depends on strong interpersonal skills and the ability to establish a rapport with colleagues and clients alike.

How to Push Your Soft Skills in Your CV and at Interview

As with hard skills, you should spend some time considering what your soft skills are (it may help to ask people who know you well) and highlight them wherever possible in both your CV and in job interviews. Hard skills can be shown via qualifications, but soft skills are slightly more slippery.

Since soft skills are necessarily abstract, you should reinforce any claims with examples of when you were able to use them to achieve positive outcomes. These examples can be drawn from professional, personal or academic experiences. Remember to show, don't tell: simply stating that you are a great communicator, for example, can have the ironic effect of undermining the very soft skill you are claiming to have.

If you have been an undergraduate student, you will probably have experience of juggling various deadlines and extra-curricular responsibilities. If you have previously worked in any job with a customer service element, you may have had to use your communication and conflict resolution skills to manage any complaints.

Otherwise, with your CV, the easiest and most essential way to show your soft skills of communication and attention to detail is to proofread ruthlessly, and eliminate any typos. When you attend an interview, remember that this is your first chance to show your interpersonal skills to your prospective employers. Be professional, make eye contact, shake hands, listen closely to the questions and answer them fully.

References

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- ▣ www.wikipedia.com
- ▣ www.studymafia.org