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Employers Rank “Soft Skills” Ahead of Job Knowledge

Hiring employees isn't easy in any industry. Job openings are bombarded with qualified applicants but few of these employee-hopefuls ever get a second interview, despite college credentials and previous experience. Often, the job goes to the applicant who simply demonstrates a few traits that trump technical know-how.

Here are the top 10 skills employers look for, as ranked by the DOD's [ASVAB Career Exploration Program](#):

1. Ability to function in a team environment
2. Problem solving and decision-making (tied with #1)
3. Verbal communication
4. Ability to prioritize, plan, and organize work tasks
5. Understand, process, and use information relating to work
6. Analyze, understand, and use quantitative data in everyday work situations
7. Technical knowledge associated with a specific job function
8. Working knowledge and proficiency in job/industry-specific computer programs/apps/software
9. Written communication skills and the ability to collect, analyze, and clearly present information
10. Ability to influence others and sell ideas

Looking at the list, it's immediately clear that employers value intangible (soft) skills above work knowledge. The National Association of Colleges and Employers [backs this up](#), citing in the 2016 NACE Job Outlook Survey, that employers main concern is finding future leaders who can not only lead, but work as part of a team.

In addition to those skills and abilities listed above, job creators seek employees who show consistent interest in both academic and non-academic pursuits. Involvement with student-led activities and sports is even more important to some employers than which school a prospective employee graduated. But why? The reasons aren't that hard to understand when you look at it from the perspective of the employer, who is looking for initiative.

Employees who go above and beyond in life are more likely to do the same at work

It's really that simple. While not everyone who plays college baseball will go on to become a CEO, a disproportionate number of executives did participate in athletics in high school and college when compared to low-level management and same age non-salaried adult employees. According to CNBC, more than 96% of female executives [played sports](#) as a teenager. Hewlett-Packard's Meg Whitman uses lessons learned on the court in her everyday business decisions. Building a team today isn't that different than it was during her basketball days, she asserts. The lessons she and countless other leaders of today learned during these formative years continue to benefit them as working adults. With few exceptions, most team sports and activities help develop every single one of the core qualities employers seek.

Employers: Here's how to find the right people for your team

If you're in a position where you must [hire help](#) for your own business, you may be wondering how to spot these soft skills without spending days locked in a room with your interviewee. Here are a few tips to get you on the right track:

- Create job postings that resonate with workers, not just those that explain the job.
- Ask applicants about their interests outside of work.
- Ask how much they know about your company – a person who is truly driven will take the time to research not only the position, but company culture and history as well.
- Talk to your best existing employees for [insight](#) on where they first learned about your open positions.
- Ask about non-industry related jobs the applicant has held – if, for instance, he or she spent summers working on a farm, you know they are not afraid of hard work.

Whether you're an employer or a prospective employee, it's always good to know what qualities make the best future leaders. And while knowledge of a job is important, remember that hands-on skills can be taught. However, it is much easier to train someone who already displays problem solving and information processing skills than someone who shows up with nothing but a four-year degree and no desire to succeed.