



Soft Skills and Hireability

Introduction

Although employment rates are at an all-time high coming out of the recent pandemic, millions of jobs are still going unfilled. Employers say that individuals applying for these jobs simply lack the soft skills required for the available positions. What are these soft skills that employers find lacking in job applicants? Whether referred to as attitudinal and behavioral skills, social skills, job search skills, or 21st Century skills, one thing is clear: Our high-school, college, and workforce program graduates generally lack mastery of these skills.

Background Research

- According to business leaders, while the three “R’s” (reading, writing, and arithmetic) are still fundamental to every employee’s ability to do the job, employers view soft skills as even more important to work readiness. These skills include professionalism or work ethic, oral and written communication, teamwork and collaboration skills, and critical thinking or problem-solving skills.¹
- In a recent study by Northwestern University, results demonstrated that schools that build social-emotional competency are getting better short-term and long-term student results than schools that only focus on improving test scores.²
- Project Oxygen, a research project conducted by Google, concluded that among the eight most important qualities of top employees, STEM skills were less valuable than soft skills, such as being a good coach, communication skills, empathy toward one’s colleagues, critical thinking, problem solving, and drawing conclusions came in at higher importance.³
- A 2017 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that “ability to work in a team” was the most commonly desired attribute of new college graduates.⁴
- According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, social skills were a significantly more important predictor of full-time employment and wages than “hard skills”.⁵

Based on this background research, there is a high need for students entering the workforce to possess the necessary soft skills that employers have determined to help them not only be successful but also remain in the job longer. Jobseekers must be able to solve problems, write and speak well, evaluate information critically, and work with other people, including those from other cultures.⁶

“Technical skills may get you the job, but soft skills will make or break you.”

Applying the Research to Preparing High School Students for Soft Skills in the Workplace

Soft skills are essential to stay ahead of the rapidly growing demand for individuals entering the workforce.

EEDW supports students' understanding and demonstration of soft skills by

1. Providing online access to business partnerships that will provide students with mentors and role models that students can look up to, talk to, and learn from regarding the soft skills needed on the job;
2. Exposing students to professionals in the industry (through mentorships) that will allow them the opportunity to learn what skills are important to them when they start seeking jobs in the field; and
3. Allowing students to establish relationships with industry professionals so they are better prepared and when it comes to knowing what skills they need to possess to be competitive in their job search as well as to have longevity in the job.

Conclusion

High-school, college, and workforce program graduates seem to lack soft skills that are essential to hireability and longevity. However, educators, program administrators, and communities can work together to ensure that all student and adult learners have the soft skills they need to succeed in the workplace.⁷

Endnote

¹ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/publications/fact-sheets/soft-skills-the-competitive-edge>

² <https://www.nationalsoftskills.org/research-publications/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.nber.org/reporter/2017number4/value-soft-skills-labor-market>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://lessonbank.kyae.ky.gov/>

⁷ Ibid.