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What Do Employers *Really* Want? Top Skills and Values Employers Seek from Job-Seekers

by *Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., and Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.*

Most job-seekers wish they could unlock the secret formula to winning the hearts and minds of employers. What, they wonder, is that unique combination of skills and values that make employers salivate with excitement?

Every employer is looking for a specific set of skills from job-seekers that match the skills necessary to perform a particular job. But beyond these job-specific technical skills, certain skills are nearly universally sought by employers. The good news is that most job-seekers possess these skills to some extent. The better news is that job-seekers with weaknesses in these areas can improve their skills through training, professional development, or obtaining coaching/mentoring from someone who understands these skills.

The best news is that once you understand the skills and characteristics that most employer seek, you can tailor your job-search communication -- your resume, cover letter, and interview language -- to showcase how well your background aligns with common employer requirements.

Numerous studies have identified these critical employability skills, sometimes referred to as "soft skills." We've distilled the skills from these many studies into this list of skills most frequently mentioned. We've also included sample verbiage describing each skill; job-seekers can adapt this verbiage to their own resumes, cover letters, and interview talking points.

Skills Most Sought After by Employers

So, what are these critical employability skills that employers demand of job-seekers?

Communications Skills (listening, verbal, written). By far, the one skill mentioned most often by employers is the ability to listen, write, and speak effectively. Successful communication is critical in business.



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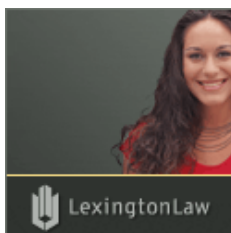
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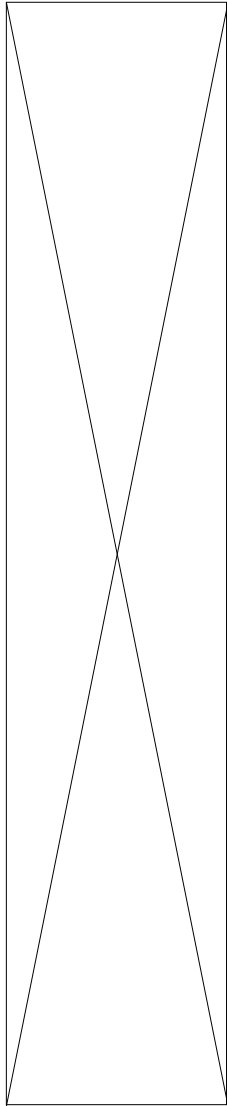
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Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Exceptional listener and communicator who effectively conveys information verbally and in writing.

Analytical/Research Skills. Deals with your ability to assess a situation, seek multiple perspectives, gather more information if necessary, and identify key issues that need to be addressed.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Highly analytical thinking with demonstrated talent for identifying, scrutinizing, improving, and streamlining complex work processes.

Computer/Technical Literacy. Almost all jobs now require some basic understanding of computer hardware and software, especially word processing, spreadsheets, and email.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Computer-literate performer with extensive software proficiency covering wide variety of applications.

Flexibility/Adaptability/Managing Multiple Priorities. Deals with your ability to manage multiple assignments and tasks, set priorities, and adapt to changing conditions and work assignments.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Flexible team player who thrives in environments requiring ability to effectively prioritize and juggle multiple concurrent projects.

Interpersonal Abilities. The ability to relate to your co-workers, inspire others to participate, and mitigate conflict with co-workers is essential given the amount of time spent at work each day.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Proven relationship-builder with unsurpassed interpersonal skills.

Leadership/Management Skills. While there is some debate about whether leadership is something people are born with, these skills deal with your ability to take charge and manage your co-workers.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Goal-driven leader who maintains a productive climate and confidently motivates, mobilizes, and coaches employees to meet high performance standards.

Multicultural Sensitivity/Awareness. There is possibly no bigger issue in the workplace than diversity, and job-seekers must demonstrate a sensitivity and awareness to other people and cultures.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Personable professional whose strengths include cultural sensitivity and an ability to build rapport with a diverse workforce

in multicultural settings.

Planning/Organizing. Deals with your ability to design, plan, organize, and implement projects and tasks within an allotted timeframe. Also involves goal-setting.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Results-driven achiever with exemplary planning and organizational skills, along with a high degree of detail orientation.

Problem-Solving/Reasoning/Creativity. Involves the ability to find solutions to problems using your creativity, reasoning, and past experiences along with the available information and resources.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Innovative problem-solver who can generate workable solutions and resolve complaints.

Teamwork. Because so many jobs involve working in one or more work-groups, you must have the ability to work with others in a professional manner while attempting to achieve a common goal.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Resourceful team player who excels at building trusting relationships with customers and colleagues.

Personal Values Employers Seek in Employees

Of equal importance to skills are the values, personality traits, and personal characteristics that employers seek. Look for ways to weave examples of these characteristics into your resume, cover letters, and answers to interview questions.

Here is our list of the 10 most important categories of values.

Honesty/Integrity/Morality. Employers probably respect personal integrity more than any other value, especially in light of the many recent corporate scandals.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Seasoned professional whose honesty and integrity provide for effective leadership and optimal business relationships.

Adaptability/Flexibility. Deals with openness to new ideas and concepts, to working independently or as part of a team, and to carrying out multiple tasks or projects.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Highly adaptable, mobile, positive, resilient, patient risk-taker who is open to new ideas.

Dedication/Hard-Working/Work Ethic/Tenacity. Employers seek job-seekers who love what they do and will keep at it until they solve the

problem and get the job done.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Productive worker with solid work ethic who exerts optimal effort in successfully completing tasks.

Dependability/Reliability/Responsibility. There's no question that all employers desire employees who will arrive to work every day - on time - and ready to work, and who will take responsibility for their actions.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Dependable, responsible contributor with committed to excellence and success.

Loyalty. Employers want employees who will have a strong devotion to the company -- even at times when the company is not necessarily loyal to its employees.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Loyal and dedicated manager with an excellent work record.

Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion. The job-seekers who get hired and the employees who get promoted are the ones with drive and passion -- and who demonstrate this enthusiasm through their words and actions.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Energetic performer consistently cited for unbridled passion for work, sunny disposition, and upbeat, positive attitude.

Professionalism. Deals with acting in a responsible and fair manner in all your personal and work activities, which is seen as a sign of maturity and self-confidence; avoid being petty.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Conscientious go-getter who is highly organized, dedicated, and committed to professionalism.

Self-Confidence. Look at it this way: if you don't believe in yourself, in your unique mix of skills, education, and abilities, why should a prospective employer? Be confident in yourself and what you can offer employers.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Confident, hard-working employee who is committed to achieving excellence.

Self-Motivated/Ability to Work With Little or No Supervision. While teamwork is always mentioned as an important skill, so is the ability to work independently, with minimal supervision.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Highly motivated self-starter who takes initiative with minimal supervision.

Willingness to Learn. No matter what your age, no matter how much experience you have, you should always be willing to learn a new skill or technique. Jobs are constantly changing and evolving, and you must show an openness to grow and learn with that change.

Sample bullet point describing this skill:

- Enthusiastic, knowledge-hungry learner, eager to meet challenges and quickly assimilate new concepts.

Final Thoughts

Employability skills and personal values are the critical tools and traits you need to succeed in the workplace -- and they are all elements that you can learn, cultivate, develop, and maintain over your lifetime. Once you have identified the sought-after skills and values and assessed the degree to which you possess, then remember to document them and market them (in your resume, cover letter, and interview answers) for job-search success.

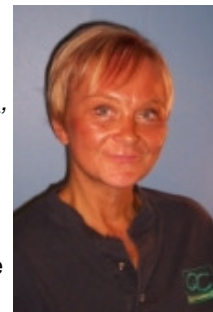
See also our [Transferable Job Skills for Job-Seekers](#).

Sources of More Information about Employability Skills

- [Some Major Employer Hiring Concerns](#), from IT [Headhunter](#).
- [The Skills Most Sought By Recruiters in Small- and Medium-Sized Organizations](#), from Human Resources Development Canada.
- [Skills and Tasks for Jobs -- A SCANS report for America 2000](#), U.S. Department of Labor (excerpts).
- [Skills and Tasks for Jobs -- A SCANS report for America 2000](#), U.S. Department of Labor (full report).
- [Employers Describe Perfect Job Candidate](#), from National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).
- [What Skills and Attributes Employers Seek When Hiring Students](#), from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.
- [Skills Employers Seek](#), from Loughborough University.
- [Skills Employers Seek](#), from Psych Web.

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our [Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms](#).

*Katharine Hansen, Ph.D., creative director and associate publisher of Quintessential Careers, is an educator, author, and blogger who provides content for Quintessential Careers, edits [QuintZine](#), an electronic newsletter for jobseekers, and blogs about storytelling in the job search at [A Storied Career](#). Katharine, who earned her PhD in organizational behavior from Union Institute & University, Cincinnati, OH, is author of *Dynamic Cover Letters for New Graduates* and *A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way into the Hidden Job Market* (both published by Ten Speed Press), as*



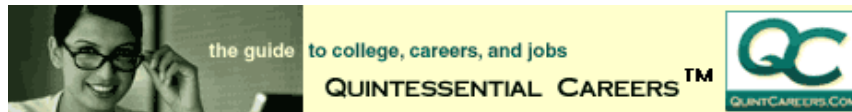
well as Top Notch Executive Resumes (Career Press); and with Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., Dynamic Cover Letters, Write Your Way to a Higher GPA (Ten Speed), and The Complete Idiot's Guide to Study Skills (Alpha). Visit her [personal Website](#) or reach her by e-mail at [kathy \(at\)quintcareers.com](mailto:kathy(at)quintcareers.com).

Dr. Randall S. Hansen is founder of [Quintessential Careers](#), one of the oldest and most comprehensive career development sites on the Web, as well CEO of EmpoweringSites.com. He is also founder of [MyCollegeSuccessStory.com](#) and [EnhanceMyVocabulary.com](#). He is publisher of [Quintessential Careers Press](#), including the [Quintessential Careers electronic newsletter, QuintZine](#). Dr. Hansen is also a published author, with several books, chapters in books, and hundreds of articles. He's often quoted in the media and conducts empowering workshops around the country. Finally, Dr. Hansen is also an educator, having taught at the college level for more than 15 years. Visit his [personal Website](#) or reach him by email at [randall\(at\)quintcareers.com](mailto:randall(at)quintcareers.com).



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