

Six Soft Skills That Could Land You the Job

by Larry Buhl, for Yahoo!HotJobs

WANTED: Payroll Manager with BA in accounting, five years of management experience, extensive knowledge of payroll principles, and a sense of humor.

Wait. Humor? Now you have to reconcile W2s, process checks, *and* crack up coworkers?

Has the job market become that competitive?

Not exactly. Employers seem to demand the moon these days, but they're really looking for candidates who may be easier to work with (assuming they already have the core skills to do the job).

This means that "Soft" or "Intangible" qualities, such as:

- Leadership
- Sense of humor
- Playing well with others

can be a strong competitive advantage for the job seeker. When a search comes down to two Systems Analysts with similar backgrounds and core competencies, the one who also may be a better "team player," or can "wear many hats," is more likely to get the nod.

Qualities You'll Need

"Today, employers want to see a candidate's ability to show value in the workplace beyond the job description," says Stefanie Cross-Wilson, Co-President of Recruitment and Talent Management at Hudson.

"It's the tangible skills or core competencies that get you in the door. It's the soft skills that often get you the job."

Any of the following six qualities could give you a competitive edge!

1) Leadership/Team Building

Leadership skills are not only critical for supervisory positions, but also for candidates who may want rise to positions where they'll give directions to others, experts say.

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2) Team Player

Employers like people who play well with others. Even if the job you seek isn't officially part of a team, an employer may want examples of how you collaborated with people who don't report to you.

3) Goal Oriented Self Starter

This doesn't necessarily require motivating others. While employers don't necessarily want loose canons or mavericks, they do appreciate people who don't need to be told what to do and can set their own tasks and follow through.

4) Excellent Communicator

No matter what the core job duties are, the ability to write a coherent memo or email, give clear verbal instructions, and help meetings run smoothly or, at least, not sabotage meetings, will probably be needed.

5) Flexibility & Multi-Tasking Ability

Sometimes employers will call this the "Ability to wear many hats." Most professionals have multiple job duties even in the best of times. In an environment rife with layoffs, managers are especially comforted knowing a candidate can take on even unanticipated tasks.

6) Sense of Humor

Unless you're applying to Comedy Central, you don't have to make them double up laughing, according to John McKee, author of "Career Wisdom" and president and founder of: www.BusinessSuccessCoach.net

"While I don't hear recruiters asking for candidates who can tell a joke well, I do believe that evidence of light-heartedness and the ability to lighten up a tough situation is valued, and self deprecation seems to be well received," McKee says.

Putting the Skills in Play

Other common soft skills demanded on job listings include:

- "Time management" (i.e. you can get everything done on time)
- "Strong work ethic" (i.e. you're not inclined to take three-hour lunches)
- "Problem solver"

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Though you might be able to hint at any of these qualities on your resume, it's really in an interview where you let the skills shine.

"At interview time, most hiring managers are digging deeper into core skills, but also evaluating soft skills, which depend on what is necessary for the position," says Lindsay Olson, partner and recruiter at Paradigm Staffing.

You don't have all of these soft skills? Don't worry. Even in today's job market, it's not necessary to be super-human.

Cross-Wilson says: "Employers don't expect you to be brilliant at everything. In the interview you can be honest if there is a weakness you have. If you are able to be relaxed and be yourself, they'll see you as authentic."

Build Mini Stories

Olson suggested that job seekers build "Mini Stories" around the soft skills they think would be valuable for the job and share them at the interview.

"You should prepare specific examples of how you dealt with a specific task or issue that will help others understand you have skills to solve their problems too."

What if you don't think you have the necessary soft skills to land the job?

It's not like you can take a class to boost your "Sense of Humor", but you can ask a mentor or a friend for help in improving, for example, your e-mail etiquette.

Many soft skills can be built or improved on the job, experts say.

Consider volunteering for more responsibility, or jump at the chance to be on a team, so that you'll have anecdotes to tell on your next interview.

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