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EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AND HOW TO DEMONSTRATE YOU HAVE THEM

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TO TRULY COMPETE in today's job market you need more than a diploma. Employers are looking for the total package; candidates who have the education needed to understand the job, the experience to carry out the technical duties, and the employability skills to be successful.

Let's begin with a quick overview of what employability (or soft) skills are. The term refers to attributes that a person encompasses that allow them to interact effectively with other people, particularly in the workplace. These traits have often been attributed to success on the job, but as the competition for talent increases, specifically in the agriculture industry, demonstrating and highlighting these types of skills throughout the job search and interview process can be a way to set yourself apart from the competition.

A full list of these soft skill traits could easily be in the hundreds, so for now, we will focus on five critical skills employers seek in new graduate hires.

1. COMMUNICATION

Hands down, this is a foundational skill that most employers would rank as the number one necessary soft skill in new hires. Your ability to listen effectively and communicate appropriately and accurately with your manager and coworkers will have a tremendous impact on your career success.

You have several opportunities to demonstrate your communication skills to a potential employer. The first may be at a career fair or other networking event. Being prepared by researching the company before the event will start your verbal communication off on the right foot. Having some familiarity with what the company does and general knowledge regarding the types of openings they have will allow you to ask more informed questions and be more relaxed in conversation.

Additionally, if you have mentally prepared and rehearsed, you won't sell

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yourself short nor be too long-winded. This will demonstrate that you are capable of filtering information and communicating important components in a concise and effective manner.

2. SENSE OF URGENCY

Do you wait to be given a task or do you realize there is a problem and resolve to be a part of the solution? As one would imagine, employers are looking for go-getters, those who are willing

to come in early, stay late, go the extra mile, ask how they can help, etc.

Employees who understand that the work they do is only a small part of a bigger picture but of importance is something valued by employers.

Early in the process, demonstrate that you encompass a sense of urgency by how quick you follow up with an employer. Especially in today's technological world, there are very few excuses for not returning an email or phone call in a timely manner.

When you reach the interview stage make sure you research the company and come prepared with a list of great questions. Establish next steps in the process before wrapping up your interview. Taking the initiative to drive the process shows that the company and opportunity are important to you.

3. PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism is a pretty broad skill that includes everything from the way you dress, your vocabulary, your reaction to workplace situations, and more. Professionalism can mean hitting your internal mute button when tempted to share your opinions in situations where you don't have all of the information or when things are changing quickly in the workplace.

Additionally, professionalism is about how you develop relationships in the business setting such as understanding the line between personal and professional interactions with peers and your manager. Also be conscientious of sensitive information that you've been

entrusted with and don't divulge that information in inappropriate settings.

Your physical and verbal reaction to constructive criticism and how you apply that feedback impacts professionalism. Demonstrate these traits once you have a job, but you can practice those while in college and use examples in your job search.

Consider the clubs or organizations you are affiliated with. Involvement shows that you are well-rounded but equally demonstrates your ability to build connections, perhaps even with the professional arm of the organization and/or alumni. Leadership roles within organizations also allow you to encounter similar situations to the workplace, such as receiving/giving constructive feedback, to utilize as examples during an interview.

Professionalism can also be demonstrated during the interview itself. Beyond the importance of the basics, how you treat each person you encounter will say a lot about your character and professional competence. It isn't uncommon for the receptionist to be asked their opinion of a potential candidate. As the saying goes, "treat the janitor with the same respect as the CEO!"

Lastly, consider how you react when you aren't offered the position. Thanking the company for the time invested throughout the process and maintaining the connections you made will certainly boost your professionalism and may even open a future door!



PROBLEM SOLVING
Tina Dorner, CHS, Inc.

"When you understand how to identify a problem and can sort out the options to select the best solution, both you and the organization are successful."



COMMUNICATION
Stacy Bond, Murphy Family Ventures

"Interpersonal communication skills are key in running an efficient business, carrying out initiatives, and driving change."



PROFESSIONALISM
Stephanie York, ADM

"Discretion, composure, focus and civility are indispensable. Everyone wants to work with people who exhibit grace under pressure and take responsibility."

4. LIFE-LONG LEARNING

For a company to progress, their employees need to continue to grow as well. Those who are committed to continual learning are typically the first to receive projects, career growth opportunities, salary increases, promotions, or additional job offers.

You may be thinking that you're learning all you can handle at the moment but you can begin to develop the desire for life-long learning while still in school. Take classes outside of your major like conversational Spanish, personal finance, or leadership. While you may think these electives may not advance your technical job training, they will help you learn things that will make you more competitive in the professional world. Talking about these class experiences while networking or at an interview will demonstrate for the employer that you have a desire to learn.

Life-long learning can easily be achieved just by reading. There are thousands of professional development books available to help you grow as a young professional. Mixing a few of these into your summer reading list will provide you with insights and theories you can practice in the workplace or discuss during networking opportunities.

5. PROBLEM SOLVING/DECISION MAKING/NEGOTIATION

Problems arise daily in the work environment, both large and small, and each one has some impact on the

successfulness of the business. As an employee, you must be able to identify the problem, take the appropriate action, negotiate the outcome and realize the consequences of those decisions.

Your interview should give you ample opportunities to validate your problem-solving abilities. Almost every employer will ask you some type of behavioral-based interview question(s). These are designed to highlight how you behaved in a situation (problem) to predict how you'll perform when faced with similar situations on the job. "Tell me about a time..." or "Give me an example of..." are typical ways these questions start. This is your chance to quickly explain the problem you were faced with and how you took initiative, utilized your resources and got results.

Demonstrate this skill to your employer by not only coming to your manager with a problem but also your proposed solution. This shows respect for your manager's time but also your desire to make the right decision by working through a problem and asking for input.

Employability skills are certainly a determining factor for success in the workplace and as young professionals, it can be hard to understand the importance these skills play for employers. Demonstrating that you have these skills and focusing on them during the interview process, along with your technical expertise, will help set you apart from the competition!