



WHAT YOU *DON'T* HAVE!

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS, coping skills, time management skills...the list seems to go on and on when employers talk about young professionals entering the work world. But, most of what is claimed to be a problem with 'this' generation, are the same shortcomings of those that came before at this stage in their lives.

It is time to change the conversation from what we don't have to what we do have! Let's start with identifying the skills that young professionals need to develop and determine ways to enhance opportunities to hone those skills. Then let's figure out how to demonstrate your achievements in those key areas.

WHAT SKILLS EMPLOYERS WANT

AgCareers.com recently conducted a survey (2017 - 2018 *Intern and New Graduate Hiring & Compensation Report*) with employers regarding intern and new

graduates. One focus area of this study was the importance of employability skill sets in the workplace for interns and new graduates. There are many studies out there around this topic, if you are interested in exploring. The results of the AgCareers.com survey aligned with what can be found in many of those reports.

This study looked at 10 key employability skills and asked employers to rank their importance as they looked at candidates for hire. The next section will dive into some of the top employability skills listed and how to develop and demonstrate these.

DEVELOPING & DEMONSTRATING THESE SKILLS

Teamwork

Given youth involvement in activities, sports, church, etc., it is hard to believe that most interns and new graduates wouldn't have some experience with teamwork. On campus there are plenty of opportunities to be a part of a team - projects, organizations, intramurals, you name it! Get involved!

The challenge is that during an interview, we get so focused on showing the interviewer what we can do that we

rarely highlight our ability to be a productive team member unless specifically asked. Keep this in mind as you practice your interview question responses. Craft a few responses to not only demonstrate your accolades but successes of teams that you've been a part of and your role within that team. Find balance here, don't go extreme with the team talk, but demonstrate your teamwork abilities.

Verbal Communication

We could probably argue that this one has changed over time, with email and text and all the other fun social media platforms. There are so many other ways to communicate that do sometimes seem easier, but let's face it, can be less effective in many scenarios. The best way to develop verbal skills is just to practice and make sure you don't fall back on your electronic communication too much. Get out there - network, talk to friends, take a class that requires you to present, take a leadership role within a club, pick up the phone and call your grandma. Talk properly. Not like you'd text or shoot the breeze with a friend. Think professional! The more you do it, the more you hone those skills. And the nice thing is that,

if you do the practice, those will shine through in your interview!

While we are here, let's just touch on written communication, since it isn't too far down the list. Biggest pet peeves heard from employers is that employees write like they text/too casual and that they choose an electronic form of communication when a phone call or in-person conversation would be more efficient. Know when to take an online conversation to in-person. Also, take a writing course or volunteer to write for your school publication to help enhance your writing skills. Demonstrate your good writing skills in your emails back and forth with the employer throughout the recruitment process. If appropriate for the role, take samples of your writing to the interview.

Problem-Solving & Decision-Making

This is a tough one, because it isn't that young professionals do not have experience in these two areas, it is just a lack of applicable experience a lot of times, or so it may seem. Obviously, internships provide a wonderful growing opportunity in these two areas. But what about interviewing for that first internship when you've had little experience? Don't worry, you have experiences from class projects, part-time jobs, clubs/organizations, etc. You just need to apply them!

This relates no matter the role, but is particularly helpful when you have little experience to draw upon. It isn't about the specific problem or outcome – it is about the process you took to get to your answer. Rather than just sharing a situation and what the result was of your decision, take the interviewer on a quick journey through your process. How did you identify the problem? What did you assess? Did you get input from others? How many solutions did you consider?

How was the decision ultimately made? And then, what was the outcome? It is more about your ability to work through a problem and make a decision than the decision itself!

“ADULTING”

We are going to take a break from the list of skills from the survey and highlight one that has been coming up more and more in employer conversations these days. No, “adulting” is not an official term. The reference is to young professional's inability to keep the personal stuff from getting tangled and mixed with the professional stuff. This is a slippery slope as the line between work life and personal life has gotten fuzzy, with the introduction of technology and even

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employer expectations. On the flip side it also has led to employers offering more flexibility in the workplace, which is awesome, but also leads to some gray areas. Here is some simple advice to address common gripes from employers.

- **Expect to be at the office from 8 to 5 daily** unless directly instructed that hours are different. Yes, this means you stay even when projects are completed. Ask for something more to do.
- **Don't use your personal phone** during the day to text or talk for non-work purposes. This also applies to personal social media usage. Use your lunch time

to take care of these needs. Many employers are more lenient on this, so if you are questioning, ask your supervisor.

- It is good to build relationships with co-workers, but until that relationship is established, **keep the conversations on the positive side**. Your co-workers don't need to know all the serious stuff going on in your life!
- **If you have a problem with something/someone, deal with it**. Try to work it out with that person. If that is unsuccessful, talk with your supervisor/mentor. Don't waste time spreading negative vibes and gossiping with others.

- **Be financially responsible**. Your finances can impact you at work. You may need to carry a personal credit card for travel expenses that you get reimbursed for. Being able to hold that line of credit is crucial. Don't expect your employer to make decisions based on your financial needs. Raises, bonuses and such are typically based on company performance, not need.

- **Understand that it takes time to climb the ladder**. Building your experience and proving your value happens with time. Express your interest in advancement, but couple that with asking about ways to grow your knowledge base to better position you for advancement. Do those things and be patient. Leadership and authority are earned, not given.

Again, let's quit focusing on what we supposedly don't have and more on what we do. Knowing what employers expect or are seeking is half the battle. You have these skills or at least the framework. Grow, learn, look for opportunities! You have what it takes! **AG**