

Essential Skills

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE CAREER-READY IN TODAY'S WORKFORCE?

By Maribeth Gunner Pulliam

Whether you are a new graduate conducting a job search or an experienced professional pursuing a career change, there are important competencies and knowledge you'll want to hone or acquire to rise above the competition.

In addition to job candidates being academically prepared and proficient in the job content, employers expect more. Regardless of the type or size of the industry, hiring officers are seeking certain essential employability skills. Most of these coveted skills are often referred to as "transferable" skills because they can easily apply to any job or work setting. These types of skills, also known as "soft" skills include abilities such as critical thinking, leadership, communication, and collaboration. Employers will also vet overall career awareness, such as current knowledge about the field and trends in the workforce, as well as resume and interview presentation.

As you advance in your career, it is important you have a strong command of all the elements employers seek: academic credentials, job content, employability skills,

and career awareness. One area to pay particular attention to is your employability skills. Based upon consecutive multiyear surveys from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), it is these types of skills that are reported as traits employers deem as high priority in the workplace. Employers understand that new hires may need training on some job duties. However, most organizations do not have the time or luxury to train academically qualified candidates on the fundamentals of self-motivation, written communication, global fluency, or teamwork. These skills are a vital facet of career readiness.

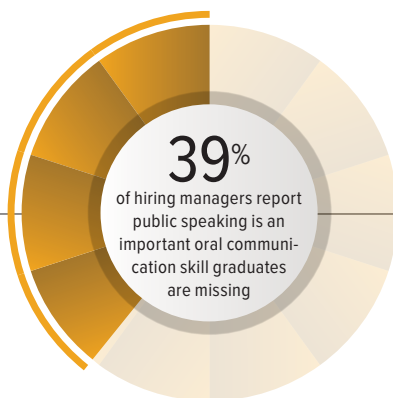
KEY EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

The concept of career readiness in the workforce has become an exceptionally important issue that has raised concern in both higher education and the labor market. Educators want to ensure students are learning the knowledge and skills necessary for sustaining a living in the 21st century. Moreover, employment trends continue to indicate a need for a more highly skilled and well-educated workforce that will meet the needs of an ever-growing service-based,

interconnected society. In conjunction with a task force of college career services personnel and human resource staffing professionals, and based upon extensive research, NACE identified eight competencies associated with career readiness that target the employability skills. All members of the workforce can benefit from learning more about these career-readiness competencies:

NACE Career Readiness Competencies*

- **Critical Thinking/Problem Solving:** Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems.
- **Oral/Written Communications:** Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to persons inside and outside of the organization.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration:** Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints.
- **Digital Technology:** Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and



efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.

- **Leadership:** Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others.
- **Professionalism and Work Ethic:** Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time/workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image.
- **Career Management:** Identify and articulate one's skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position desired and career goals, and identify areas necessary for professional growth.
- **Global/Intercultural Fluency:** Value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions.

*Full descriptions of competencies and additional information can be viewed at the Excelsior College Career Center (www.career.excelsior.edu).

ENHANCE YOUR CAREER READINESS

As you review the list of competencies, you may note some of the skills in which you are proficient, and others that you wish to develop further. Here are a few tips on how to get started:

Advance your education and training

Identify the gaps in your skillsets. Augment your knowledge and skills through additional coursework, degrees, or certifications in the subject areas where you believe you are deficient. For example, if you need to increase your technology or writing skills, explore the appropriate level courses in this subject area. Material in these types of courses can also help improve your critical thinking skills. Excelsior College offers sound options. You can also look for training opportunities through your community, place of employment, or reputable open educational resources.

Seek additional opportunities to expand your mindset and your skillsets

Adopt a growth mindset. With the right training, practice, and dedication, you can master new skills and increase your professional development. If you are looking to enhance your public speaking skills, volunteer to be a group spokesperson for presentations at work or in a community group, or consider joining Toastmasters. Want to strengthen your leadership and/or teamwork skills? Take on a leadership role at work, or volunteer to be on a community board or council where you can collaborate with diverse constituents for a common goal. Seek out a mentor who has refined these skills, and solicit advice and assistance. Read, or attend webinars or conferences,

to gain more knowledge and strategies to improve your skillsets.

Increase your career awareness

Visit the Excelsior College Career Center (www.career.excelsior.edu) and peruse the full suite of resources and services. Contact the Center's experienced counselors to discuss your career aspirations, goal setting, resume development, and interview skills. Inquire about career assessment and exploration tools that will expand your personal and professional knowledge and increase your job search techniques. Join a professional association in your field. Reviewing and reflecting on the steps of your career development can also assist with sharpening your critical thinking skills, setting goals, and creating more confidence in your career management abilities.

Taking these steps can positively impact your professional growth employability skills—those qualities and talents that will provide you with an edge in the job market and allow for greater potential. Once you have acquired and refined these skills, be ready to illustrate them on your resume and promote them in an interview. Employers are waiting for applicants who can demonstrate they are career-ready. ■

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