What skills are employers looking for?

Employers are often looking for skills that go beyond qualifications and experience.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are vital when seeking employment and may be the single most important factor for many recruiters.

Interpersonal skills are the skills we use to interact with other people. Good interpersonal skills allow you to participate effectively as a member of a team, satisfy customers and clients' expectations, negotiate, make decisions, manage your time efficiently, take responsibility, and work effectively with other employees. Well-honed interpersonal skills allow us to empathise and build rapport with colleagues and clients, leading to a better working environment which can be less stressful.

Communication Skills

Employers look for people who communicate well both verbally and in writing.

If you are either applying for a job or looking for a promotion with your current employer, you will need to demonstrate good communication skills. The ability to communicate both verbally and in writing with a wide variety of people, maintain good eye contact, write clearly and succinctly, demonstrate a varied vocabulary and tailor your language to your audience are all essential skills that employers seek out. Good verbal and written communication means you can get your messages across with less chance of misunderstanding.

Similarly, active listening skills involve not only hearing but gaining and understanding information. Listening is a basic requirement leading to fewer mistakes and a greater understanding of the needs of employer and client. As your career progresses, the importance of communication skills increases since as well as creativity, people skills, and an aptitude for teamwork, the ability to speak and write with clarity and conciseness is essential for managers.

Critical Thinking Skills

The ability to solve problems and make decisions can be a huge asset to your employer and these are therefore desirable skills to develop.

Decision making and problem solving require gathering reliable information, evaluating the information for a variety of solutions and selecting the most appropriate option based on the criteria and situation. Although the ability to solve problems and make appropriate decisions are critical in any job, people with these skills are especially helpful in customer service positions.

The ability to be able to effectively plan and organise means that you, or your team, are more likely to get the job done correctly the first time. These skills are beneficial to employers as they save time and money. Planning and organisation also require the

recording of information (maybe in a report) which can be referred to when planning future projects.

Creative thinkers are innovative and inventive and are more likely to devise new ways of doing things that add value to the work environment, making systems and procedures more efficient. Creative thinkers can offer new perspectives about the job and the company.

Personal Development

Personal development is all about having the right attitude towards work and the organisation you work for. Employers look for people who are keen to develop and learn.

Lifelong learners are always valued in organisations. In order to stay ahead of the competition, organisations need to continually learn and develop better ways of doing things. The employee who is open to learning and embraces change will be more successful than the person who is afraid of learning and resistant to changes in the organisation. Most jobs involve change, some more frequently than others, and employers want people who are adaptable, flexible, and patient, and respond who well to change.

Personal development is also concerned with how individuals evolve their working practices and attitudes to work. Self-motivation and confidence are key areas of personal development as is personal appearance and how others perceive you. Self-management skills, also known as 'self-control', are the skills we use to manage our personal feelings and how we react to challenges and problems both at work and in our private lives. Personal development includes learning to avoid potentially negative emotions such as anger and stress while developing assertiveness and effective negotiation skills.

Presentation Skills

Presenting information clearly and effectively is a key skill in the work place and presentation skills are required in almost every modern employment area.

Whether you are an administrator, manager or executive, you should expect to present your ideas and findings to your work colleagues and external stakeholders. Presenting information does not just include making formal presentations - information could be presented in the form of notes, reports, research findings, business plans, scenario planning, risk assessments and strategic documents. You may well be asked to give a presentation as part of your initial interview.

Leadership

Leadership is the ability to influence others toward the achievement of a goal.

Leaders either have, or are perceived to have, strong self-confidence. Leaders are team players, allowing them to work in a group to achieve the best results for their employer. Leaders show social skills by respecting the thoughts, opinions and ideas of others - they gain the respect of others and aim for credibility.

The latest QS recruitment survey (2010) lists the four most important skills sought by executive level recruiters as interpersonal skills, communication skills, strategic thinking and leadership ability. Developing your leadership skills can therefore not only help you to find a senior position, but may also help you to gain promotion with your current employer.

Numeracy (Number Skills)

Numeracy involves an understanding of numerical data, statistics and graphs, and is also part of making decisions and reasoning.

Numeracy skills are very important, irrespective of whether you consider a job to be "*working with numbers*". Having competence and being confident in working with numbers is a skill that can be used to your advantage in a wide range of employment settings: for example, knowing how profitable a company is, understanding value for money when purchasing and ordering supplies, following a budget or just calculating your holiday time. Being able to understand and analyse data in different formats is considered an essential skill in many organisations.

IT Skills

Most people need some IT skills to find work today. Acquiring basic IT skills and being familiar with using a computer may open up a wide range of employment opportunities and increase your marketability in the workplace.

It is likely that a modern job will require you to be familiar with at least some computer applications. Computer literacy means understanding what computers can and cannot do. Even if you know that you will not be using a computer in your job, it is well worth your while learning some of the basics of information technology, for example how to send and receive emails, use the internet effectively, and use word processor and spreadsheet software.