The Soft Skills
Job Seekers Need Now
Technical and hard skills are undeniably important for landing a job and growing your career. But what about soft skills, such as communication, collaboration and time management? You’ll need both types of skills to succeed in the workplace, and it’s important to understand what employers are looking for when you are applying and interviewing for jobs.

This research uncovers the specific types of soft skills employers are looking for, how they evaluate these kinds of skills in a potential employee and how your soft skills affect your ability to advance your career.

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The Soft Skills & Personality Traits Employers Are Seeking
The Top 3 Soft Skills That Get You Hired:

**Problem-Solving, Adaptability & Time Management**

Looking to unlock the secret formula to landing a job? Soft skills might be the answer. While each employer and position type may require unique sets of hard skills from job candidates, overall recruiters are looking for these key soft skills.

The soft skills *recruiting professionals* value most in a job candidate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Soft Skills Valued by Recruiters Vary by Company Size

Depending on the size of the company you want to work for, the soft skills that are most valued vary. Overall employers value problem-solving as the most important soft skill. However, for smaller companies with less than 500 employees, time management (51 percent) and organization (44 percent) are highly valued, while larger companies value adaptability (56 percent) and time management (44 percent). At small companies, employees typically need to wear more than one hat, which can provide more exposure to a wider array of job functions, but requires strong time management and organization skills. While a role at larger organization will likely be specialized in a specific job function, many employers seek people who can be adaptable to changing work conditions and work collaboratively toward solving problems.

## How Certain Soft Skills Measure Up • Based on Company Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soft Skills</th>
<th>500 or Fewer Employees</th>
<th>More than 500 Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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When Soft Skills Matter Most

The truth is certain business areas and industries value soft skills more than others. According to recruiting professionals, the business areas where soft skills are more important than hard skills include customer service (67 percent), human resources (67 percent) and sales/marketing (53 percent).

The business areas that soft skills are more important than hard skills:

- Customer service: 67%
- Human resources: 67%
- Sales/Marketing: 53%
- Administration: 39%
- Strategy/Operations: 36%
- Research/Development: 24%
- Legal: 21%
- Information tech (IT): 18%
- Finance: 18%
- Production: 17%
- Distribution: 14%

An Economist’s Point of View

“The U.S. labor market has been growing polarized between high-skill and low-skill jobs, but common to both ends of the spectrum is the need for soft skills. Whether home health aides or white-collar data scientists, the human element is the key to many of today's fastest growing jobs. Creativity and emotional intelligence are crucial for working directly with customers, providing leadership within an organization, and pushing the frontiers of innovation.”

Josh Wright, Chief Economist at iCIMS
The Top 3 Personality Traits Job Seekers Need:  
**Professionalism, Drive & Enthusiasm**

In addition to the soft skills you have learned and developed over time, your personality traits may also play a role in your career. Employers need people who can use their transferrable skills and will fit into the company culture.

The *personality traits* recruiting professionals value most in a job candidate:

**Insight From a Top Employer**

“We hire for three things at DISH – energy, intelligence, and the need to achieve. We believe these characteristics are innate to our employees and essential for the company’s success. DISH employees are inquisitive, not afraid to challenge assumptions and are hungry for knowledge.”

Daniel Pecharich,  
Senior Manager of Recruiting  
at DISH Network
Tip the Hiring Scales

When you’re looking for your next job, the more competitive a field is the more important soft skills and personality traits can be. When recruiting professionals are deciding between two job candidates with equal qualifications and hard skills, the soft skills that would make them hire one candidate over the other are oral communication skills (63 percent), active listening skills (61 percent) and preparedness (61 percent).

If you’re up against another candidate who has equal qualifications and hard skills, these attributes will set you apart:

- Oral communication skills: 63%
- Active listening skills: 61%
- Preparedness: 61%
- Enthusiasm: 56%
- Body language: 39%
- Politeness: 39%
- Presentation skills: 38%
- Written communication skills: 36%
- Appropriate interview attire: 30%

An Economist’s Point of View

“It’s clear that the increasing use of automation in all kinds of workplaces drives up the premium on technical skills for operating computers and working with robots, but we are just beginning to reckon with how and when automation makes soft skills more valuable too. To an economist, soft skills are humans’ comparative advantage – they are a great way to differentiate yourself and take advantage of your unique value proposition.”

Josh Wright, Chief Economist at iCIMS
Section 2
Tips for The Class of 2017
Still Looking for Your First Job, Class of 2017?

Why Your Degree Isn’t Enough

Class of 2017, if your job search has stalled, sharpening your soft skills could give you the edge needed to get an interview and a job offer. You’ll definitely stand out, as more than one in three recruiting professionals believe job candidates’ soft skills have gotten worse in the past five years.

The Blame Game:

Why So Many Job Candidates Lack Soft Skills

97% of recruiting professionals agree that both parents and colleges need to do a better job of teaching students soft skills before they enter the workforce.
Seeking Entry-Level Soft Skills

Which soft skills are valued most? For entry level positions, recruiting professionals rank adaptability (36 percent) as the most important soft skill, followed by oral communication (24 percent), and problem-solving (19 percent).

For entry-level positions the following soft skills are most important:

- Adaptability: 36%
- Oral communication: 24%
- Problem-solving: 19%
- Collaboration: 12%
- Written communication: 10%
Section 3
The Soft Skills Needed for Leadership Positions
Seeking Management Soft Skills

Developing strong soft skills can help you climb your career ladder faster. In fact, 58 percent of recruiting professionals believe soft skills are more important for senior-level positions, meaning leadership and management positions – compared to entry-level positions.

For senior leadership level positions, recruiting professionals rank problem-solving (38 percent) as the most important soft skill, followed by oral communication (26 percent) and adaptability (17 percent).

Want a Promotion? Strong Soft Skills May Outweigh Tenure

Technical skills and your education will help you get hired, but soft skills can get you promoted. Consider this:

94% of recruiting professionals believe an employee with stronger soft skills has a better chance of being promoted to a leadership position than an employee with more years of experience, but weaker soft skills.
Section 4

How Recruiters Are Judging Your Soft Skills
When to Show Off Your Soft Skills

So, how do you convince the recruiter or hiring manager that you have the soft skills they are looking for? During the hiring process, many companies take advantage of the latest talent acquisition tools to find people with the soft skills they need.

Before the in-person interview, recruiting professionals use the following tactics to evaluate your soft skills:

- **Phone interview**: 33%
- **Checking with references**: 17%
- **Conducting a video interview**: 16%
- **Conducting a written personality test**: 12%
- **Evaluating work samples or simulations**: 12%
- **Looking at your social media pages**: 10%
Today, Technology Plays a Big Role in Getting a Job

To ensure a job candidate is a good match for a job, many companies have incorporated new technologies such as video screening and talent assessments, also called pre-employment screening tests. Depending on the role you are applying for, be prepared to perform and showcase the soft and hard skills the job requires.

Video screening can involve a recorded video cover letter or a live interview. Talent assessments are online questionnaires used to assess job candidates’ personality, work style, knowledge or skills. Additionally, some employers may require job simulations as part of the interview process that are designed to see how well you would perform on the job. For example, a writing test, role play scenarios or physical tests.

In fact, nearly two-thirds of recruiting executives are upgrading their organizations' assessment and selection capabilities to one of their top three near-term priorities and are increasing their budget for assessment and selection by an average of 15%. ¹

Based on iCIMS system data, here are the top 10 soft skills and personality traits recruiters are using to describe their candidates as:

1. Ambitious
2. Confident
3. Friendly
4. Charismatic
5. Articulate
6. Enthusiastic
7. Determined
8. Easygoing
9. Efficient
10. Focused

¹ CEB, Global Assessment Trends, 2014
Why You Didn’t Get the Job

Failing to showcase the right soft skills during a job interview can make all the difference. Consider this:

75% of recruiting professionals have cut an interview short because a candidate didn’t demonstrate the soft skills they were seeking.

Insight from a Top Employer

“We define our culture on our careers website and include our definitions of what energy, intelligence, and the need to achieve mean to us. We believe this transparency gives candidates who possess these traits the best chance to be prepared during their interview. Know your business and be prepared for the interview; be knowledgeable about the company’s mission, vision, and cultural values so your examples and responses to questions match them as best as possible. Also, be sure to ask questions during every interview about what soft skills are important and highlight accomplishments that required those specific skills to get the results you obtained.”

Daniel Pecharich, Senior Manager of Recruiting at DISH Network
A Job Seekers’ To-Do Don’t Do List

Need a reminder about what not to do during an in-person interview? It’s shocking how many job seekers forget the basics when interviewing.

Here are the most common mistakes recruiting professionals see job candidates make during interviews:

- **79%** Showing up late
- **70%** Dressing inappropriately
- **68%** Avoiding eye contact
- **58%** Checking their phone during the interview
- **33%** Forgetting to thank the interviewer
- **28%** Forgetting the interviewer’s name

Other mistakes hiring professionals have seen during an interview include:

- Chewing gum
- Complaining about past employers or colleagues
- Not being prepared or knowing enough about the company
- Cursing or using inappropriate language
- Not answering the questions directly or rambling
In It for the Long Haul

By now it’s obvious, soft skills are very important to your career. Strong soft skills not only get you in the door, but may affect your ability to earn promotions and advance your career. Here’s some encouraging news: You’ll likely have more than one chance to showcase your soft skills to a potential employer. Interviews are becoming much more in-depth to ensure a skill set and company culture fit.

Job candidates participate in three interviews, on average, before receiving a job offer, according to recruiting professionals – with most companies (55 percent) conducting three to four interviews during the hiring process.
The Future Is Now

It’s clear, the days of the one-and-done job interview are long gone. In addition to three or more rounds of interviews, you can expect to participate in video interviews and online assessment surveys before receiving a job offer. Employers have learned that hiring the wrong person comes with a high cost so they are putting the right technology in place to help them make smarter decisions.

Video interviewing and recorded cover letters have already transformed the interview process. While they may seem intimidating, video interviewing can save you time and money while allowing you to showcase your soft skills and personality – things that your resume won’t show.

Gaining popularity with employers, online pre-employment assessments give recruiters and hiring managers a more complete picture of who you are and how you’ll perform on the job. About 76% of organizations with more than 100 employees rely on assessment tools such as aptitude and personality tests for external hiring. Over the next few years, that number is expected to reach 88%. These tests are based on data algorithms that show what kinds of traits and skills are correlated with success in a given company or job position.

Don’t be discouraged, while the process can be time consuming, ending up in the right job and company will lead to a more satisfying career!

2 CEB, Global Assessment Trends, 2014

About iCIMS Hiring Insights

iCIMS Hiring Insights is an online resource for labor market insights and hiring trends. Our team of researchers and writers uses iCIMS’ exclusive data, as well as proprietary and secondary research, to create reports and articles that cover the most recent developments in the workforce. Featuring iCIMS’ Chief Economist, Josh Wright, iCIMS Hiring Insights helps its readers stay well-informed about the latest in recruiting, technology, and the labor market. To learn more visit: www.icims.com/hiring-insights.

Survey Methodology

The iCIMS survey was conducted by Wakefield Research (www.wakefieldresearch.com) among 400 U.S. HR/recruiting professionals, between June 22 and July 3, 2017, using an email invitation and an online survey.