

## Soft Skills

Soft skills are habits, attitudes and personality traits that are increasingly important in the workplace. In fact, many of today’s employers rank soft skills above technical skills. Part of the employment navigation program at EvCC focuses on soft skills. A lack of one or more of the soft skills listed below can present significant barriers to employment. The following table highlights several soft skills employers demand in new hires.

<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Attendance:</b> regular and on time <b>Delivers:</b> turns in work on time <b>Communication:</b> regarding expectations, deadlines and setbacks <b>Dependable:</b> does what says will do
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Good communication:</b> listens actively Sets realistic goals and objectives Accurately assesses own and others’ capabilities and needs Follows through Efficiently acquires and applies new information, knowledge and skills necessary for the job
<b>Courtesy</b>	Gets along with others Performs well in a team Behaves respectfully towards others Manages stress Positively resolves conflicts with others in a timely fashion Acknowledges others in positive and appropriate manner Displays appropriate etiquette and manners in a variety of settings
<b>Competence</b>	Possesses adequate technical skills and knowledge to perform job Requirements Possesses ability to quickly acquire new skills and knowledge appropriate to changing needs of job
<b>**Chart developed by the Seattle Jobs Initiative’s Performance Skills Coalition, comprised of employer partners.</b>	

In the next exercise discuss with your navigator some examples of your soft skill competency by answering the following questions.

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In this exercise rank the soft skills you are most proficient at. For example, if your strongest soft skill is communication rank it number 1, if your weakest soft skill is showing up to work on time then rank reliability 8. Your navigator will discuss the results with you once completed and discuss ways to improve your lower ranked soft skills.

### Soft Skills Ranking Worksheet

Soft Skill	Rank 1-8
Communication	
Reliability	
Team work/Collaboration	
Problem Solving	
Time management	
Adaptability/Flexibility	
Positive attitude	
Conflict resolution	

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According to the “Job Outlook 2012 Survey” conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) employers sought candidates who possessed team working skills closely followed by communication. Did teamwork or communication make the top of your list? Take a few minutes and discuss the soft skills you ranked with your navigator.

**Communication:** There are four types of communication and it is important to be good at all four if you want to be successful in today’s job market. The four types of communication are:

- Verbal (language, grammar, tone and sounds)
- Listening (active listening and passive listening)
- Non-verbal (body language, gestures, posture and facial expressions)
- Written (memos, emails and instructions)

Effective communication not only requires the ability to convey thoughts and ideas but to also listen and understand what others are saying. Below are some tips on how to communicate effectively.

1. **Think before you speak.** Always be professional, avoid using profanity
2. **Make sure the volume of your voice matches the environment you are in.** Things can get loud on a shop floor so it is reasonable to increase the volume when you speak in a noisy environment  
However, remember to recalibrate your volume of your voice when in a quiet environment. Avoid shouting, if you think someone cannot hear you get closer
3. **Successful communication means you are listening and the speaker knows it.** Sometimes effective listening takes a lot of work. Always remember to focus on the speaker by maintaining eye contact and watching for his/her non-verbal cues. Avoid interrupting the speaker. Wait until there is a pause in the conversation to speak. Be respectful of the speaker. Avoid negative body language when listening to a speaker. Crossing your arms, sighing and rolling your eyes while listening to someone speak is disrespectful and will most likely lead you down the road to conflict with the speaker. Instead maintain eye contact, nod to indicate you understand and ask clarifying questions when appropriate to show you are listening

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4. **Proofread your email for grammar, spelling , content and tone before you send it.** When writing a memo or email make sure you proofread the final draft at least twice. You may even have a co-worker or friend to proofread your correspondence especially if it is a document of high importance. Spelling and grammatical errors in emails demonstrate a lack of professionalism. Remember to keep your emails concise and professional. Avoid using slang, jargon and emoticons. Be clear in your subject line. Keep your subject to one sentence or less and make sure it is related to the overall topic in your email

**Reliability:** Can people count on you? Are you always on time for class, work and meetings? Do you follow through on your commitments? If you said yes to the previous questions then you are reliable. People who are reliable gain the trust of people they interact with. Follow the tips below to build your brand as a reliable person

1. **Never overpromise!** If you can't follow through on a task on time because of other commitments say so rather than accepting more work
2. **Avoid committing to a task that is over your head.** Taking on work that you are not competent at doing will only waste time and money. It may also lead to safety issues.
3. **Use technology to increase your reliability.** There are lots of apps that can help you schedule your day. Use calendars and alerts on your desktop and smartphone to keep you organized and your task load in front of you

**Team work/Collaboration:** Whether it is on the floor of a manufacturing company or in a boardroom more employers require employees who are willing to work as part of a team. Companies that foster a teamwork environment have more productive employees. In large part, employees who possess a strong teamwork ethic are also strong communicators and are reliable. Below are several suggestions for you to improve your team working skills.

1. **Share praise when appropriate.** Recognize and celebrate your teammate's good ideas in an honest positive way

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2. **When you critique be prepared to offer an alternative.** When you don't agree with someone's idea it is ok to say so. But your argument against a particular idea should be supported by facts, not anecdotes, and you should be prepared with an alternative
3. **Respect your team members** by focusing on the task at hand instead of focusing on individuals or their behaviors

**Problem Solving:** Today's employers seek employees who are not afraid to tackle and solve problems. It is likely you will be asked to give examples of how you solved problems during an interview. Below are several proven ways to approach and solve problems in the workplace.

1. **Identify the problem:** This step may require effective communication with supervisors and coworkers. Can you think of the last time you had to identify a problem?
2. **Define the problem:** This step narrows the scope of the problem that exists. For example, you may have identified that you are unable to go to work as a problem. You may define the problem of not going to work because you do not have a car
3. **Find a solution:** Once you define a problem formulate a solution. This may require you communicate with others in your workplace. You may discover there are multiple solutions to a problem. If you are working in a team setting bring the solutions you discovered to the team to discuss which solution works best

**Time management:** Time management requires organization and attention to detail. Many employees must juggle multiple projects with competing priorities. That is in addition to the personal priorities many employees have as well such as child care. Discuss the following tips with your navigator to create a time management strategy.

1. **Prioritize your tasks:** Focus your efforts on tasks that must be accomplished over tasks that take up your valuable time but are a low priority
2. **Just say no:** Make sure you do it in a polite way when refusing to take on additional non-essential tasks that will hamper your ability to complete essential tasks
3. **Delegate:** It is ok to ask someone to help you by taking on some of the work. Again, approach is important when asking someone to help. Make sure you show genuine gratitude when someone agrees to assist you

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4. **Utilize technology:** Apps and computer programs abound to help you keep track of your work and help you complete your tasks in a timely manner.
5. **Set aside time:** Schedule time to work on specific tasks and make sure you limit distractions during that time. Turn off the phone and close the office door if you have to.

**Flexibility:** Are you someone who breaks down when things don't go according to plan? Or do you roll along with whatever is thrown your way? Do you have a "can do attitude"? Flexibility is an increasingly important soft skill. Below are some ways to develop this important skill.

1. **Be the guinea pig:** Volunteer for new assignments, join committees and teams working on innovative projects. Demonstrate to your boss that you are flexible
2. **Embrace change:** Whether you like it or not change will happen at your workplace. While change is often difficult to accept or can be intimidating, change is ultimately an opportunity to learn and grow as an employee
3. **Never pass on an opportunity to learn:** Always take advantage of employer related training or continuing education

**Positive Attitude:** Employees with positive attitudes usually stay with an employer when other less positive employees are let go. The reason is simple: employees who are positive are more productive; create a better work environment for others and often lead by example. Why would an employer get rid of a person who can bring so much to the workplace by simply having a positive attitude? You may ask yourself "how can I develop a positive attitude as a soft skill?" Check out the tips below:

1. **Ask for feedback:** Your manager may get too busy with routine tasks and projects to take the time to give you consistent feedback on your performance. Work with management to find time to discuss your performance on a regular basis. Asking for feedback demonstrates initiative on your part and it also shows you care about your work
2. **Avoid gossip:** Gossip is an extremely unhealthy form of communication in the workplace and can sour interpersonal relationships quickly. People with positive attitudes avoid gossip and use effective communication with others to stop gossip in its tracks
3. **Celebrate success and milestones:** It's the little things you do to help you maintain a positive attitude at work. Today's work place requires a lot of personal interaction. When you celebrate a co-worker's success, a birthday, new birth or other life event you are reinforcing a positive interaction that will ultimately make you feel better about yourself

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In most cases it is easier for employers to determine a prospective employee's technical skill level than his or her soft skill competency. However, hiring managers have developed strategies to determine if a potential employee has the soft skills required for the job. Read and answer the questions below. Discuss your answers with you navigator to get a feel for your soft skill competency.