

Employability & Workplace Skills

AUTHOR'S NOTE

To obtain and keep a job in today's economy, employers are looking for three main components. (It is recommended that the teacher bring in newspaper or go to on-line job sites like www.monster.com, allowing students to read the language in actual job advertisements in your area).

1) KNOWLEDGE

When looking at an ad in a newspaper or on-line, employers first list the knowledge and skills necessary for the job. Often times, it will specify a particular degree and/or skills needed to be considered as a viable applicant. It might read:

- *“Looking for someone with a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering.”*
- *“An associate’s degree in drafting or architecture is essential.”*
- *“Applicant must possess excellent computer skills & understanding of SPSS.”*

Usually the more specialized and higher paying jobs require more education, greater knowledge and advanced skills.

2) EXPERIENCE

Many positions are considered to be “entry-level” jobs, which means that almost anyone can apply and be considered. These employers believe that they can teach you what you need to know to be successful on the job. Other jobs require candidates to possess a certain number of years of experience in a specified field. The ad might read:

- *“Minimum of three years of office management experience required.”*
- *“2 years in health care industry is preferred.”*
- *“Looking for someone with 3+ years of supervisory experience.”*

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3) PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Regardless of the type of job, employers are looking to hire individuals with strong character and excellent personal attributes. Employers want to know that a person has a good work ethic, is motivated and is a “go-getter.” They also want to know that an employee is honest, trustworthy and dedicated. One just has to look at the ads to understand how important this is:

- *“Seeking someone who is a fast-learner and can take direction well.”*
- *“Needing someone who is a motivated team player.”*
- *“Wanted – a goal-oriented person who is highly organized.”*
- *“This job requires an outgoing personality and quick decision-making skills.”*
- *“Only hard-working, motivated and ethical people need apply.”*

WHICH COMPONENT IS MORE IMPORTANT?

All three components are necessary to find and keep most jobs, but is one component more important than the others? To be honest, for highly-specialized jobs and jobs that require advanced degrees, knowledge is the key component that will get an individual in the door for an interview. With that being said, many argue that when it comes to employability and being successful in the workplace, “soft skills,” personal qualities and a person’s character are just as important as the technical “hard” skills.

In fact, Dr. Jacquelyn Robinson, a work force development specialist says, “Having desirable personal qualities is more important than having a good basic educational foundation and critical thinking skills.”

4-H COUNCIL STUDY ON EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

One study conducted by the National 4-H Council found that the overwhelming majority of employers are looking for workers with average intelligence and good social skills. Among these social skills are:

Put up Overhead, *What Employers Are Looking For:*

- Strong Work Ethic
- Positive Attitude
- Good Communication Skills
- Time Management Abilities
- Team Player
- Self-confidence
- Positive Response to Criticism
- Flexibility/Adaptability

National 4-H Council, 2014

NEWSWEEK & FORBES CONCLUSIONS

It seems like many young people don't understand the importance of these personal characteristics in the job market because *Newsweek* recently reported that 56% of employers were unhappy with a high school graduates level of motivation and responsibility and 35% were dissatisfied with their ability to work with others.

Other research reports suggest that employers want to know that a candidate is honest and ethical, that he/she can get along with others, show respect for authority, be counted on to arrive on time, work hard and meet deadlines.

WHY PEOPLE GET FIRED

Conversely, the top reasons that an employee gets fired or fails to be promoted are also indelibly linked to a person's character. Indeed, most jobs are not lost because an employee can't do the job or doesn't have a certain level of intelligence. Rather, people get fired because they lack personal traits. For instance, co-workers do not want to work with someone with a bad attitude or who can't get along with others. Likewise, employers do not want someone who is disrespectful or isn't responsible enough to meet deadlines.

Put Up Overhead – *Top 10 Reasons Employees Get Fired:*

- Proved to be dishonest
- Could not get along with other workers
- Did not have acceptable appearance
- Was unreliable or was absent/late too often
- Used work time for personal business
- Could not do the work
- Worked too slowly or made too many mistakes
- Refused to follow orders
- Repeatedly missing deadlines
- Misrepresented self or lied on application
- Caused too much drama at work

Fortune Magazine, 2015

TEACHER TIP

It would probably be helpful if the teacher could think of personal stories related to individuals you have worked with who got “passed over” or fired as a direct result of one of the bullet points on the following overhead.

THE LINK WITH CHARACTER

Each of the bullet points in the above studies correspond with the character traits, covered in this curriculum (and a few traits that are not covered in this curriculum). *Ask students to put a trait next to each of the bullet points to make sure they understand the connection.*

CONCLUSION

The marriage between hard technical skills and soft character related skills is what makes a person marketable, employable and successful on the job. It seems clear that one without the other only gets you halfway. Therefore, if you embrace and internalize the traits focused on in this class you will, 1) have an advantage over other applicants and be more employable, 2) these traits will make you stand out and get noticed in a positive way, thereby increasing the likelihood of promotions throughout your career and 3) decrease the odds of you being fired. *Ask students if they agree with the three points in the previous statement.*