

Soft skills in demand: survey

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Like many job seekers, you hope to impress potential employers with hard skills like technological literacy. But soft skills like collaboration and teamwork will set you apart from the competition.

According to LinkedIn's 2016 Soft Skills Report, hiring managers in Canada find soft skills more difficult to find than technical ones, with 67 per cent admitting they struggle to find candidates with the right soft skills compared with only 49 per cent for hard skills.

If you haven't already highlighted soft skills on your LinkedIn profile or resumé, head back to the drawing board, advises Danielle Restivo, director of global communications at LinkedIn. Consider adding statements such as: 'I love to work with others towards a shared goal because I know that as a team we're stronger.'

The best way to showcase your soft skills is through storytelling. "When you describe what you've accomplished, also describe the soft skills you put into action to get there," Restivo says. Instead of simply saying you're a result-driven team player, for instance, reference a specific project that required you to work with others, some of the challenges you encountered and how you overcame them and achieved concrete results.

If your soft skills are lacking, make developing them an intentional activity, advises Crystal Campbell, president of c2 coaching + consulting. She offers a three-step plan to develop your teamwork, problem-solving and communication skills — the soft skills most important to Canadian hiring managers:

1. Discover. Gauge your current skill level by taking an online assessment.

"Even better, if you can get candid, trusted feedback from others, ask for input from those who regularly observe you demonstrating — or failing to demonstrate — these skills," says Campbell. "Asking a few other people for specifics around what they have noticed is a good check and balance to ensure you're getting an accurate read on your current ability."

Consider why gaining competence in these areas make sense. What will change when you have these skills? What will the payoff be? "Addressing your own motivations will set your learning in motion and increase your odds of successfully reaching your goals."

2. Plan. If your goal is to lift your skill in any or all three of these areas, speak to your manager and build these growth areas into your development plan. If your boss wants you to focus instead on other areas, consider building a separate plan you can execute simultaneously.

SUN+ SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed upon, Realistic and Time-based) goals for each soft skill you want to tackle. Each goal should emphasize both understanding and applying the soft skill. “Knowing the principles of team building is terrific but only goes so far if you’ve never been on a team,” says Campbell. “You want to be steeped in the best practices plus gain some real experience.”

3. Take action. Here are some ways to beef up your competence:

Subscribe to newsletters, blogs and LinkedIn groups that focus on your development area(s).

Look for an independent, objective and certified coach to work with you one-on-one to ramp up your aptitude in specific ways. The Greater Toronto Area chapter of the International Coach Federation lists bios of its member coaches at www.gtacoaches.com/find-a-coach.

Find a mentor who’s stellar in your development area and willing to guide you. Shadow them to observe what makes them so effective. Ask them questions around how they did what they did and for advice on how you can increase your own ability.

“Try to view your development as a continuous activity rather than a one-off situation that you focus on every couple of years,” says Campbell. “The point is to ensure you’re developing a habitual practice. Just like brushing your teeth each day, you can build a habit of continually growing your capacity around teamwork, problem-solving and communication. This, in turn, will position you as a strong candidate in front of hiring managers.”

