

HR Insights

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Recruiting for Soft Skills

There's a lot more that goes into finding the right candidate for your company's opening than just a block of text.

That's why the interview process exists and why, as an HR professional, learning how to recognize soft skills is so important.

What Are Soft Skills?

The term "soft skills" refers to the attributes that an applicant can bring to your company that might not show up on a resume, such as:

- Communication
- Emotional intelligence
- Conflict resolution
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Dependability
- Flexibility
- Problem-solving
- Leadership
- Accountability

These soft skills can demonstrate a candidate's ability to be a positive presence in the workplace outside of, or alongside, their official job description. For example, communication, conflict resolution and problem-solving are integral to helping your workplace function smoothly. Critical thinking and creativity are important for contributing new ideas and solutions that other employees might not think of.

But while all of these soft skills are great to have in your employees, you won't be the only one looking for those candidates.

Candidates in High Demand

According to LinkedIn's 2019 Global Talent Trends report, 92% of talent professionals

reported that soft skills are equally, or even more important, than hard skills.

A report from the International Association of Administrative Professionals, OfficeTeam and HR.com noted that 67% of HR managers said that they would hire an applicant with strong soft skills even if they were lacking in technical skills. Meanwhile, only 9% of those same responders said that they would extend an offer to a candidate with strong technical skills but weak soft skills.

Many business schools, including Harvard, Yale and Columbia, are now offering courses that focus specifically on soft skills.

Finding the Skills Your Company Needs

Most job postings will include language fishing for certain soft skills, but similarly, most applicants will claim to have them. Request that candidates include specific examples of the skills that you're seeking in their cover letters and resumes. You can gain some indications based on how they respond. For example, do they give themselves all the credit, or do they cite things like teamwork?

Some companies use online services in order to help

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filter out candidates before beginning the interview process. Applicants are required to go through an online assessment using software programmed to analyze, among other things, soft skills.

Regardless of the steps you and your company might choose to take, it's easiest to assess these kinds of qualifications in person. The interview process is when it becomes more apparent which candidates have the soft skills you're looking for, but there are still steps that your company should take in order to assess interviewees.

- **Structure interviews**—Use standard questions for all candidates interviewing for a position in order to eliminate unconscious bias.
- **Dig deeper**—Many applicants arrive at interviews with rehearsed answers, so try to ask situational questions that apply to real-world scenarios.
- **Test problem-solving**—Ask candidates for a plan for a project they might undertake at your company, and then have them adjust it based on certain constraints, such as a budget cut.
- **Avoid similarity bias**—You might be naturally drawn to a candidate who is similar to you and therefore think they have certain soft skills. Ask for feedback from other members of your team who have met the candidate to get their opinions.
- **Ask the hard questions**—Have a candidate tell you about a time that they have had to admit a fault or communicate bad news at work. Their responses to difficult questions about stressful times can provide insight into their soft skills.

Of course, not every soft skill is of equal importance for every position. For example, communication skills might be more important for a client-facing position, while problem solving and conflict resolution are necessary for those in management.

For More Information

As an HR professional, you play an important role in seeking out soft skills and helping your organization function smoothly.