Emotional Intelligence and Soft Skills: What Employers Are Seeking

sph.umn.edu/28323/

on October 5, 2012 and Tags:

With all the time, energy, and financial resources that go into earning a graduate degree, the natural inclination is to focus your resume on the technical skills acquired in the course of that education. What may be surprising – and even disappointing – to job-seekers with new master or doctoral degrees, is that there are skills and characteristics that are even more important to potential employers than those directly job-related. Soft skills that speak to the candidate’s “emotional intelligence” could carry more weight than those requiring specialized training.

What is emotional intelligence? An article on mindtools.com describes it as follows: “Emotional intelligence is an awareness of your actions and feelings – and how they affect those around you. It also means that you value others, listen to their wants and needs, and are able to empathize or identify with them on many different levels.”

Imagine that you have carefully crafted a great resume, detailing your coursework and experience, and you get invited to interview. Before you even get a chance to describe how your knowledge will help you contribute in the position, you are making the ever-important “first impression.” And your emotional intelligence skills can help you make that impression a positive one.

Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist, authored the internationally best-selling book, Emotional Intelligence, and developed a framework of five elements that define emotional intelligence:

1. **Self-Awareness** – People with high emotional intelligence are usually very self-aware. They understand their emotions, and because of this, they don’t let their feelings rule them. They’re confident – because they trust their intuition and don’t let their emotions get out of control. They’re also willing to take an honest look at themselves. They know their strengths and weaknesses, and they work on these areas so they can perform better. Many people believe that this self-awareness is the most important part of emotional intelligence.

2. **Self-Regulation** – This is the ability to control emotions and impulses. People who self-regulate typically don’t allow themselves to become too angry or jealous, and they don’t make impulsive, careless decisions. They think before they act. Characteristics of self-regulation are thoughtfulness, comfort with change, integrity, and the ability to say no.

3. **Motivation** – People with a high degree of emotional intelligence are usually motivated. They’re willing to defer immediate results for long-term success. They’re highly productive, love a challenge, and are very effective in whatever they do.

4. **Empathy** – Empathy is the ability to identify with and understand the wants, needs, and viewpoints of those around you. People with empathy are good at recognizing the feelings of others, even when those feelings may not be obvious. As a result, empathetic people are usually excellent at managing relationships, listening, and relating to others. They avoid stereotyping and judging too quickly, and they live their lives in a very open, honest way.

5. **Social Skills** – It’s usually easy to talk to and like people with good social skills, another sign of high emotional intelligence. Those with strong social skills are typically team players. Rather than focus on their own success first, they help others develop and shine. They can manage disputes, are excellent communicators, and are masters at building and maintaining relationships.

It is easy to see how important emotional intelligence skills can be to success, both personally and professionally. These are the types of skills effective leaders demonstrate, so developing your emotional intelligence can be key in not just a making good first impression, but a positive lasting impression that a showcases your leadership abilities.

Beyond the emotional intelligence skills, there are other “soft skills” that can set you apart from other applicants and increase your odds of success in the job search. The following is adapted from www.quintcareers.com.

**Communications Skills (listening, verbal, written).** Probably more than any other skill, the ability to listen, write, and speak effectively is critical in the workplace. Provide examples of your successful communication experiences.

**Analytical / Research Skills.** This refers to the ability to assess a situation, seek multiple perspectives, gather more information if necessary, and identify key issues that need to be addressed. Be prepared to tell a story about how you are able to do this.

**Computer / Technical Literacy.** Specifically identify the software applications with which you are competent.
**Flexibility/Adaptability/Managing Multiple Priorities.** Good time management and an ability to “go with the flow” are critical. Tell your prospective employer how you prioritize and manage multiple projects.

**Planning/Organizing.** There is a reason that project management training is a resume builder – the ability to design, plan, organize, and implement projects and tasks within an allotted timeframe and budget is very important. If you have done it, say so.

**Teamwork.** Many jobs involve working in one or more groups, so the ability to work well with others is essential.

Bottom line? Develop, practice, and use your emotional intelligence and your soft skills. Identify them as strengths on your resume. And when you go to your interview, it will be your demonstration of those skills as you meet the hiring manager that make you a successful applicant.