

Soft Skills for Skilled Trades Students

Adapted from “Your Future Depends on Soft Skills” and “Skills Revolution 2.0”
By ManpowerGroup, 2018

Do your students have what it takes to be employed in the future?
Or are they rightfully fearful that robots are going to take their jobs?

The questions are serious, and the answers may surprise you.

Clearly, the world of work is changing; technology is transforming the way companies do business and the way employees work. Increased digitization, automation and new technologies are seeping into the workplace every day with no signs of stopping. Robots are already out there and doing some pretty impressive work.

But how far can it go?

Overall, employers say digitization will actually be a net gain for employment in the near term. Only 10% expect to reduce their workforce as a result of automation. As companies go digital, most will need more people, not fewer.

However, the impact will vary by function. Manufacturing and production companies stand to have a lot of churn, as old tasks are shed and new roles are created.

In general, the key to future workplace success will come in the form of human strengths—those skills that will augment technology and reduce the threat of replacement by automation. While the term “human strengths” sounds like something straight out of a comic book or sci-fi movie, essentially we are talking about soft skills.

Soft skills are not new, but the way we use them in the future will be more important than ever. It is no longer enough to simply possess the actual technical skills needed to perform a job; employees will need more to stay relevant in their roles. They will have to have the right combination of soft skills, technical and digital skills to succeed.

Across all job categories, these are the top soft skills considered to be the most valued for future employment, based on a survey of 20,000 employers in 42 countries:

- **Communication:** As we move further into the digital age, employees must know how to effectively convey information in a variety of styles and formats—both written and verbal. This includes: in a one-on-one setting, in a team meeting, over the phone, on social media and via email. More than half of employers (56%) say that communication skills are among the most valued soft skills. But 30% say that this is also one of the hardest skills to find.
- **Collaboration:** This is especially important in IT functions, where people are increasingly working across teams leading digitization. IT is no longer a siloed, stand-alone department; today it's a cross-functional, core element of business transformation. Fifty-five percent of employers say that collaboration is one of the most valued soft skills, while 22% say that this is among the hardest skills to find.

- **Problem Solving:** How people approach a problem, process the situation, generate ideas and implement solutions will be critical to career success. This skill requires a real discipline for process and dedication; you have to be tenacious and results-focused. Anyone can identify a problem, but those who can reach efficient solutions will be able to build a reputation as a go-to employee. Fifty-four percent of employers say that this is one of the most valued soft skills, but 31% say it's among the hardest to find.

In addition to these top three, other highly valued soft skills include organization, customer service, leadership and management.

In this digital world, success will not always require a college degree, but it will rely heavily on an appetite for continuous skills development. We must nurture people's curiosity and learnability so they have the desire and ability to continuously develop their skills to stay employable. With the right skills mix, people will augment rather than compete with technology.

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