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7 Soft Skills You Need to Achieve Career Growth

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Is there someone (or hopefully, several someones) at your company who it seems like *everyone* wants to work with?

Maybe they always get pulled into brainstorming, or maybe your team's leaders consult with them. Or maybe it just seems like everyone on your team just really, really likes them.

It might be because they're the nicest person in the world, or it might be because they have a finely-honed set of soft skills.

What exactly are soft skills, and why are they so important to growing your career? Keep reading to find out.

Soft skills are the combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and personality traits that make it easy to get along and work harmoniously with other people.

What are Soft Skills?

Soft skills can be taught, but they're not as straightforward as hard skills: those specific qualities and skills that can be clearly defined, measured, and taught for success in a job.

Hard skills can be quantified and advanced. You can learn advanced mathematics or writing skills, and you can get better at shipping code.

But when it comes to soft skills -- things like small talk, empathy, and flexibility -- it's not as straightforward.

That doesn't mean soft skills aren't worth investing in -- and practicing. You need hard skills to *land* a job, but you need soft skills to *progress* in your career. So we've rounded up a list of the soft skills most critical to building a successful career -- and how you can brush up on them.

7 Soft Skills You Need to Achieve Career Growth

1) Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is often referred to as the ability to recognize and manage your emotions and the emotions of others. It's made up of five key elements:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Motivation
4. Empathy
5. Social skill

You can read more about the specifics of the attributes of emotional intelligence in this blog post if you want to learn more, but in the context of the workplace, emotional intelligence boils to a few key abilities:

- Can you recognize and regulate your emotions and reactions in the workplace?
- Can you build rapport and positive relationships with other people?
- Can you empathize with others?
- Can you give -- and receive -- effective, constructive feedback?

It might not sound like the most important skill for job growth and success, but in some cases, it is. In an analysis of new employees who didn't meet expectations during the first 18 months on the job, 23% failed due to low emotional intelligence. (Take this quiz to rate your emotional intelligence and identify areas where you can improve.)

2) Team Player Attitude

The ability to play well with others is a soft skill you've been working on -- unknowingly -- since your first day of pre-school or daycare. You might not have known it when you were fighting over blocks or figuring out the rules of a made-up game, but you were actually preparing for a lifetime of workplace collaboration.

Whether you're an individual contributor or a people manager, you have to work with other people -- in meetings, in brainstorming, and on various cross-functional projects within your company. A positive, can-do attitude when it comes to working with others is essential to team harmony, which means you need to be able to run an effective and inclusive meeting, be open to new ideas, and work respectfully with others.

Read our guide to running better meetings for all personality types here, and brush up on these rapport-building questions to get to know and work well with any team member you encounter.

3) Growth Mindset

In any job, no matter what the role, you'll encounter roadblocks, disappointments, and other situations that might frustrate you. A soft skill that's critical to your ability to persevere is having a growth mindset -- a term psychologist Carol Dweck coined to refer to a frame of thinking that reflects viewing your abilities, talents, and intelligence as skills you can grow and improve upon.

Someone with a growth mindset might look at a failure to meet a quarterly goal as an opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses to tackle the next quarter's goal. A person with a fixed mindset, however, might say to themselves, "I'm not good at blogging," and let that negative outlook -- without any belief in the capability of improvement -- impact their next quarter's success, too.

Watch Dweck's TED Talk to learn more about the growth mindset here -- and try to find places in your daily correspondence or reflections where you can reframe your outlook by viewing a challenge or setback as a way you can grow.

4) Openness to Feedback

This is part of emotional intelligence, but especially when it comes to the workplace, being open and able to receive development feedback is critical to success at a job -- especially a new job.

Think about it: Constructive feedback helps you do the best job you can, and if you take it personally or react defensively, you aren't able to hear the feedback and adapt it to your current strategy.

The key to giving and receiving feedback is to come into the conversation from a place of kindness: You aren't receiving constructive feedback because that person hates you personally, it's because they want you to be the best you can be. You should be chomping at the bit to receive feedback that can help you more effectively hit your goals.

If you don't feel comfortable with feedback yet, try immersion therapy -- make feedback a part of your daily to-do list. Ask for feedback from more people you work with to get immediate help honing your skill set -- and to help make it easier to take.

5) Adaptability

No matter what your role, and no matter what your industry, the ability to adapt to change -- and a positive attitude about change -- go a long way toward growing a successful career.

Whether it's a seat shuffle or a huge company pivot, nobody likes a complainer. It's important not only to accept change as a fact of life in the constantly-evolving business world, but as an opportunity to try out new strategies for thriving in environments of change (remember the growth mindset?).

If you don't feel comfortable with frequent changes, either on your team or at your company, write down your feelings and reactions, instead of immediately voicing them. By laying out how you feel and why you feel a certain way, you'll be able to distinguish legitimate concerns from complaints that might not need to be discussed with your team.

6) Active Listening

You probably can tell the difference between when someone is hearing words you're saying and when they're actively listening to what you're saying. If someone is typing while you're presenting at a meeting, or they're giving you that slack-jawed look, they probably aren't really *hearing* what you're saying.

Active listeners, meanwhile, pay close attention to meeting presenters, offer up clarifying questions or responses, and refer back to notes in future discussions. They don't need things repeated to them because they heard them the first time -- making active listeners not only respectful colleagues, but more effective workers, too.

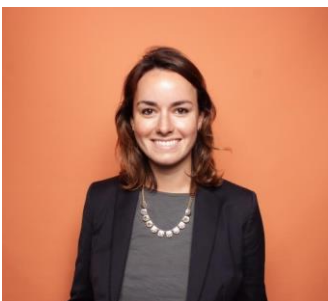
If you think you could stand to improve your active listening skills, challenge yourself not to look at your various devices during meetings -- instead to focus completely on speakers, and take notes by hand if needed (which is proven to help with memory retention).

7) Work Ethic

You can't succeed in a role without being willing to put in the time, effort, and elbow grease to hit your goals, and company leaders and hiring managers are looking for people who will put in the extra legwork to succeed *without* being asked.

If you want to get a new job or get promoted, it's essential that you hone your work ethic -- so quit bellyaching and put in the extra time you need to succeed. Or, if excelling means learning new skills or tools, dedicate time to learning those outside of work hours so you can make your time in the office as effectively as possible.

What weaves all of these soft skills together is **a positive attitude**. It might sound cheesy, but believing that there's a positive outcome in any and all challenging situations will help you navigate the day-to-day of your job while making other people *really* want to work with you. These soft skills are harder to teach, but the payoff might be even bigger, so make sure you're investing time and effort into auditing and improving your soft skill set.



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