

What are Soft Skills?

- Non-technical skills common to every job.
- Workplace basics every employee must have to remain employable.
- The number one thing employers are looking for in job applicants.
- What employers most often say is lacking in the applicant pool.

Five Major Soft Skills Categories:

Workplace Basics - All about professionalism and dependability.

Attitude - Do you make clients feel welcome, or uncomfortable?

Communication - Do you listen? Ask questions? Speak and write clearly?

Teamwork - Can you take and give criticism gracefully? Resolve interpersonal conflicts?

Problem Solving - Can you apply critical thinking to a situation and devise creative solutions?



WORKPLACE BASICS

Dependability

I show up on time.

Why it's important

Customers expect someone will be ready to help them when the doors open. If other workers depend on you getting your work done, being late prevents them from doing their job. When running late, let your boss know as soon as possible.

How to demonstrate this skill

Get to class on time. Arrive early to appointments. If you have a job, be on time every day. If you are habitually late, make adjustments like getting up earlier, finding reliable transportation, etc.

I don't call in sick unless I'm actually sick.

Why it's important

Faking sick days can be grounds for dismissal. Save sick leave for those times that you really need it. But if you are sick, don't spread it around the office. Stay home and contact your employer as soon as possible.

Meeting Deadlines

I meet my deadlines.

Why it's important

Many deadlines are not negotiable and can cause serious problems if they are not met.

How to demonstrate this skill

Turn your homework in on time. Plan ahead and prioritize your work.

If I can't meet a deadline, I tell my boss ASAP.

Why it's important

Sometimes deadlines can't be met for reasons you can't control. Immediately tell your supervisor about any issues preventing you from meeting a deadline so they can re-prioritize or address issues outside of your authority.

I can prioritize tasks.

Why it's important

Arranging tasks in order of urgency and importance helps you meet deadlines. Consult your supervisor if you don't know what takes priority.

How to demonstrate this skill

Break down class projects into smaller tasks, estimate the time required for each, and readjust.

Customer Service

I go out of my way to help customers get just what they want.

Why it's important

A friendly and professional experience keeps customers coming back. If customers are not happy, the business will not be profitable.

I remain calm and professional, even when the client is not.

Why it's important

Escalating the situation by raising your voice or arguing will only lose you a customer. Staying calm and doing your best to meet a client's needs is the best way to diffuse a tense situation. Involve your supervisor if a request goes beyond what you are authorized to provide.

I take time to really listen to customers to understand what they want.

Why it's important

If a customer complains, listen to them. Find out what the issue really is. It's seldom personal. They just want their needs met.

People Skills

I treat my boss and coworkers with respect.

Why it's important

Nothing poisons a workplace like employees who don't get along. Your boss's authority should be respected. They are directly responsible for your continued employment. Getting along with your coworkers is essential for success, so learn to deal with a broad range of personality types. Learn your company's policies for handling disagreements. Use the process when necessary, but not vindictively.

How to demonstrate this skill

Treat your parents, teachers, and peers respectfully.

I dress appropriately.

Why it's important

Dress according to the standards set by the business. Jeans and work shirts are appropriate for a job in a garden center, but not for a bank. Find out about the dress code before your first day of work.

I use appropriate language for the workplace.

Why it's important

Foul or insensitive language can make your coworkers uncomfortable working around you. It creates a hostile work environment.

How to demonstrate this skill

Avoid disparaging anyone's race, age, gender, religion, disability, etc.

I practice good personal hygiene.

Why it's important

Customers prefer clean, well-groomed employees. Good hygiene makes it easier for coworkers to work near you. Many people are sensitive to perfumes and colognes, so avoid wearing fragrances to work.

How to demonstrate this skill

Bathe daily. Be mindful of your appearance. Apply make-up and hair products with restraint.



ATTITUDE

I am eager to learn and to meet new challenges.

Why it's important

Businesses constantly face new challenges and need employees who are flexible and eager to improve. Workers stuck in the old ways of doing things hold the company back.

How to demonstrate this skill

Volunteer for a project or task.

I project a welcoming, eager-to-please demeanor.

Why it's important

Being pleasant is the best way to make people comfortable. Clients are the reason you have a job, so show your appreciation.

How to demonstrate this skill

Be warm and pleasant with everyone you meet.

I perform tasks to the best of my ability.

Why it's important

Doing a half-hearted job tells your employer that you don't care about the company's success.

How to demonstrate this skill

Put 100% effort into every project you do, no matter how minor.

I face setbacks without spreading negativity.

Why it's important

On any team, morale can mean the difference between success and failure. Attitude is contagious, so spread a positive one.

How to demonstrate this skill

Avoid complaining. When faced with a challenging situation, focus on the upsides.

I accept new tasks gladly.

Why it's important

Accepting a new assignment with "No problem" and a smile shows that you will complete the task to the best of your ability. Responding with an irritated sigh signals that you're not up to the task.

How to demonstrate this skill

Pay attention to how you respond when assigned homework, chores, or projects.

I actively seek ways to improve my performance.

Why it's important

Businesses are in constant competition with each other, which means practices and technologies are always evolving. Employees who find better, more efficient ways to do things will be noticed and rewarded.

How to demonstrate this skill

Try to improve everything you do, starting with hobbies and chores. Find ways to save time, or techniques to improve precision.



COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal Communication

- I practice good posture to project confidence.**

Why it's important

Confidence is essential to success, and good posture is an important visual cue signaling confidence. How you present yourself frames how others view you and makes a lasting impression. Project success.

- I make eye contact when speaking with others.**

Why it's important

Eye contact is another important way to project confidence. It also shows that you are listening attentively.

How to demonstrate this skill

If you naturally shy away from eye contact, make an effort to maintain it with everyone you talk to. But take care not to stare. It's okay to break and reestablish eye contact during a conversation.

- I never check my cell phone during a conversation.**

Why it's important

Pay attention to the person in front of you, using body language and eye contact to show you are truly listening to them. Checking your phone during a conversation makes the other person feel devalued.

- I mirror the posture and mannerisms of others.**

Why it's important

When someone is in a hurry and you respond at a leisurely pace, they think you don't care about their needs. Mirroring isn't copying someone's every move, but simply matching their mannerisms to show empathy and put them at ease.

- I smile often, and mean it.**

Why it's important

A smile is welcoming and makes people want to be around you. While your smile can't always be genuine, adopting a positive attitude can help make it so.

- I avoid inappropriate nonverbal clues.**

Why it's important

Body language can speak louder than words. Be aware of any non-verbal messages you're sending.

How to demonstrate this skill

Avoid eye-rolling, finger-pointing, arm-crossing, etc.

Verbal Communication

- I speak clearly and enunciate my words.**

Why it's important

If people can't understand you, it doesn't matter what you say. Some people are uncomfortable asking you to repeat yourself, and will pretend to understand. Clear enunciation eliminates this risk.

How to demonstrate this skill

Read aloud or record yourself speaking. Make sure to speak at a relaxed pace and project your voice.

- I am an active listener.**

Why it's important

To understand what a client or supervisor wants, you must listen carefully, and ask them to clarify anything you don't fully understand.

How to demonstrate this skill

Practice focusing on the speaker and not letting your mind drift. Let others finish speaking before adding your thoughts.

- My criticism is positive and constructive.**

Why it's important

No one likes being criticized, but it is essential to improvement. Frame criticism as helpful suggestions and take care not to belittle the person or question their ability.

How to demonstrate this skill

Begin by saying something positive about their performance, then suggest ways to build on their strengths. Avoid making passive/aggressive remarks or laying blame.

- I use sarcasm all the time because there's totally no way anyone could ever misinterpret my meaning.**

Why it's important

Sarcasm, especially in writing (see above), can be easily misinterpreted. While humorous in casual situations, avoid sarcasm in the workplace. Be clear and direct.

Written Communication

- I write clearly and simply, but express myself fully.**

Why it's important

Writing must convey meaning without the benefit of gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Clear, direct language is essential to writing effectively.

How to demonstrate this skill

Practice writing on subjects that interest you. Write reviews of movies or products. Edit them to eliminate unclear sentences and unnecessary words. Try writing texts in complete sentences without photos or emojis.

I avoid overly long and complex sentences**Why it's important**

Brief sentences communicate more directly. Your goal is to convey information, not to impress people with elaborate phrasing.

 I double-check my spelling and grammar**Why it's important**

Typos and grammatical mistakes make you look unprofessional and suggest you lack attention to detail.

 I avoid over-sharing, political incorrectness, and obscenities on social media**Why it's important**

Social media profiles are our public identities. If your profile contains objectionable content or represents you in a bad light, you may be turned down for a job offer or let go from your current job. Don't rely on privacy settings to keep your secrets safe. Privacy policies change all the time, often without a reasonable notice.

How to demonstrate this skill

Go through your social media profiles and delete anything you wouldn't want your employer to see. If you must share your wild side with friends, create an alternate profile.

 I take notes to remember important discussion points.**Why it's important**

Your memory is unreliable. You may forget the finer points of a discussion after a night's sleep. Taking notes keeps you focused and can jog your memory when you return to a task.



PROBLEM SOLVING & CRITICAL THINKING

 I can assess problems, and find solutions**Why it's important**

Every business encounters problems. Employees who can identify the source of a problem and offer viable solutions are highly valued.

How to demonstrate this skill

Take a creative approach to solving problems. There's no instruction manual for running a business, so a creative mind is a must.

 I use good judgment and make sound decisions**Why it's important**

Thinking of creative solutions is a great skill, but must be tempered with the ability to evaluate those solutions to decide if they are realistic. Ideas must become well thought-out plans with many factors considered before acting on them.

 I can identify areas that need improvement and offer positive suggestions**Why it's important**

Even if a business is doing well, one must always be on the lookout for potential problems or ways to make things work even better. The ability to frame suggestions in a positive light makes others more likely to embrace them.

 I approach my supervisor with possible solutions rather than just problems**Why it's important**

Often, you understand the realities of your job better than your supervisor does, making you the ideal candidate for proposing solutions. Coming to your supervisor with solutions rather than just problems shows that you can take responsibility for your success.

 I can change my mind when faced with new information.**Why it's important**

It's embarrassing to be wrong, but it's worse to cling to a position for fear of admitting you were wrong. When you learn something that challenges your point of view, don't dismiss it. Carefully consider the facts, and if the new position is more convincing, there's no shame in changing your mind.

How to demonstrate this skill

Play devil's advocate and practice arguing in favor of a position you don't hold. Even if you don't change your mind, it can be enlightening to follow the logic of the opposing viewpoint.



TEAMWORK

I pull my own weight when working on a team

Why it's important

Slacking forces others to do more work and causes resentment, especially if you accept an equal share of the credit and rewards.

How to demonstrate this skill

Offer to help out with chores at home. In group projects at school or work, make sure your part is done well and finished on time. If you don't know what you are supposed to do, ask that specific roles or tasks be assigned.

I look at situations from the other person's perspective.

Why it's important

Understanding someone else's position is vital for avoiding or resolving conflicts. The better you understand someone else's position, the better prepared you are to give them what they want, or to persuade them that another option is better.

How to demonstrate this skill

When conflict arises, figure out what is motivating the other person. Imagine yourself in their position, and that you don't know the other side of the story.

I adopt a "We're all in this together" attitude.

Why it's important

An organization can only thrive if its employees work together, rather than competing against each other. Make sure all your actions are positive and productive to benefit the whole organization.

I take criticism gracefully and use it to improve myself

Why it's important

Everyone has some room to improve, and criticism is an opportunity to become better at what you do. Recognize that those offering criticism are there to help. Taking criticism personally makes your coworkers uncomfortable offering suggestions, and your work may suffer for it.

I remain flexible and unafraid to change plans if something is not working

Why it's important

Adaptability is crucial to survival. Workers stuck in rigid ways of thinking cannot innovate, and cannot effectively respond to changing conditions. This leaves a business vulnerable to its competition.

I give credit to others for their ideas and efforts

Why it's important

Often, a few people get credit for a successful project that many others contributed to. Giving credit where it's due ensures that no one feels undervalued. Taking credit for the work of others causes resentment and can sabotage future teamwork.

How to demonstrate this skill

When you receive a reward or accolades, extend credit to those who contributed. Do it publicly at the time you are acknowledged.

I act as the peacemaker when conflicts arise

Why it's important

A workplace functions better without conflict. If you are in a position to keep the peace at your workplace, do what you can to resolve conflicts.

How to demonstrate this skill

Avoid taking sides in conflicts. If someone complains to you about a coworker, help them see the other point of view. But know when it's not your place to get involved.

I speak my mind, but phrase opinions positively

Why it's important

Progress and improvement depend on everyone contributing their best ideas, so voice them. Sometimes it is necessary to point out what isn't working, but to do so constructively requires carefully-considered phrasing so it doesn't register as blame or negativity.

How to demonstrate this skill

If you're shy, practice speaking up at school, home, or work. If you're talkative, practice keeping your opinions positive and constructive.