



Soft+Skills:

The Hard Skills For
Today's Workforce

75% of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 25% on technical knowledge.

Stanford Research Institute and Carnegie-Mellon

85% of job success comes from having well-developed soft skills and people skills.

Harvard University



Then, why is soft skills competency such a neglected after-thought?

For some reason, it seems that organizations simply expect people to know how to perform on the job.

Doesn't everyone understand the importance of being on time, taking initiative, being friendly, and producing high quality work?

Most people will say, "Yes, I understand the importance of these qualities." Yet, when individuals face common workplace situations that demand competent soft skills, they often fall short because they don't have tools or techniques they can draw upon to address those.

To date, institutions of higher education and vocational colleges have struggled to incorporate soft skills education within their curriculum. Progress is being made. But, challenges remain. College graduates are lacking more than 75% of the professional soft skills they need to be successful. And many corporations are slow to fill the void. In fact, Mark Murphy, author of *Hire for Attitude* and CEO of Leadership IQ, found that 46% of new hires fail in the first 18 months. Of those new hires, 89% fail for reasons associated with attitude.



Attitude. That's a broad term, for sure. But, without the skills to handle conflict, adapt to change, get along with people from different cultures, manage priorities, workers can be overwhelmed by the realities in the workplace. Perhaps get discouraged. Even long-timers struggle with routine workplace challenges because they lack the tools and techniques to manage through them effectively, making it difficult to maintain a positive attitude.

“Keeping a job and building a successful career requires those professional, intangible qualities in equal measure with technical knowledge. It's time to balance that scale.”

Many believe that having the hard skills knowledge to perform job tasks is the most important factor for landing a job. True. To a point. Based upon the research, however, this belief is a bit lopsided. Today, the scale is tipped heavily toward mastering the hard skills. Furthermore, the training opportunities to learn them tip the scale even more. Keeping a job and building a successful career requires those professional, intangible qualities in equal measure. It's time to balance that scale.

What Makes **Soft Skills** So Hard?



So, let's get specific. What are soft skills? Soft skills are those personal, intangible qualities that help you get along in the workplace and achieve long-term career success. Some refer to these as "people" skills. By contrast, hard skills are the industry knowledge and quantifiable abilities to do a job, like accounting, web design, word processing, dental hygiene. **Having technical mastery doesn't assure one's ability to communicate effectively with customers, solve problems, or navigate change.** That's one key reason why soft skills are so hard in today's workplace.

How difficult are the soft skills for your employees? Not Sure? Do these challenges sound familiar?

- 1 - You're really good at bringing on clients, and not so great at keeping them . . .
- 2 - You have high staff turnover and keep training new people . . .
- 3 - You have certified network engineers who know their stuff but can't meet critical deadlines . . .

Chances are you have a soft skills gap.

Top **Soft Skills** Employers Seek

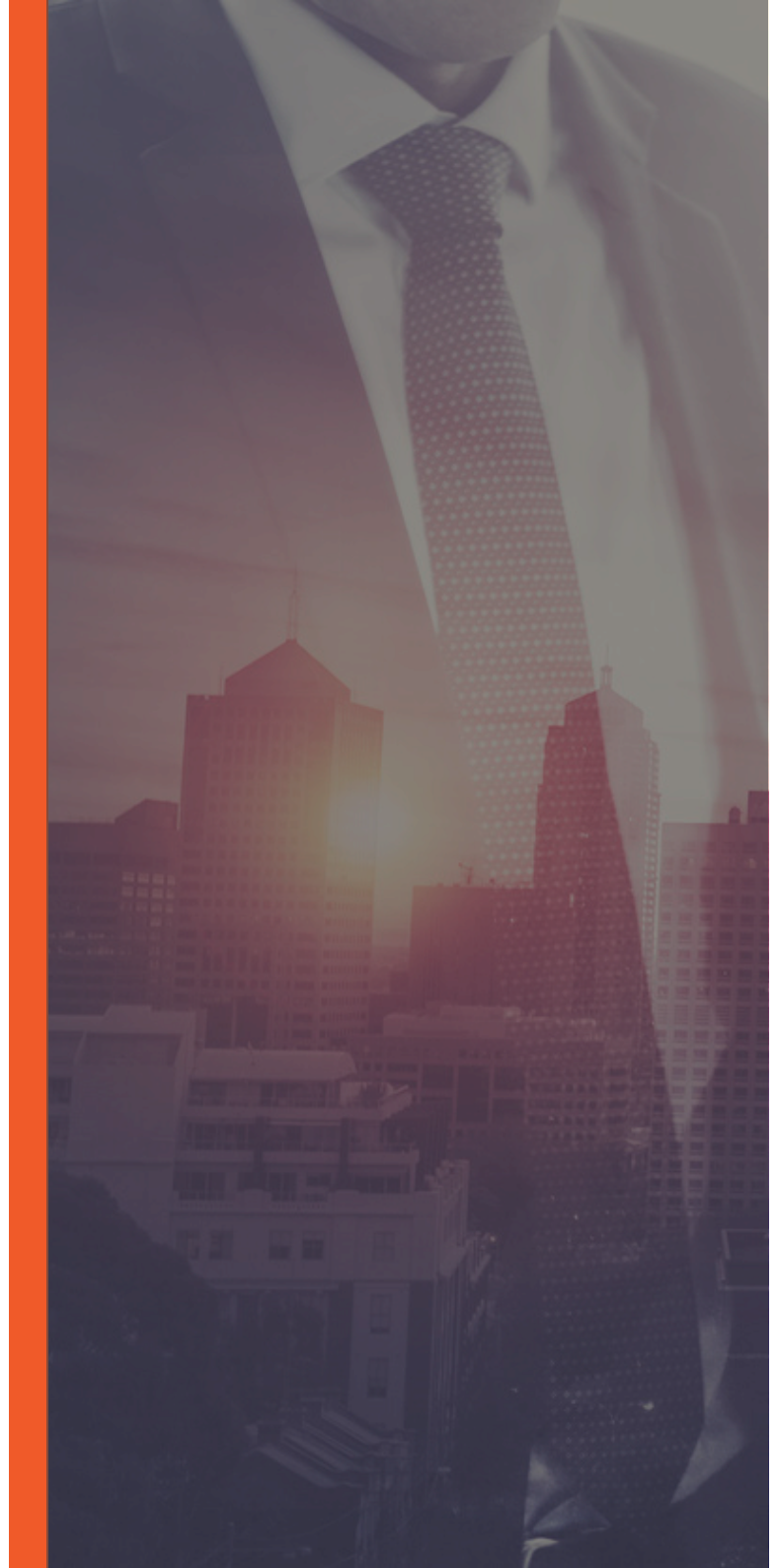
What are the top soft skills employers seek? When you dig into the job placement and recruiting company web sites or Google “top soft skills” on the Internet, you’ll find an array of words. Look closely, match up synonyms, like adaptable and flexible or teamwork and teamplay, and you’ll find a surprisingly consistent list of soft skills at the top.

They are:

- Communication
- Problem-solving
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Adaptability
- Organization
- Conflict resolution

Go deeper down the list, and the soft skill priorities get a bit more mixed.

You’re likely to find your top most important soft skills among the list on the next page, compiled and defined by Knowledge Workers Pro. If the soft skills aren’t defined quite how you think about them, feel free to refine them to align with your organization’s requirements. The key is to make sure that everyone on your team – ideally, everyone in your organization – knows what you expect of them. If they aren’t comfortable with their soft skill competency level, then training is a likely remedy. Some people naturally are great communicators or creative thinkers. These are trainable skills; you can learn them.



Top 21 In-Demand *Soft Skills*

Accountable	Models ability to take responsibility for one's behaviors, actions, tasks, and interpersonal relations.	Friendly	Models ability to be pleasant, positive, engaging and able to build rapport with others.
Adaptable	Models ability to accept the routine pace of change, manage one's response to change, and constructively influence the implementation of change initiatives.	Has a work ethic	Models a belief in and practices the value of hard work and diligence to achieve goals.
Communicator	Models the ability to communicate professionally in spoken, written and non-verbal ways and use active listening techniques that lead to two-way communication and understanding.	Innovative	Demonstrates ability to transform new and creative ideas that fall outside current norms into tangible outcomes.
Creative thinker	Demonstrates the ability to think in new ways and take calculated risks to facilitate growth.	Leadership	Demonstrates ability to inspire, guide, and engage others to achieve a shared vision.
Decision maker	Models ability to make effective and timely decisions both independently and as part of the team.	Manages conflict	Recognizes the normalcy of conflict and models the ability to resolve conflicts with co-workers, supervisors, and customers effectively.
Emotionally intelligent	Demonstrates awareness of the difference between IQ (intellectual intelligence) and EQ (emotional intelligence) and effectively manage emotions to foster productive workplace relationships.	Manages stress	Demonstrates the ability to manage multiple conflicting priorities and heavy workloads without losing composure.

Top 21 In-Demand *Soft Skills*

Ethical	Maintains a high moral code and models the ability to make ethical choices when faced with ethical dilemmas.	Negotiator	Demonstrates the ability to resolve differences and facilitate agreements with co-workers, supervisors, customers, and stakeholders.
Organized	Uses effective methods, tools, and techniques to manage multiple tasks and meet deadlines.	Team player	Demonstrates ability to work as a competent team member, willingly providing back-up support for co-workers and actively supporting group goals.
Problem solver	Models ability to identify, analyze, and resolve problems effectively.	Trustworthy	Models ability to earn and keep the trust of co-workers, supervisors, customers, and "stakeholders"
Productive	Uses efficient tools and techniques to set goals, prioritize tasks, and complete assignments effectively, on time, and to quality standards.	Values diversity and inclusiveness	Models the ability to get along with co-workers, supervisors, and customers from diverse cultures and background without displaying prejudice or stereotyping.
Takes initiative	Models the ability to assess a situation and take independent action to begin new projects, resolve problems, or begin new tasks before being asked by another.	<i>“These are trainable skills; you can learn them.”</i>	

Five Benefits of **Soft Skills** Competency

Soft skills are required from the board room to the front line. Soft skills competency transcends job type, pay-grade, industry, and culture. The investment payback for developing these skills can lead to five organizational benefits.

1 - Stronger customer relationships

Being customer-focused is more than a strategy. It's the key to long-term relationships, competitive advantage, and sustainability. Workers who listen effectively, understand the nuances of non-verbal communication, excel at building rapport, show empathy, and earn trust. Drawing upon these core skills, they can solve customer problems, resolve conflicts, and negotiate outcomes that serve both customer and company needs.

2 - More cohesive and creative teams

Blending diverse personalities, team player types, and styles into high-performing teams can be challenging. Managers who understand these dynamics can create a working environment that inspires teams to draw upon their strengths, focus on the tasks at hand, and resolve problems in fresh, creative ways. Learning that conflict, a normal part of workplace relationships, leads to stronger, more creative solutions. It builds confidence and a stronger commitment to follow through on team decisions. The outcomes lead to effective process improvements and help drive positive change.



5 Benefits of **Soft Skills** Competency

1 - Stronger customer relationships

2 - More cohesive and creative teams

3 - Greater organizational productivity and effectiveness

4 - More engaged and motivated employees

5 - Deeper commitment to shared goals

3 - Greater organizational productivity and effectiveness

Juggling multiple priorities, facing down deadline pressures, and addressing conflicts that arise along the way are powerful stress triggers. They interfere with effective, productive work. Learning to distinguish between must-do-now and can-do-as-the-situation requires is a first step to gain control of the time available to accomplish goals. While focusing on the objectives instead of the myriad tasks, workers can organize and manage projects from beginning to end more effectively, delegate appropriately and hold people accountable for their commitments.

4 - More engaged and motivated employees

Empowering workers to solve customer problems. Engaging them in meaningful team projects. Giving clear direction and constructive feedback when things get off track. These are keys to engaging employees and stirring their motivation within. Motivated and inspired workers develop the confidence to challenge the status quo, take the initiative to improve processes, contribute positively to change initiatives. They earn trust and respect and become the next generation leaders.

5 – Deeper commitment to shared goals

Leadership sits at the foundation of high performing organizations. Drawing upon both intellectual and emotional intelligence, strong leaders inspire employees to achieve their personal best while meeting the organization's many business requirements. They're savvy enough to hire and develop the right people, measure and evaluate performance fairly, make sound ethical choices, and have the courage to admit mistakes. These leaders earn the trust and respect of others. The result? High-performing teams aligned with and committed to shared goals.

Conclusion

A growing awareness and a willingness to invest in developing soft skills create the possibility that organizations – any industry, any geography, any size – can improve their workforce's effectiveness, improve co-worker and client relationships, and increase competitiveness. At the same time, this awareness and willingness create a tremendous opportunity for training providers to fill the void with high quality, job-based soft skills training programs.

Why You Want to Train Your Employees with Skills Builder Pro

Skills Builder Pro believes that training must lead to improved skills, greater competency, and better performance. We focus on the most in-demand skills workers need to perform their jobs with confidence and craft the learning experiences that lead to that end.

SBP learners acquire the essential soft skills they need to succeed in the workplace, not theory or nice-to-know concepts. During the learning experience, learners practice real skills, tools, and techniques they need every day to be productive and effective on the job. The exercises, activities, case studies, and role plays represent common, and often challenging, workplace situations, so they are ready to apply what they learn immediately on the job.

About the Author



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Cinda has a long-standing career record for leading profitable business units, growing new business initiatives, and pushing the mark by creating -a-new-box approach to business challenges. She is the creator of "The Daly Interview," a popular series featuring interviews with industry luminaries and authors, including Steve Wozniak, Marcus Buckingham, Guy Kawasaki, and Geoffrey Moore. Bringing more than 30 years of experience leading teams to high performance and training adults, Cinda is the strategic marketing partner for ThinkCSI, publishers of Skills Builder Pro training solutions, and chief operating officer of Knowledge Workers Pro, publisher of the KWP Career Certification and Training curriculum and chair of the KWP International Certification Standards Board. She holds B.A. and Masters degrees with high honors from the University of South Florida, USA, and Georgia State University, USA.

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About Skills Builder Pro

Skills Builder Pro (SBP) combines innovation, technology, and adult learning theory into a comprehensive library of courses that bring classroom, online, and self-study training solutions to market. Our global leadership and development teams represent years of business expertise, adult education program management, curriculum design, and educational technology expertise into every aspect of our training solutions.

The unique learning paths [link to learning path page] guide individuals toward learning the most in-demand skills necessary to succeed in their career of choice. The state-of-the-art learning management system [link to details page] helps enterprise leaders manage their training programs and guide the employees' training paths. Combined with training needs assessments, the Skills Builder Pro solutions assure that customers are directing their investment on specific skills training that will have the greatest impact on performance and deliver overall value to their organization.

The Skills Builder Pro library evolved from ThinkCSI's proven methodology used to train and certify more than 5000 people in businesses, technical colleges and universities worldwide.

