Core Workplace Skills

Employers evaluate college students based on the relevant skills and experiences they will bring to the workplace. In varying degrees, their evaluation includes your academic record (i.e., some employers focus more on GPA when making selection decisions than others). All employers, however, will evaluate your core workplace skills and qualifications that are specific to their industry and the position for which you are applying. You can develop these skills during internships, through employment and volunteer positions, while working in a faculty member’s research lab, and/or by being actively involved in a student organization.

Warning: some college students hold faulty assumptions that hold them back from developing a competitive resume! Included among these problematic beliefs are the following:

- Having an exceptional GPA is more important than developing workplace skills because employers view performance in the classroom over and above internships and extracurricular activities.
- Once admitted to a top-ranked university, one’s prospects for finding a good job is guaranteed – regardless of the experiences added to their resume during college.
- Choosing a major that has a direct connection to the business world (e.g., Economics, Communication, General Business) provides a ticket to employment upon graduation. Completion of one of those majors is more important than getting experience outside of the classroom.

*Findings from a 2012 study of over 700 employers conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education, dispel the above notions. Specific results included:

- 78% of employers will consider any major
- Work experience (particularly internships and jobs held while in college) is more important to employers than academic credentials, including GPA and college major

Effective Communications

Spanning across one-on-one and group interactions, those who succeed professionally

- Can create and edit written reports
- Express themselves clearly when speaking and writing
- Understand what others are saying by listening well and reading nonverbal messages
- Adjust communications based on audience needs
- Can influence others

Problem Solving

The workplace asks us to solve problems. People in the for-profit sector solve problems such as how to reach a new market. Those in the nonprofit sector address problems such as obesity or homelessness. Employers seek those who can

- Delineate the components of a problem
- View the problem from different vantage points
- Develop and test possible solutions
- Can make decisions in a timely manner
- Collaborate with others to implement solutions

Teamwork

All jobs involve working together as co-workers to contribute to the goals of the organization (having an esprit de corps); many jobs entail work on short-term project teams; some jobs require day-to-day work on a team. Associated skills include

- Defining common goals
- Achieving consensus
- Working collaboratively and tapping into the strengths of each member

Leadership

Knowing how to take charge in a way that inspires others to reach a common goal is the essence of being a good leader. Employers seek new hires who

- Have managed projects from beginning to end
- Can clarify roles and objectives
- Understand how to motivate others
- Know how to delegate
- Can coach others on performance improvement
Integrity
Demonstrating integrity in the workplace includes the following behaviors

• Being honest
• Owning up to mistakes and offering to help fix any ripple effects
• Seeking assistance when unsure about how to perform a job duty (rather than faking it)
• Following through on agreed upon actions and standards
• Discussing ethical considerations when making important decisions

Coping with Change
Whether unforeseen or planned, changes commonly occur in the workplace. Therefore, employers look for those who

• Show adaptability in the face of change
• Can help others cope with the change
• Can evaluate the feasibility of making a change (at personal and organizational levels)

Thinking Critically
Recognize that you are transitioning from jobs that largely entail performing labor under close supervision (e.g., serving food to others) to jobs that involve the application of knowledge in settings valuing autonomy. Associated skills include

• Identifying pertinent information
• Restraining emotions during analysis
• Adopting multiple perspectives
• Distinguishing between fact and opinion
• Ability to analyze quantitative data

Knowledge Management
From staying up on workplace trends or technology changes, or taking on new job duties, those who succeed professionally

• Value continuous learning
• Can quickly digest ideas and facts
• Are responsive to a variety of training formats

Valuing Diversity
The workplace is comprised of people from all walks of life, representing differences in ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, able-bodiedness, place of birth, and many other characteristics. Employers seek those who

• Value differences
• Understand their personal biases
• Interact effectively with people from all backgrounds

Time Management
Employers recognize that those who do well academically while juggling multiple commitments have developed the abilities to

• Perform under pressure
• Recognize priorities
• Develop realistic plans
• Stay focused on tasks

Balancing Work and Life
Regardless of all your other capabilities, if you let stress interfere with your workplace productivity or relationships, your value to an employer will be reduced. To build balance

• Engage in activities you enjoy (e.g., hobbies)
• Set realistic expectations for what you can accomplish at work and in your personal life
• Exercise to burn off frustrations
• Devote time to a cause that you care about to broaden social contacts with “like-minded” people

Developing Skill Stories
When communicating with employers during interviews, via cover letters, or at career fairs, you need to go beyond simple claims such as, “I’m a great problem-solver.” This can be done by telling a short story related to how you have developed problem-solving skills through internships, volunteer service, research projects, leadership roles, or other experiences. Example: “I’m a great problem-solver. While I’ve always been intrigued by how people are quick to jump to conclusions when faced with a problem, I got to learn first hand about the value of group problem-solving when I was an intern at Sloopy Apparel. That company has a standard problem-solving process that entails root cause analysis, brainstorming solutions with a team, and determining how to evaluate proposed solutions. I got to work through each problem-solving stage with a team that was dealing with inconsistent application of red dye on jerseys. It was a great experience. One of the solutions I suggested made it to the testing phase.”

1. Review the 11 core workplace skills described on this document. Circle the 3 that you believe represent your strongest skills.

2. Reflect on your various experiences, including course projects as well as extracurricular activities, to draft a story for each of your top 3 skills.

3. When describing the strength of your skills, focus on using words that are in line for someone with an undergraduate college education. Employers are quickly turned off by those who seem to be overselling themselves. Consider the differences in the following descriptors:

   Safe Choices - great, excellent, very strong, very capable, solid, top-notch, high-level

   Risky Choices - fabulous, extensive, superb, awesome, expert, profound, stellar, world-class
Skill Story #1:
Name of Core Workplace Skill:  
Story:  

Skill Story #2:
Name of Core Workplace Skill:  
Story:  

Skill Story #3:
Name of Core Workplace Skill:  
Story:  

4. Consider scheduling a mock interview to practice pitching your skill stories. The career services advisor can give you feedback on your stories as well as offer general interviewing pointers. Visit http://asccareerservices.osu.edu/students/services/mockinterviews to learn how to schedule a mock interview.

5. When interviewing for an actual internship or job, you will likely be asked the question, “What are your weaknesses?” Therefore, you are encouraged to circle the workplace skill that you struggle with the most. Additionally, you should jot down some ideas for how you can make improvements in that area. When employers ask the question, “What are your weaknesses?,” they are actually more interested in hearing about your plans for self-improvement. Everyone has weaknesses; those who succeed in the workplace are aware of their weaknesses and strive to overcome them!

Improvement ideas:  

Keep in mind that you can be undecided about your career goals while building transferable skills. Don’t let indecision hold you back from taking advantage of opportunities on and off-campus that employers like to see on resumes (e.g., holding a leadership position). Chances are you will be able to decide upon a career track while building your core workplace skills!

Numerous other studies conducted recently indicate similar results. Therefore, it’s essential for you to develop a plan for how you can acquire your core workplace skills!