

Bulletin Board: Work hard on soft skills

by Maggie_Reed

Soft skills will take you further in the workplace than you might imagine.

When hiring administrative staff, managers are putting more value on soft skills than technical skills.

A new survey found 67 percent of human resource managers polled said they would hire an applicant with strong soft skills whose technical abilities were lacking while only 9 percent would hire someone with strong technical skills but poor interpersonal skills.

One of the main reasons? The overwhelming majority, 93 percent, feel technical skills are easier to teach than soft skills.

The survey was conducted by OfficeTeam, HR.com and the International Association of Administrative Professionals. More than 300 administrative professionals and 400 HR managers were polled.

"The results indicate the increasing complexity of the administrative function," said Sandra P. Chandler, international president of IAAP. "Today's professionals often negotiate with vendors, plan meetings and special events, create presentations and interview and supervise other employees. While office technology skills are very important, excellent interpersonal abilities are invaluable and usually difficult to teach."

When asked what soft skills were most in demand, the response was:

- Organizational skills (87 percent).
- Verbal communication (81 percent).
- Teamwork and collaboration (78 percent).
- Problem solving (60 percent).

- Tact and diplomacy (59 percent).

- Business writing (48 percent).

- Analytical skills (45 percent).

(Multiple responses were permitted.)

Diane Domeyer, executive director of OfficeTeam, said, "The ability to collaborate and build consensus on projects distinguishes top performers."

Chandler added that managers need to work with their support staff to encourage professional growth.

"To help support staff enhance their effectiveness, managers should provide them with the opportunity to attend professional conferences or take relevant courses," she said.

For more information, visit www.officeteam.com, www.iaap-hq.org and www.hr.com.

HOT DEGREES

Business administration degrees top the list of desirable degrees once again. Of the 150 senior executives polled, 39 percent said they would choose a degree in business administration to best prepare for future success.

The same question was asked in surveys, developed by Accountemps, in 1990 and 1996. Although liberal arts was the most popular in 1990, business administration has claimed the top spot since 1996.

When asked which course of study they would follow for success in the business world, the response was (by percent in the years 2007, 1996 and 1990):

- Business administration (39 percent, 49 percent, 28 percent).

- Liberal arts (21 percent, 14 percent, 29 percent).

- Computer science (14 percent, 11 percent, 8 percent).

- Law (4 percent, 5 percent, 5 percent).

- Other/don't know (11 percent, 3 percent, 4 percent).

"The only certainty in today's business environment is change," said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of "Managing Your Career For Dummies."

Messmer added, "Degrees with a broader focus, such as business administration and liberal arts, may be the most attractive as they typically provide a diverse course of study and a focus on critical thinking, which can prepare people for success in a variety of environments."

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