

Defining Soft Skills

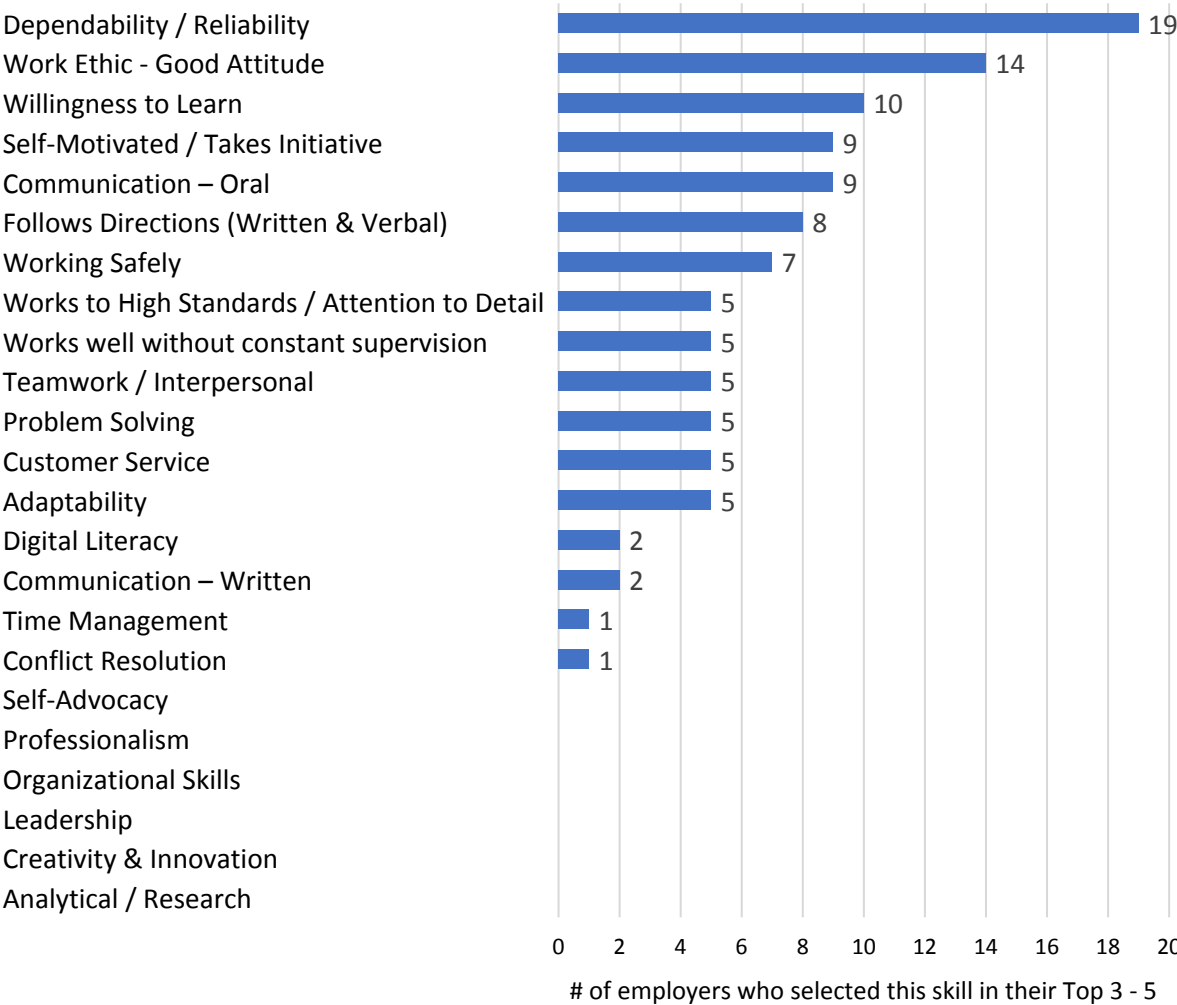
Introduction

In a partnership project between Project READ and the Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin, local employers from the Construction, Manufacturing and Retail sectors were surveyed to determine:

- Which soft skills are the most important for entry-level jobs in their industry?
- What do they mean by the skills they selected – what does this look like in their industry?

Employers were directed to select 3 – 5 skills from a provided list of 23 soft skills. The chart below shows the skills included in the list, and the number of times each soft skill was selected among an employer’s Top 3 – 5. Dependability/Reliability was ranked as the highest priority, selected by 19 employers.

Top Skills Needed in Construction, Manufacturing & Retail



Employer Comments

Employers were also asked the following optional question for each of their Top 3 selected skills:

“Please share how an employee did NOT have this skill. What were they unable to do, and how did it impact your business?”

The employer comments we received are below, with skills listed alphabetically, and sub-categorized by the industry of the employer (Construction, Manufacturing, Retail, or Other Industries).

(Note: Not all skills received comment responses.)

Adaptability

Other Industries

- “Because the employee is at entry level, they will be given a number of different areas of the work so that the manager can see their strengths and weakness in order to see where the training is required.”

Communication – Oral

Manufacturing

- “It's important to communicate, being able to express yourself and be understood. Poor communication can lead to many problems, specifically quality.”
- “Not sure why but communication lacks big time ever since 2020 happened!”
- “Language barriers. It made giving instructions difficult.”

Retail

- “If vehicle concerns are not communicated [from Customer Service staff] to our technicians, it can cost us money and time for tracing issues that could have been easily diagnosed.”

Customer Service

Retail

- “Rather than look for an item or a solution to a customer request, simply replying “No, we don't have that.” In one instance it cost us the sale of a \$1200 item.
- “We had a service advisor who wasn't good at dealing with customers at the service counter. We received negative comments and reviews about her and her interactions. She is no longer with us.”

Dependability

Construction

- “Not showing up for a scheduled workday has a huge impact on our schedule. We pre-plan, schedule materials and have clients aware of the schedule. When someone does not show up, they can delay the project/schedule.”
- “Did not show up to work and didn’t bother calling in to notify the supervisor. It impacted the day because there was 1 person missing that was expected to be there.”
- “New hires sometimes do not show up for their first day. Others show up inconsistently.”

Manufacturing

- “Did not show up at work consistently or call when they were unable to come to work. Makes it difficult to plan workflow and time wasted tracking people down to figure out why they are not at work.”
- “It seems like employees are not dependable anymore. Have a job is like they are doing the employer a favour, no loyalty anymore.”
- “Did not attend work on a regular basis and be punctual. This requires the Supervisor to make alternate plans and impact output.”
- “Don't show up to booked and confirmed interviews. Don't show up to work when job was offered and accepted.”
- “Employee could not arrive on time to work and missed many workdays.”
- “Stating that they can work 40-48 hours in the interview, come in to work and say oh I can only work 3 days a week. Not reliable or dependable.”
- “If employees don't show up to work regularly, they won't learn and progress as fast as they should.”
- “Workers who did not show up and didn't call. Or came late to work. Impacted production and team morale.”

Retail

- “Not arriving on time for work, leaving early from work or simply not showing up for work. Many tasks simply do not get done and overall sales are affected by fewer staff having to do more in their day, while some tasks simply remain undone.”

Other Industries

- “The employee needs to be on the job when required in order to be trained or do the required job function that the company needs to have done.”
- “Didn't show up on time for start of shift or calls in frequently to take time off. Impacts team as they have to make up for being short a person on the shift.”

Follows Directions (Written & Verbal)

Manufacturing

- “Said they understood the directions and then did not follow them. Had written instructions and didn't think they needed to follow them. Resulted in quality issues (bad parts being made) and safety issues (equipment damage).”
- “Did not follow instructions from trainer. This resulted in training taking longer or being unsuccessful.”

Other Industries

- “The employer knows the whole picture of the operation of the business and needs the employee to follow the instructions that have been given. They cannot just do the job the way they think it should be done or to their standards because they don't have the big picture.”
- “Didn't stack a skid properly and put allergens close to other food products. Resulted in returned product and lost business for the company.”

Problem Solving

Manufacturing

- “Problem solving is an integral part of our custom fabrication.”

Teamwork / Interpersonal

Manufacturing

- “Conflict between the new hire and their trainer, didn't want to listen caused issues with product quality and time.”

Willingness to Learn

Construction

- “Employee came with a set of skillsets and refused to adopt and adapt to other ways of doing things. Unable to deliver the expected results. Business has been investing in the learning and development of employee, but the latter remained fixed to own way of working.”
- “Unable to retain information they were taught. It’s difficult to get a good flow at work when you constantly need to stop and re-teach a skill set every other day.”

Manufacturing

- “Usually everyone has the capacity and willingness to learn. In some cases learning disabilities or perhaps mental health issues can create anxiety for the employee, making them incapable to learn (even if temporarily). We accommodate as much as possible, but we wish that they would be trained already to be able to handle changes, instructions, or at least come to us with a profile of who they are and how they would learn best. We find that throughout the process of trying to figure out in what way we can accommodate, we're going through trial and error until we figure out what the best method is. However, we are not professionals in this field, so it would be good to receive something like an IEP in schools on how to best support employees with disabilities and or anxiety in the workplace.”
- “If someone comes in with an attitude of "I already know everything" they won't learn and excel with how we do things here.”

Work Ethic – Good Attitude

Construction

- “Employee's lack of good attitude resulted in team conflicts and toxic environment. Tried to resolve and gave several chances to change with no positive results. Consequence - Termination of employee. Impact - Lost time and resources put towards training of employee - Had to replace.”
- “Lazy. Always on the phone and going out for multiple smoke breaks. They were not able to keep up with the expected pace and as a result to job fell behind schedule.”
- “Generally skill 1 [Dependability] and skill 2 [Work Ethic] go hand in hand, meaning if they are dependable and reliable they also have a good work ethic and good attitude.”
- “Not getting along with others that you spend all day with does not set the mood and brings the others down.”

Manufacturing

- “It is hard to find people with good work ethic they want high pay but don't want to actually work!”
- “New employees need to have a good attitude so other employees will want to work with them and teach them.”
- “Unable to work at a steady pace throughout the shift and stay busy. Creates difficulty with the team and productivity is reduced.”

Retail

- “Accepting a less than acceptable result when doing tasks that they have been assigned such as creating merchandise displays to showcase promotional items. The impact is lost sales opportunities as customers do not find what they are looking for.”

Working Safely

Construction

- “Employee did not follow the procedures by wearing the necessary PPE, slipped and fell and had serious injury. Positive Impact: Heightened awareness of safety and lead to reinforcement of procedures, etc. Other Impact: Had to find temporary replacement for the employee, etc.”
- “Working unsafely can cause big concern for themselves and the others in the company.”

Manufacturing

- “Not paying attention to Forklifts in the area can cause a serious injury.”
- “When an employee is unable to come to work it makes it difficult to plan workflow.”
- “Not paying attention to surroundings is a big one!”

Other Industries

- “Did not follow safety protocol, cut corners resulting in injury. Results in personal injury to employee and lost time, cost to business, puts pressure on team members to do extra work while employee recovers.”

Works to High Standards / Attention to Detail

Retail

- “Customers appreciate being WOWED! When they are picking up their new vehicles, they are looking for value in the money they just spent. A dirty/damaged vehicle isn't appreciated.”

Additional Feedback

Employers were asked: “Do you have any other feedback for us about soft skills?”

Here are their responses:

- “Need to ask questions when you don't know. Need to keep busy without always being monitored.”
- “We are willing to train a candidate that is willing to learn. In our workplace we strive to have team members cross-trained in different positions so a person who is willing to learn can progress.”
- “Many younger workers simply do not have writing and verbal communication skills. While many things can be accomplished with a computer, verbal communication with customers and being able to take notes in a legible, understandable format are definitely important. It may seem "old school" but simple things like cursive writing and grammar in school are needed when we watch employees struggle to even print a note for reference to an order or customer request.”
- “The school system has let these future employees down. They are lacking basic math and English skills, common social skills.”