



Career Readiness
Courseware &
Credentials

SOFT SKILLS

THE SECRET SAUCE FOR MODERN WORKPLACE SUCCESS

WIN LEARNING
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ABOUT WIN LEARNING

WIN Learning is a leading partner with workforce and education entities in strengthening the digital ecosystem providing individuals with sustaining skills for their future.

INTRODUCTION

In today's work environment, while technology and technical expertise change at lightning speed, one certainty remains: soft skills endure, and students, job seekers, and employees must cultivate them to secure employment and thrive in their careers.

"Soft skills" are often referred to as professional skills, employability skills, durable skills, work habits, emotional intelligence, and human capabilities. Employers define these foundational work readiness skills as dependability, work ethic, conflict resolution, customer relations, teamwork, and critical thinking. Together they create habits of working that are rooted in interpersonal relationships and emotional intelligence.

According to America Succeeds, "durable skills," which include soft skills, are often overlooked compared to technical skills. However, many employers are now prioritizing them up to four times more than technical skills when evaluating candidates, signaling a significant shift for employers (America Succeeds, 2021). For example, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 91% of employers look for strong communication skills, while 81% value teamwork abilities (NACE, 2023). Job seekers who demonstrate these skills are differentiated applicants in a highly competitive job market.

Soft or durable skills are not exclusive to management or leadership roles; they are critical for success in every role of an organization. Especially for those entering the workforce or switching careers, highly developed soft skills can be a major advantage throughout the job application process. For example, effective communication, collaboration, punctuality, and professionalism would certainly be noticed by a hiring manager.

In addition, research shows that employees with high emotional intelligence perform better, manage stress more effectively, and experience greater job satisfaction, leading to enhanced productivity and a collaborative work environment. Moreover, these employees tend to have less job mobility, leading to higher employee retention rates.

"In an era when technical skills are evolving at an unprecedented pace, there is an important set of durable skills that last a lifetime and power entire careers. Employers seek these skills nearly four times (3.8X) more frequently than the top five technical or hard skills."

America Succeeds, The High Demand for Durable Skills, 2021

Soft skills are also essential for professional growth. A LinkedIn study found that 92% of hiring professionals consider soft skills equally or more important than hard skills for career progression (LinkedIn, 2019). Collaboration skills, adaptability, and critical thinking are crucial for taking on greater responsibility.

As rapid technological advancements reshape industries, ability to adapt and engage in continuous learning have emerged as top requirements for future employment. Soft skills enable employees to thrive in dynamic environments.

WIN's Soft Skills solution addresses this demand by equipping students, job seekers, and employees with supporting skills such as goal setting, adaptability, growth mindset, data-based decision making, systems awareness, and design thinking, ensuring that they thrive in today's job market. Built on thorough research and aligned with industry standards, the curriculum draws from recognized sources like O*NET® (Occupational Information Network) and the Essential Skills Framework (EFF) to meet employer needs.

The WIN solution is a career-contextualized, competency-based approach to validating the ability of students and job seekers to apply these foundational soft skills on the job. It indicates readiness for work and is not a career interest, career exploration, aptitude, or personality test. To validate the skills acquired, WIN offers proctored assessments leading to the National Work Readiness Credential – Soft Skills.

THE SOFT SKILLS ADVANTAGE

As stated, soft skills have become essential for enhancing employability and career satisfaction. By developing interpersonal abilities, job seekers can stand out in the hiring process and demonstrate their potential to thrive in diverse work environments. Employees with well-developed soft skills are more likely to maintain employment, receive promotions, provide higher levels of customer service, and foster collaborative environments. As workplaces continue to change, characterized by remote work, new technologies, and cross-functional teams, the demand for employees who can effectively communicate, collaborate, and adapt has never been higher.

ENHANCED EMPLOYABILITY

Soft skills play a crucial role in helping job seekers secure and maintain employment, as they are valued by employers in today's competitive job market. Out of the top 15 skills that will be needed by 2025, 67% are identified as soft skills (World Economic Forum, 2020). By cultivating these interpersonal skills, job seekers can differentiate themselves during the application and hiring process and demonstrate their capacity to thrive in diverse work environments, ultimately enhancing their employability. For instance, strong communication skills enable candidates to articulate their thoughts clearly during interviews, fostering a positive impression on hiring managers.

Real-world examples of businesses that prioritize soft skills include Southwest Airlines, which is known for its strong customer service and values qualities like communication and teamwork; Google, which actively seeks candidates who excel in teamwork; and retail companies like Nordstrom, which emphasizes strong interpersonal skills, enthusiasm, and a customer-focused attitude over specific experience. These cases highlight that soft skills not only boost job seekers' employability but also play a crucial role in ensuring their long-term success in the workplace.

THE IMPACT OF SOFT SKILLS ON JOB PERFORMANCE AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The relationship between soft skills and job performance has grown significantly as strong interpersonal abilities are critical for individual success and organizational effectiveness. Research indicates that employees who possess well-developed soft skills are more likely to work effectively with colleagues, foster a positive customer experience, and contribute to overall business performance.

Soft skills can be vital for those entering the workforce or switching careers as they lay the foundation for new workplace interactions and contribute to effective and engaged organizational culture. These skills enable employees to collaborate successfully with colleagues and supervisors. Entry-level employees with strong soft skills communicate with co-workers and customers, navigate diverse work environments, and problem-solve more effectively.

Moreover, soft skills are essential for career progression. Employees who cultivate these skills are more likely to stand out, attract positive attention from management, and open doors to advancement opportunities. A strong foundation of soft skills paves the way for employees to grow into managerial and leadership roles.

Soft skills encompass a wide range of personal attributes that enhance interactions and communication with others as well as management of self-emotions and actions. Soft skills include: communication, teamwork, problem solving, professionalism, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.

1. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is foundational to job performance. Employees who can articulate their thoughts clearly contribute to better team dynamics and project outcomes. A study by the McKinsey Global Institute found that strong communication skills are among the top three skills sought by employers globally (McKinsey Global Institute, 2020). In high-stakes industries such as healthcare, clear communication can be a matter of life and death. Teams that communicate effectively reduce the likelihood of errors and improve patient outcomes.

2. PROMOTING TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION

Soft skills facilitate teamwork by fostering a collaborative environment where diverse ideas and perspectives are valued. Research by the Institute for the Future indicates that the ability to work effectively in teams is becoming crucial as organizations become more cross-functional and project-based (Institute for the Future, 2020). Companies like Google emphasize teamwork and collaboration in their culture. Their use of cross-functional teams to solve complex problems has led to innovative products, demonstrating how soft skills enhance team performance.

3. THINKING CRITICALLY AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

The National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) "Job Outlook" report consistently highlights problem solving and critical thinking as top skills employers seek in new graduates, emphasizing their necessity across various entry-level positions (NACE, 2023). Customer service roles often encounter dissatisfied customers or unexpected issues. Being able to think critically allows them to assess the situation quickly, identify the problem, and propose effective solutions, enhancing customer satisfaction and retention.

4. CONVEYING PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism is essential for fostering a productive and trustworthy workplace. Building trust through punctuality, dependability, and accountability sets a reliable foundation for team dynamics. Demonstrating integrity, initiative, and a strong work ethic reflects a commitment to both personal and organizational success. Even during the hiring process, job seekers that demonstrate professionalism signal to employers that they are serious, committed, and capable of contributing positively to the company culture.

THE GROWING DEMAND FOR SOFT SKILLS: NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF WORK

As employers increasingly prioritize strong soft skills, there is a growing need for targeted training programs that enhance skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, professionalism, and communication, which are crucial for navigating the complexities of remote work and technological advancements. As organizations seek innovation and agility, competencies like creativity and collaboration have become essential for adapting to evolving market demands.

“Today’s workforce must not only meet mathematical, reading, and comprehension skills, but must demonstrate soft skills as well.”

Michael O. Williams, Michelin
Workforce Development
Coordinator, South Carolina

Companies such as Zappos, Chick-fil-A and Starbucks prioritize customer service and interpersonal skills in their hiring process, recognizing that these qualities foster customer loyalty, boost sales, and enhance brand reputation. The Harvard Business Review reports that employees with strong soft skills are 12 times more likely to engage customers, increasing the company’s overall profitability (Psico-smart, 2024). Investment in soft skills and learning opportunities for employees lead to higher retention rates, increased employee engagement and internal mobility.

CHANGING WORKFORCE DYNAMICS

The nature of work has transformed significantly with the rise of digital and AI technologies and remote work arrangements. As organizations strive for innovation and agility, soft skills become critical in navigating complex interpersonal and team dynamics as well as interacting with the new technologies. Shell, one of the world’s largest international companies, values soft skills as employees work from different countries and cultures across the globe. According to Debbie Foley, head of global marketing for employer brand and talent attraction at Shell, “Good communication skills are thus vital to our success” (McLaren, 2019, para. 7).

Remote work also relies heavily on digital tools, making it imperative for employees to navigate virtual interactions with sensitivity and clarity. Additionally, problem solving and adaptability are vital as remote workers face unique challenges, such as varying time zones and technology issues.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has increased the demand for soft skills, as software takes on more routine work tasks and data analysis. While AI excels in automation and complex computations, it lacks emotional intelligence, creativity, and critical thinking. This is why responsible use of AI calls for “a human in the middle.” In this way, people will always be needed to interpret the work of artificial intelligence using their soft skills to analyze context. As organizations adopt AI, workers will need to demonstrate adaptability and innovation by adopting new tools and workflows.

THE POWER OF SOFT SKILLS IN EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND BUSINESS SUCCESS

Organizations that prioritize soft skills often experience enhanced productivity, improved employee engagement, and increased customer satisfaction, all of which contribute positively to a company’s success (Lobosco, 2019). By developing essential interpersonal competencies, organizations can improve team cohesion, increase productivity, and drive innovation, ultimately leading to better business outcomes and a more resilient and adaptable workforce.

Employees with strong soft skills are more adept at navigating challenges, adapting to change, and communicating effectively with colleagues and clients. Research shows that companies with high emotional intelligence among their workforce outperform their competitors by 20% (TalentSmart, 2020). When employees have strong soft skills, they can share ideas effectively, provide constructive feedback, and resolve conflicts, creating a more engaged and productive work environment. These skills also enhance teamwork; individuals who empathize with their colleagues and practice active listening contribute to a culture of trust, inclusivity, and mutual support.

Workplaces that develop soft skills often enjoy higher employee morale and lower turnover rates. Organizations with positive cultures attract top talent and retain employees longer. According to Gallup, companies with engaged employees see a 21% increase in profitability (Gallup, 2021).

Soft skills are also vital in customer interactions. Employees with strong interpersonal skills can build rapport with customers, leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty. A study by the Institute for Corporate Productivity found that organizations prioritizing soft skills experience 30% higher customer satisfaction ratings (i4cp, 2020).

By investing in the development of these soft skills, companies can foster greater team cohesion, enhance productivity, and drive innovation, leading to improved business outcomes and a more resilient workforce.

O*NET CONTENT MODEL: THE EVOLVING IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS ACROSS CAREER LEVELS

Soft skills are also an important part of the O*NET® Content Model, a framework that identifies the most essential types of occupational information including workforce characteristics, requirements, and experience. O*NET® categorizes occupations by Job Zone, which identifies the required education, experience, and training for a job. Soft skills such as professionalism, communication, collaboration, and problem solving are included throughout the occupation descriptions across the continuum of Job Zones.

O*NET®	Occupation	Soft Skills
Job Zone 1	Fast Food and Counter Workers	Customer relations Active listening Punctuality
Job Zone 2	Cargo and Freight Agents	Effective speaking Organizational skills Common technology tools
Job Zone 3	Commercial Pilots	Effective listening Adaptability Systems awareness
Job Zone 4	Accountants	Effective writing Interpret data Systems awareness
Job Zone 5	Chief Executives	Strategic communication Decision making Business acumen

PREPARING JOB SEEKERS AND EMPLOYEES FOR THE MODERN JOB MARKET: WIN'S SOFT SKILLS SOLUTION

Soft skills are critical for success in nearly every profession. As recent studies indicate, employers prioritize soft skills as a primary factor in hiring decisions, often valuing them equally or more than technical abilities. Workplaces have become more collaborative and diverse and the ability to work well with others and adapt to change is paramount to the success of the employee and the organization.

WIN's Soft Skills solution is designed to equip job seekers and employees with the essential interpersonal skills needed such as communication, leadership, professionalism, and teamwork, ensuring that they thrive in today's dynamic job market.

WIN's Soft Skills solution is built on a foundation of thorough research and alignment with industry standards. The curriculum draws from multiple nationally recognized sources, including O*NET® and the Essential Skills Framework (EFF). This ensures that the content is relevant and tailored to the specific needs of employers across various sectors.

The Employment and Training Administration (ETA), part of the U.S. Department of Labor, developed the Building Blocks Competency Model as a framework to identify the competencies required for effective job performance across various industries. This model provides a structured approach to workforce development to align their programs with the skills and abilities that employers seek.

The model is built with Personal Effectiveness as the foundation in Tier 1, including competencies such as interpersonal skills, integrity, professionalism, initiative, dependability, growth mindset, and adaptability. Tier 2 is Academic, which includes academic skills as well as soft skills such as analytical thinking. Tier 3 is Workplace, which includes competencies such as teamwork, problem solving, business fundamentals, and organization.



Source: Adapted from <https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/competency-models/building-blocks-model.aspx>

WIN's Soft Skills solution targets competency development at these three tiers which serve as the foundational building blocks for the rest of the pyramid. Mastering these competencies affords job seekers the fundamental, transferable skills necessary for career success at any level, in any industry.

The WIN Soft Skills Courseware consists of four modules and employs a scaffolding strategy that builds on foundational skills. Participants engage in progressive learning experiences that reinforce their understanding and application of soft skills in various contexts. This structured approach not only enhances retention but also enables learners to transfer skills to real-world situations effectively. The four modules include:

- Communicating Effectively
- Conveying Professionalism
- Promoting Teamwork and Collaboration
- Thinking Critically and Solving Problems

Along with the interactive digital curriculum, Soft Skills Courseware provides practical classroom activities and a culminating capstone project to support the development of foundational interpersonal skills and positive work habits.

To validate the soft skills acquired through the program, WIN offers proctored assessments culminating in the National Work Readiness Credential – Soft Skills. The credential not only provides a benchmark for employees but also serves as a digital credential that can be easily shared on multiple digital platforms and with prospective employers, enhancing job seekers' marketability.

A distinguishing feature of the assessment is its innovative two-part approach. Test takers are required to select both the best and worst choices in real-world scenarios, promoting critical thinking and a deeper understanding of each skill. This method ensures that participants can effectively navigate complex workplace dynamics, preparing them for the challenges they will face in their careers.



As the job market continues to evolve, the demand for well-rounded employees equipped with essential soft skills has never been greater. WIN's Soft Skills solution provides a comprehensive framework to prepare individuals for the challenges of today's workplace. Through a research-based curriculum, validated assessment, and innovative learning approaches, WIN empowers job seekers and employees to not only meet but exceed the expectations of employers.

Investing in soft skills training is an investment in the future—one that leads to improved job performance, career advancement, and greater organizational success. With WIN, employees are not just ready for the job market; they are poised to excel in it.

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