

# Top soft skills for jobseekers

THE PANDEMIC HAS SHOWN EMPLOYERS VALUE STAFF WHO CAN ADAPT AND WORK INDEPENDENTLY

## CAREERS

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**S**oft skills have become increasingly valuable to employers since the pandemic began, but showcasing them during the application process is not always easy.

Unlike industry-specific technical ability that is often explicitly gained through education and training, soft skills are personal attributes and can be difficult to self-identify, let alone articulate in a resume or interview.

So, what soft skills do employers want and how do you amplify them to a potential boss?

### COMMUNICATION

A recent survey of 105 Australian employers by recruitment agency Drake International found 85 per cent believed communication skills were critical to being productive while working remotely – the strongest result in the poll.

Demand for communication skills is not unique to the COVID-19 employment landscape, but people with this skill have typically worked more effectively during the pandemic, while those without such skills were more likely to have been let go, Drake International chief executive Christopher Ouizeman says.

"Communication is pretty easy to demonstrate on a resume because it's about being clear and articulate and not having any ambiguity in terms of what you are saying," he says.

"You show you understand what the job entails and you tailor your application accordingly. We can tell (if a jobseeker has) communication skills by the written aptitude on their resume – no spelling errors and it's a professional document."

### WORK ETHIC

Almost half (48 per cent) of employers believe a strong work ethic is

critical to being productive while working remotely, according to the Drake survey.

Ouizeman says jobseekers can highlight this skill by including in their resume an example of how they have been flexible in working to meet the demands of their current or previous role. "We would check that with reference checks but never be afraid to state that in your document," he says.

### ADAPTABILITY

This is considered a critical skill by 39 per cent of employers. Ouizeman says jobseekers should include one or two examples of times they have demonstrated adaptability in their resume's work experience section – underneath where they have listed their job title, employer, time frame and a brief description of the role.

"For example, due to COVID there were some initiatives you introduced or you adapted your working style," he says.

### TIME MANAGEMENT

This is also considered a critical skill by about two in five employers (39 per cent). Ouizeman says if time management is in the key selection criteria of the job ad, applicants should provide specific examples of how they have managed their time, and how that has benefited the company.

"Do you use some kind of software, such as the Outlook calendar? How can you do more with less?" he says.

"You may have been given a week to complete a task but, due to time management, you were able to complete it in three days."

### SELF LEADERSHIP

Employers search for self leaders – workers who are driven from the inside out, leadership specialist Michelle Bihary says. "Self leaders shine due to self-awareness, lifelong learning, openness to feedback and taking personal responsibility," she says. "This makes them easy to work with as they are not defensive or

reactive." The author of *Leading Above the Line* says jobseekers can highlight this skill in a job application by explaining how the role fits in with their goals, and acknowledging areas of future growth.

"Give examples of lifelong learning and openness to feedback," she says. "Reflect on examples of being proactive, when it might have been easy to be reactive."

### EMPATHY

Cholena Orr, who is responsible for early career talent at ANZ bank globally, says empathy is one of the key attributes ANZ interviewers look for when hiring graduates.

She recommends jobseekers demonstrate empathy by answering questions in a way that highlights that

they considered their customer or colleague's point of view.

"They are looking for the best evidence to predict whether you will be successful in the job and the environment," Orr says.

### CURIOSITY

ANZ – which attracted 10,000 applicants to its 2021 graduate program and hired 85 – also lists curiosity as a sought-after soft skill.

Orr says interviewers look out for applicants who ask great questions.

"You can really see someone is more likely to be curious if they have taken the time to not just look at the website, but ... perhaps look at financial reviews or at YouTube clips we share on ANZ's site, or of our CEO talking at various events," she says.

Poseidon Sea Pilots director Steve Pelecanos.  
Picture: Richard Walker



## Don't be all at sea on the job

The role of a marine pilot requires many technical skills, but they are not very useful without the soft skills to match.

Marine pilots are the mariners who take over a ship when it reaches their port.

The captain brings it across the seas but it's the marine pilot who "parks" it.

Poseidon Sea Pilots director Steve Pelecanos says marine pilots must hold a master mariner qualification, and therefore have at least 10 years' experience at sea.

To be employed by Poseidon, they then go through an intensive training program.

"It's six months before we let you on a ship, then there is follow-up training for typically three years," he says.

Pelecanos, an ex-marine pilot himself, says they also need soft skills, such as good communication and problem solving, and the ability to work in diverse groups, as bridge teams of ships typically comprise a variety of nationalities.

They must also be able to think clearly in a stressful environment.

"Part of the selection process includes putting candidates in a ship simulator and putting them through a number of scenarios to see how they respond and how they listen," Pelecanos says.

Poseidon is hiring marine pilots, launch crew, dispatch officers and launch crew trainees to work at the Port of Brisbane. While most roles require experience, the traineeships are open to anyone.