

## Why Are Soft Skills Harder to Prove than Hard Skills?

Research study after research study shows that soft, employability skills are the power behind your career. They're the engine that drives you forward to success.

However, soft skills are hard to measure and have been under-emphasized when compared to the important role they play in your life. Let's define hard and soft skills:

**"Hard skills" concern the ability to do a specific task.** They require specialized knowledge and technical abilities. The outcome of hard skills is immediately obvious because one or more of your five senses tells you the result—you can see, smell, taste, touch, or hear the outcome.

- A delicious dessert you prepare will have a fabulous smell and scrumptious taste.
- A haircut will look good, or bad, to a client who inspects it in a mirror.
- A car engine will rattle, or purr, to your ears after you make a repair.
- A baby will relax and stop crying after your gentle touch.



**Soft skills are more about your personal behavior or thinking.** They concern "how" you do what you do. For example, you may be able to solve a problem quickly and perfectly (the hard-skills result). But if you are difficult to work with, poor at communicating, and defensive when receiving feedback, your poor soft skills will be what coworkers remember, and this behavior is likely to outweigh the value of the problem you solved.

**LinkedIn's 2019 recommendations.** Each year, LinkedIn provides a list of the soft skills employers say are lacking in job applicants. For 2019, these soft skills are:

- Creativity - Organizations need people who can come up with good ideas that work.
- Persuasion - Good communication skills are needed for persuading or motivating others.
- Collaboration - Teamwork requires working collaboratively with coworkers.
- Adaptability - Being flexible and able to make changes shows you are adaptable.
- Time Management - Setting priorities and managing your schedule and deadlines are keys to time management.

**Action:** Of the five soft skills identified as important in 2019 by LinkedIn, which are your strengths and which do you need to improve? How can you improve the skills that need attention?

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*To the instructor:* By emphasizing the powerful soft skills, you help students advance their career beyond other applicants who are less well prepared for employment. You can use *Job Ready Career Skills* and *It's for Real Workplace Ethics* as individualized curriculums or in directed-learning environments.

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