


Teamwork: The Most Vital ‘Soft Skill’?



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 JOB SKILLS



You hear a lot about “soft skills” as a vital part of any job. But what are the most important soft skills to have?

According to CompTIA’s 2015 “[International Technology Adoption and Workforce Trends](#)” study, the majority of surveyed tech executives rated teamwork as the most important soft skill for tech pros.

That represents a significant shift in hiring priorities. Three years ago, when CompTIA conducted its last survey, the most desirable soft skill was work ethic, followed by motivation and initiative, and then customer service. Now teamwork tops the list (having jumped six spots), followed by flexibility and adaptability, and then customer service. If there’s a main takeaway here, it’s that all of these are dependent on how well you communicate with others.

An aptitude for teamwork can also determine whether you land a job. Over the past couple years, Rob Byron, a partner-manager in [WinterWyman’s](#) Information Technology Search division, has seen a bump in requests for collaborators. “Most of my clients are putting that as their top required soft skill,” he said, “and it’s the same as teamwork.”

For some people, teamwork means checking off the boxes in a very project-oriented, linear way, with everyone doing their little bit for the collective. But more companies are defining teamwork in a more cross-functional and relational way; it’s all about how you approach people in order to solve a problem. The trick is to think holistically about the other people involved in the discussion—not only their roles within the organization, but also how they go about their jobs—and adapt accordingly, no matter what the stage of a particular project.

James Stanger, senior director and [product manager](#) of CompTIA’s Skills Certification Group, said the biggest reason for the rising focus on teamwork is the [cloud](#). “The major driver is the fact that we’re using more managed services in IT than ever before,” he said, “and we’re using more third-party, [cloud](#)-based solutions, which means we have to work together and communicate on a different level than we ever have before.”

Both he and Byron see the generational shift as another significant driver. In addition to more Millennials, a lot of different generations currently populate the workforce. Research shows that, while Baby Boomers veer toward hierarchal organizations, Gen Xers are suspicious of hierarchy, and Millennials have a higher level of self-involvement (hence the “selfie generation” moniker).

These age demographics have an impact on management, compelling executives and owners to look for workers who can speak and listen to each other regardless of when they were born.

According to Stanger, another major driver is the fact that technology has become more ubiquitous: “What used to be a purview of just a CIO and their minions is now technology that’s used directly by everybody.”

Byron added that, in the not-too-distant past, teamwork had much lower status. “Now that technology is integrated into every part of an organization,” he said, “the ability to work across departments and finesse multi-disciplined teams is critical.” These days, you have to prove that you know how to solve a complex problem by coordinating with others, following up properly, managing your time and reading between the lines.

“Tell me some good stories,” said Stanger. “If a hiring manager is a good listener they can tell pretty quickly if you’re a finger-pointer, or somebody who’s able to think things through but not much of a doer.” Candidates should know how to move a process along without stepping on anyone’s toes, he added.

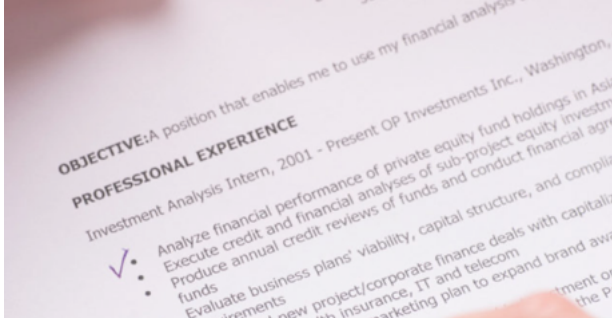
Byron advised candidates to give examples: “Talk about the time you partnered with the business to solve a problem and how and who you worked with as a team to find a solution. Go through it step by step.”

And last but certainly not least: Good teamwork just makes the workday easier, especially in the pressure-cooker environment of many tech companies.

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Elisabeth Greenbaum Kasson is a Los Angeles-based writer and editor who covers the collision of culture, technology and business. Her work appears in the Los Angeles Times, Documentary magazine, Los Angeles magazine, HR Magazine and other venues.

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