

Top Employers Say Millennials Need These 4 Skills in 2017



Caroline Beaton Under 30 ⓘ
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Millennial job seekers receive conflicting messages from employers and career advisors: on the one hand, we're told robots will someday replace our technical skills, so why bother. On the other hand, we're told hard skills are a hot commodity.

Which is it?

Employers value technical skills, to be sure. But I asked more than 100 top HR managers, recruiters and CEOs which was more important for entry-level job seekers, and nearly all of them said soft skills. "We look for candidates with a solid foundation of soft skills and trust so that the rest can be built upon it," Emóke Starr, Head of HR at [Prezi](#), said. Likewise, [Wayfair's](#) Global Senior Director of Talent Management and Employee Development, Marcy Axelrad, said that Wayfair often doesn't require entry-level candidates to "have the exact experience in the area for which she/he is interviewing."

Traditional soft skills include leadership, communication and collaboration. Millennials tend to excel at these or, at the very least, know they should. **But there are four additional soft skills that are under-discussed, rare and essential in the modern workforce:** 



Source: Pexels

1) Attention

“Focus is the new IQ,” says Georgetown computer science professor [Cal Newport](#). Technology has increased automation and decreased our focus, creating a high demand for and short supply of workers capable of concentrating.

Attention is conscientiousness. Jake Rozmaryn, CEO of [Eco Branding](#), told me that his firm sees lots of “careless typing and formatting errors in millennial applicant writing and work samples, cover letters, resumes, etc.”

It’s also time management and follow-through. Executive Recruiter [Carolyn Thompson](#) said she’s seen “an increase in people struggling to manage time and prioritize.” Lindsey Dole, Vice President of People at [Updater](#), notes that “very few” entry-level candidates have work experience on projects or internships that have allowed them to “own and execute on a deliverable from beginning to end” – a must-have skill in startup environments like Updater’s.

The catch-22 for millennials, of course, is they need to show proof of follow-through before employers will give them a chance to exercise follow-through. While most millennials will be in assistant roles throughout and for several years after college, they can develop and showcase attention skills by pursuing side projects. Even if the project is small in scale, demonstrating that “you can own initiatives from beginning to end,” as Dole put it, can prepare millennials for larger-scale, company-sponsored projects.

2) More than college

Graduating from college used to be so essential for a promising career that it trumped all other skills. But I believe the [economic importance of a college education](#) has finally peaked. With college enrollments higher than they’ve ever been, bachelor’s degrees may now be less important in part because they’re less rare. College education isn’t the simple recruiting filter it used to be.

Millennials, educators and companies are beginning to see higher education as an inefficient, inadequate and expensive option for some career paths. While universities prepare students well for academia, memorizing, position writing and the sciences, [Badger Maps](#) CEO Steve Benson believes that “our education system has effectively failed them in terms of preparing them for careers in business.”

For instance, most entry-level business jobs involve a customer-facing component, but few colleges offer classes preparing students for sales, customer support or client relationships. In turn, recent grads who pursue business feel unprepared and out of place, says Benson. “It’s almost like we spent 20 years teaching them track and field events and now that they’re ‘grown up’, we toss them in the deep end of a pool and ask them to swim.”

This is why curiosity and commitment, not college, will be among the most important skills for millennials in 2017 and beyond. Will Tjernlund, CEO of [Goat Consulting](#), told me that recent college grads do not have the skills he needs, “so I know I must hire someone who is still willing to learn after they graduate college.” Five years ago, “it was unimaginable for a top management consulting firm to hire any consultant without a top tier education,” Deniz Sasal, founder of [The Career Mastery](#) said. “Now, however, that criterion is pushed down the list.”

3) Agility

According to Emőke Starr, of Prezi, technology and engineering “change so quickly that by the time one becomes an ‘expert’ at something, it’s time to learn something new.” This is why

Jeff Vjungco, Vice President of Global Talent at [Adobe](#), believes that “having high IQ or hard skills alone isn’t sufficient” in today’s workplace.

To adapt to the rapidly-changing demands of modern work, millennials need agility. In a phrase, agility is the ability to overcome. Beth Perkins, Talent Acquisition Manager at [Delphic Digital](#), has noticed that millennials often “expect things to go their way” and, if they don’t, “move on rather than sticking it out and finding a solution.” Indeed, of all skills that millennial job candidates tend to lack, Stephen Twomey, Founder [MasterMind DBS](#), says that inability to overcome setbacks is “the number one issue.”

Agility is “not getting stumped at an early stage,” says Anna Crowe, CEO of [Crowe PR](#). Instead it’s “here’s plan B and C to get us where we need to be.” Adobe’s version of agility is ‘athleticism’: individuals who demonstrate resourcefulness, goals-driven behavior, team player mentality and relentlessness.” For Adobe’s Vjungco, agility is not just capability but also **copability**:

“ Copability is your expertise under pressure. Do you remain calm, work through it, or freak out? In tech, things are always changing – we look for someone who can change directions quickly and effortlessly.

To develop agility, make grit the theme of your track record. “If you can find grit in their story, such as having been told no or that they’re not good enough, that turns into a soft personality trait I’m looking for,” said Nick Powills, Founder and CEO of [No Limit Agency](#).

4) Humility

Not taking yourself too seriously, admitting when you don’t know stuff and asking for help when you need it are some of the most advanced skills of all. In the digital age, it’s never been so easy to inflate your successes and white-lie your way to and through a job.

David Wachsman of Wachsman PR emailed me about an entry-level applicant botching an interview. When asked what her ideal salary would be, she responded, crossing her arms and leaning back in her chair, “Well, what can **you** do for me?”

Ross Vierra, CEO of [Axis Global Enterprises](#), remembers an engineering student with no work experience who said at the beginning of his first interview, “Sir, I am looking for 160K a year, car allowance, full benefits, a 401K, and I have a month trip coming up to Europe coming up in three months, and would like six weeks off a year.”

Unfortunately, these stories are common. Founder and CEO of [Schoolinks](#), Katie Fang, sums, “Too often I speak with candidates who walk in with a list of demands a mile long, but no experience to justify their desires.” She suggests figuring out how much you’re actually worth to hiring managers, not just what you think you’re worth. “You may in fact be worth your list of demands, eventually,” said Fang. “But until your resume and work history proves it, stay humble.”

On a day-to-day scale, people who think they know everything aren’t trainable, nor are they good collaborators. Admitting you’re a beginner, over and over again, takes practice. It’s also our only hope of actually advancing.

Caroline Beaton is a workplace psychology journalist. [Get her full-text articles delivered straight to your inbox.](#)