

# Soft Skills at Work: Good workers know it's about the job, not about 'me'

By MARCIA HALL, For The Capital  
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"Ask not what your employer can do for you. Ask what you can do for your employer."

What better way to describe what job seekers need to do to get and keep a job than this adaptation of the famous quotation by President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address.

I heard it from Jane Ramsay, owner of Snap Fitness 24/7 in Millersville, when I visited her to talk about soft skills she values. Snap Fitness, a nationwide franchise, is a 24-hour coed fitness center that has high-end equipment.

"I hire for attitude first and aptitude second," Jane told me.

The day I met with Jane, her hiring philosophy was evident by the way she greeted her customers as they came in and out of Snap Fitness. Jane knows them by name and the welcoming atmosphere is one reason her customers enjoy being there.

With students graduating and looking for work, I asked Jane what she believes is important for job seekers to demonstrate during the interview and in the workplace. She started with the reality every job seeker faces today.

"I feel this strained economy has put a much needed shift in the employer/employee relationship," Jane said. "For many years, we lost sight of the real reason jobs are created and fulfilled. It used to be jobs and careers were meaningful. Then the 'Me' generation came along and it seemed that folks only looked for positions that gave 'them' the most return, the corner office, the yearly bonuses, even if they didn't produce."

She continued, "Now the economy has shifted back to where businesses are hanging on for dear life and every employee must realize again that they are hired for a reason - to help fulfill the company's mission and goals. The ones who are going to get the jobs will be the ones that not only show a real interest in the interview, but on the job as well."

Jane believes that employers need to provide the necessary tools and training, but that employees must be willing to be engaged and give it their all each day.

"If we take care of the customers every day, the customers will take care of us," she said. "I tell my new hires, 'From this point forward, everything about this position is about and for the customer. From the time we arrive to the time we leave each day, every task we are assigned, every phone call, every email, every person who walks

through our door, our actions and our decisions are based on what is best for the customer.' "

Unfortunately this type of attitude and commitment is not always being demonstrated, even in this economy. Jane told me of a typical phone inquiry she and other small employers regularly receive.

A caller says, "Do you have an opening?"

Jane replies, "Well, it depends. What do you have to offer?"

"I just want a job that pays money," the caller says.

"That's not good enough," Jane will say.

"Whatever," the caller says, hanging up.

Jane's example is an indication that some job seekers are unaware of what is important to employers. To help them become better prepared, Jane offered advice about what to do and avoid during an interview and once in the workplace.

#### **Do:**

- Speak well. Enunciate clearly.
- Watch your appearance, and check for body odor and bad breath.
- Demonstrate discipline by showing up for work, staying for the whole shift, and not missing days.
- Understand what a work ethic is, and then display it.
- If you're looking for a job, check your email and voice mail and get back to the employer promptly. Let potential employers know how you communicate so they can get in touch with you.

#### **Do Not:**

- Use excuses. Employers do not want to hear any. Be careful about saying you have a "family emergency."
- Say, "I'm not comfortable doing that." That duty was in the job description you agreed to do. Don't just say you'll do it, commit to it.
- Use business computer for personal matters.
- Take personal phone calls, emails or text on the job. These calls tie up the business phone.
- Send your resume by email without checking it.

Jane emphasized the importance that attitude plays in the workplace and how it ultimately makes the job rewarding.

"You have to take a personal interest in your customers," she said. "All of a sudden, it's not a job anymore. It's meaningful. It's a third of your life."

Jane also stressed that job seekers must consider the needs of the business first.

"Think, 'How can you help the company reach its goals?'" she said. "Why should I keep you if you're not here to work?"

Countless employers would agree with Jane's advice, I'm sure.

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