

Soft Skills at Work: Workplace traits can be a sign of success

By MARCIA HALL, For The Capital
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Each month this column highlights soft skills that help people succeed in their careers. There are many essential qualities workers must possess to move ahead.

But what are the best predictors of job success?

Professor Jordan B. Peterson Department of Psychology, at the University of Toronto, told me a very accurate indicator is conscientiousness, which he defined as orderliness and industriousness.

"Conscientiousness is as good a predictor of workplace performance (with the exception of entrepreneurial ability) as IQ," Professor Peterson said.

His comments led me to wonder what local practitioners were finding as they interacted with employers. I talked with Shahrzad Arasteh, a holistic career counselor who is the founder of Career Consulting Services in Edgewater, to learn what her experience has been in working with businesses, job seekers, and those in transition.

"A good fit between the position /organization and the employee is a major factor in predicting what makes a successful and happy employee and increasingly something hiring managers pay close attention to," Shahrzad said.

Shahrzad explained how the "fit" is evaluated. This usually includes some of the qualities employers consistently report as desirable and associated with successful hires, from entry-level to senior-level employees.

She gave me examples of five attributes that are assessed:

1. Communicating effectively and appropriately - "This includes listening skills and how you communicate," Shahrzad said. "Employees who have and use strong skills to communicate, verbally and in writing, with a range of people-customers, managers, and coworkers-are important to a company's ability to survive and thrive, and their own career progresses because of it."
2. Teamwork/ability to effectively interact with others - "An employee who is able to work well and collaboratively with others, share credit, and is committed to contributing to the common goal will be recognized and appreciated for these characteristics," Shahrzad said. "A person who is able to recognize and bring out the unique strengths and complementary skills of their team members will increase the team's effectiveness even further."

Shahrzad told me about a colleague she knew who is very skilled at collaborating on projects with people who have different proficiencies, work styles, and backgrounds.

"This ability is one of the reasons she has been invited to serve in leadership positions in professional associations and given new and interesting projects in her current job," Shahrzad stated. "She has proven that she is willing and able to share the work and the credit to achieve the goals her employer or professional organizations need to reach."

3. Dependability/responsibility/conscientiousness - "This is the person who can be counted on to carry out what they commit to do, or what their manager or co-worker asks them to take on, and to do it to the best of their ability, with an eye toward quality, and to show these behaviors consistently." Shahrzad said.

4. Integrity/ethics - "This certainly touches on the qualities of trustworthiness and responsibility, but it covers more than that," she said. "It's having personal integrity and ethical guidelines that are separate from (and may or may not be the same as) any individual employer's code of ethics. Your personal integrity serves you throughout your career-and life-and is appreciated by employers who seek people who behave ethically, whether or not someone is watching."

5. Positive attitude/enthusiasm - "Some people just make every interaction with them a joy!" Shahrzad stated. "These are people who approach interactions with others and opportunities to take on a task or project cheerfully and graciously, conveying the message that they are happy to help."

The qualities Shahrzad mentioned are ones I hear from each employer I interview. She summed up what I believe is the strategy for success.

"Each contact you have is an opportunity to demonstrate who you are and leave an impression. The impression you make is up to you," Shahrzad said. "It is important to pay attention to how you interact with others, not just a hiring manager or a person you consider important to your goals. Being consistently thoughtful and well-mannered, following through, doing quality work, treating each job or task as important, and the qualities highlighted above, will help you be known for the qualities employers value, and successfully pursue future work and life opportunities."

Shahrzad also commented why possessing these attributes is important not only on the job.

"It's about more than being a successful employee," she said. "It's who you want to be as a person and what you want to be known for."

In other words, your reputation always counts.

Marcia Hall, founder and principal of Reputation COUNTS, is a job readiness skills and business networking trainer, and author of "Jumpstart Your Job: 12 Simple Ways to Shift Your Career into High Gear." She is a member of the CONNECT! Coalition, a project of the Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corp. dedicated to stressing the connection of soft skills to workplace success. E-mail her at marcia@reputationcounts.com

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