

New Survey: Looking for a Job? Employers Value Soft Skills More than Ever Before

Dependability and Problem-Solving Skills Sought by Employers

TORONTO, July 28, 2021 – As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, soft skills are becoming more valuable to employers, according to a new Harris Poll survey commissioned by Express Employment Professionals.

The pandemic is expected to have long-lasting impacts on employers, with a new normal that requires employers to be flexible, adapt to change quickly and be innovative. In the short-term, companies are anticipated to face acute labour shortages and high employee turnover, as many employers were already struggling to find qualified employees even before the pandemic.

According to the new survey, more than half of businesses (59%) say finding qualified applicants for open positions is one of their greatest difficulties, and one-third say one of the main reasons is that applicants lack soft skills (33%).

The most sought-after soft skills include willingness to learn and dependability (both at 81%), communication skills and adaptability (both at 75%), problem-solving skills (74%) and taking initiative (72%).



These findings follow a December 2020 Harris Poll survey for Express Employment Professionals which found more than half of hiring decision-makers believe soft skills are very important or absolutely essential when considering a job applicant.

That survey found that three-quarters (73%) of companies said they value soft skills more than ever before. In addition, almost 1 in 5 (19%) believe soft skills have become more valuable than hard skills and believe this will become a permanent shift in the workplace.

Brent Pollington, an Express franchise owner in Vancouver, British Columbia, says that soft skills have become increasingly important because shortages of qualified workers continue to be a problem for employers. He says in many cases soft skills outweigh the need for hard skills and technical knowledge, which can be taught on the job.

“Companies are very willing to make massive investments in new hires – training, development, coaching and mentorship,” said Pollington. “What they look for in return is an employee who has demonstrated a willingness to learn, retain and eventually return the investment the company makes. Otherwise, companies become fearful and hesitant to make those investments and teach hard skills.”

According to Pollington, the most desired soft skills include tenacity, willingness to learn, innovation, being self-driven, proactiveness, and motivation.

Bruce Hein, an Express franchise owner in Sarnia, Ontario, agrees that soft skills are important, but points out that not all companies appreciate their importance yet.

“Most companies want the perfect fit on day one, but they don't realize that it costs money to leave a position unfilled while waiting for their dream employee,” said Hein. “In many cases, it is more cost effective to find someone with the right attitude and offer some training.”

In terms of which soft skills are in-demand by employers in his area, Hein says flexibility is becoming increasingly important.

“While everyone appreciates a strong work ethic, the right attitude makes job seekers more employable, he said. “Organizations nowadays look for people who are flexible and adaptable in an ever-evolving workplace,”.

Pollington advises that employers want to see that applicants who lost their jobs due to the pandemic used their time wisely while unemployed.

“COVID will understandably create employment gaps for many, but when interviewed, those who are able to highlight courses, personal development and self-driven training will be the most likely to get hired,” said Pollington. “Companies are always looking for people who are driven and, when faced with adversity, don’t just sit back and wait but instead try to solve problems and improve themselves.”

Job seekers who highlight their soft skills when applying for positions will have an advantage, according to Express CEO Bill Stoller.

“Employers obviously want workers who have the relevant hard skills and experience, but after over a year of unprecedented interruptions caused by the pandemic, many companies want employees who are dependable and innovative self-starters who can adapt to change,” he said. “These more intangible skills along with the right attitude are more valuable to employers than ever before.”

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between March 23 and April 12, 2021, among 505 Canadian hiring decision-makers (defined as adults ages 18+ in Canada who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than 1 employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data were weighted where necessary by company size to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at

(613) 858-2622 or email ana@mapleleafstrategies.com.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the international staffing company has more than 830 franchises in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Since inception, Express has put more than 9 million people to work worldwide.

About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Our international network of franchises offers localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, employing 526,000 people globally in 2020. For more information, visit www.ExpressPros.com.