

Must-Have Job Skills in 2013

MarketWatch By Ruth Mantell | MarketWatch – Tue, Nov 20, 2012 5:51 PM EST



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WASHINGTON (MarketWatch) — Even as employers remain cautious next year about every dollar spent on employees, they'll also want workers to show greater skills and results.

For employees who want to get ahead, basic competency won't be enough. To win a promotion or land a job next year, experts say there are four must-have job skills:

Clear communications

Whatever their level, communication is key for workers to advance.

“This is really the ability to clearly articulate your point of view and the ability to create a connection through communication,” says Holly Paul,

U.S. recruiting leader at PricewaterhouseCoopers, the accounting and consulting firm based in New York.

For job seekers in particular, clear communication can provide a snapshot of their work style to employers. “I can walk away from a five-minute conversation and feel their enthusiasm and have a good understanding of what's important to them,” Paul says.

As office conversations increasingly move online, some workers are losing or never developing the ability to give a presentation, for example. Others may be unable to write coherently for longer than, say, 140 characters.

“Technology in some ways has taken away our ability to write well. People are in such a hurry that they are multitasking, and they skip basics such as spelling and proofing, says Paul McDonald, senior executive director of Robert Half International, a Menlo Park, Calif., staffing firm.

Personal branding

Human-resources executives scour blogs, Twitter and professional networking sites such as LinkedIn when researching candidates, and it's important that they like what they find.

“That's your brand, that's how you represent yourself,” says Peter Handal, CEO of Dale Carnegie Training, a Hauppauge, N.Y., provider of workplace-training services. “If you post something that comes back to haunt you, people will see that.”

Workers also should make sure their personal brand is attractive and reflects well on employers. “More and more employers are looking for employees to tweet on their behalf, to blog on their behalf, to build an audience and write compelling, snappy posts,” says Meredith Haberfeld, an executive and career coach in New York.

Haberfeld has a client whose employee recently posted on her personal Facebook page about eating Chinese food and smoking “reefer.”

“I saw it on Facebook. Her supervisors saw it,” Haberfeld says.

Flexibility

The ability to quickly respond to an employer's changing needs will be important next year as organizations try to respond nimbly to customers.

"A lot of companies want us to work with their employees about how to get out of their comfort zone, how to adapt," says Handal. "Somebody's job today may not be the same as next year."

The ability to learn new skills is of top importance, says George Boué, human-resources vice president for Stiles, a real-estate services company in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "We want to know that if we roll out a new program or new tools that the folks we have on board are going to be open to learning," he says.

Productivity improvement

In 2013, workers should find new ways to increase productivity, experts say. Executives are looking for a 20% improvement in employee performance next year from current levels, according to a recent survey by the Corporate Executive Board, an Arlington, Va., business research and advisory firm.

"When you are at your job, do you volunteer for projects? Are you looking for creative ways to help your organization," McDonald says. "The way to really differentiate yourself is to be proactive."

Companies that are considering adding workers in coming years want current employees to operate in growth mode now. "My clients are looking for employees that have a great ability to understand what is wanted and needed, rather than needing to be told," Haberfeld says.

Even hiring managers need to work on certain skills as organizations consider expanding next year. "The ability to spot talent and hire people has fallen out of use over the last several years," says Ben Dattner, an organizational psychologist in New York. "As the economy turns around companies will have to work harder to retain talented employees. Companies have trimmed the fat, and now they have to build the muscle."

Ruth Mantell is a MarketWatch reporter based in Washington.

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