10 Skills Companies Want a Modern Employee to Have

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Learn What Earns

Whether you've been in the workforce for decades, are re-entering the workforce, or are trying to advance where you are, today's most hireable employees need more than a polished resume. To stand out, you need the perfect balance of hard and soft skills and the right training to support your skill set.

Whereas hard, or technical, skills are the concrete abilities you bring to the table (e.g., typing 100 words per minute or computer programming), soft skills relate to your personality and interpersonal skills (e.g., self-motivated or active listener). Then there are hybrid skills (e.g., project management), which combine the best of hard and soft skills. To get hired or move up where you are, having the right mix of technical acumen and interpersonal abilities is more important than ever.

The growing need for the right skills is compounded by the fact that millennials now account for the majority of people in the workforce, according to the Pew Research Center. With these digital natives flooding the job market, it's becoming even harder for baby boomers, older adults, and seasoned workers to find jobs that pay well.

(2)

Older Adults Working Longer

If you're among the baby boomers planning to work well into their 70s or 80s—whether out of necessity or because you love what you do—you're not alone. AARP reports that workers 55 and older filled nearly half of the new jobs created in 2018 alone.
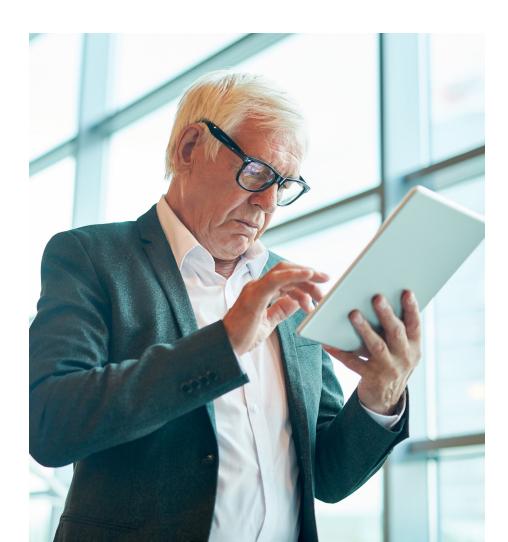
The Layoff Landscape

Despite this commitment to working longer, age discrimination is a reality for many boomers and older adults in the workforce.

Despite this commitment to working longer, age discrimination is a reality for many boomers and older adults in the workforce. A study by ProPublica and the Urban Institute on how and why older adults are being forced out of their jobs found that 28 percent of "stable, longtime employees" face at least one layoff between turning 50 and reaching retirement. On top of that, only one in 10 of those workers were able to regain their peak earnings. Even years after a layoff, the disruption in employment means more than half of older workers have had to adjust their lifestyles to accommodate a lower salary.

3

The good news is that hiring for the information technology sector continues to increase.

Whether a company is driven by a failure to hit budget goals or is trying to reconcile overstaffing, the *Harvard Business Review* recommends that employees who are underperforming or are deemed "less-than-fully busy" should be the first to go. Additionally, when companies relocate or go through an acquisition/merger, the head count often takes a hit.

The good news is that hiring for the information technology sector continues to increase. If you're an older adult considering a job change or, worse, you've lost your job, you'll need the latest technology skills, training, and certifications to keep pace has a modern, ready-to-hire employee.

The Talent Shortage

With unemployment levels at an all-time low, employers are scrambling to find skilled workers to fill empty posts or advance current employees into new roles. In fact, there are currently more than 7 million unfilled jobs on the market, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

According to global workforce solutions company ManpowerGroup, 45 percent of employers are struggling to fill skilled worker roles. Additionally, a TalentNow report found that 42 percent of employers are worried about finding the talent they need, and 73 percent report having trouble finding relevant candidates. TalentNow reports that 86 percent of recruiters and 62 percent of employers believe that the hiring market has become candidate-driven.

The jobs with some of the greatest growth potential are computer and information technology careers, including information security and cloud computing jobs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that these industry jobs are poised to grow 13 percent by 2026 to create 557,000 new positions in the U.S. alone.

This guide will help you succeed as a modern worker by showing you how to refresh the skills you've honed and acquire the new skills you need to align with what today's employers are looking for in an ideal job candidate.

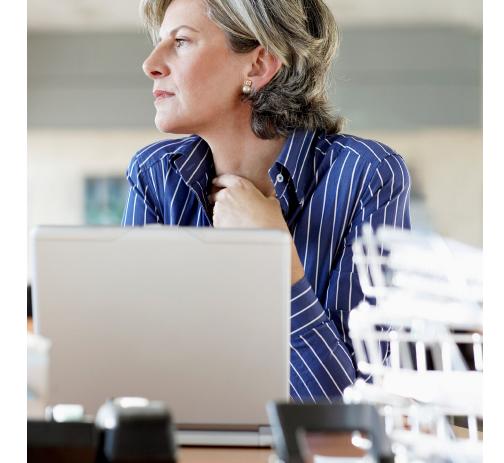**45 percent of employers are struggling to fill skilled worker roles.**

10 Soft and Hard Skills for Success

If you have a long work history, then you've likely already acquired some valuable skills along the way. The hardest thing is picking and choosing which skills to include on your resume or job application to give yourself the best chance of getting hired.

If you have more than 10 years of experience, try to keep your resume to two pages, Money.com says, focusing on the roles that are most relevant to the job you're applying for. In addition to prioritizing any expert-level skills you have, focus on your technical skills and certifications. Lastly, selectively include soft skills, or "human" skills, which a Cengage-Morning Consult report says have become very important to employers in making hiring decisions.

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Soft Skills

With years of experience, you've likely gained a diverse set of skills, many of which simply can't be taught in the classroom. If you're adaptable, a collaboration pro, or excellent at persuasion, hiring managers are looking for your soft skills.

Soft skills are heavily sought after by employers, because they're not task- or job-specific—and they aren't things that can be taught. Your soft skills are part of who you are, no matter where you are.

According to an Adecco survey, although many candidates look great on paper, 44 percent of U.S. executives think American workers lack soft skills and aren't certain about how they'll fit into the work environment. The most important soft skills employers are looking for today, according to research by LinkedIn Learning, include:

1 Creativity

Although machines are great at solving problems in a consistent, repeatable way, humans are great at finding out-of-the-box solutions. And this is creativity! In fact, out of all of the skills uncovered by LinkedIn Learning, creativity was No. 2 on the most in-demand list (after cloud computing, which we'll get to in a bit).

2 Persuasion

If you've mastered persuasion, you're able to defend your ideas and convince others that they matter—and it's not just for salespeople, either. Persuasion is kind of the Swiss Army knife of soft skills, because it uses empathy, communication, collaboration, and kindness to get the job done. With persuasion, you can usher important decisions along and put yourself in a role of leadership and dependability.

3 Collaboration

As companies start to become more global and new technologies enter the work environment more rapidly, collaboration is becoming more important. You've got to be able to communicate and cooperate with other members of your team or people in another department on the other side of the globe, and you've got to do it with mutual respect and an open mind. Collaboration may sound like teamwork, but it's a bit more nuanced. This skill means you know how to balance your personal goals with the greater goals of your collaborators.

4 Adaptability

The modern workplace is a moving target, making adaptability essential. Whether your company is implementing new technologies to increase data security or the C-suite has decided it's time to switch to a remote office model, you need to be able to change gears and adapt—quickly and eagerly.

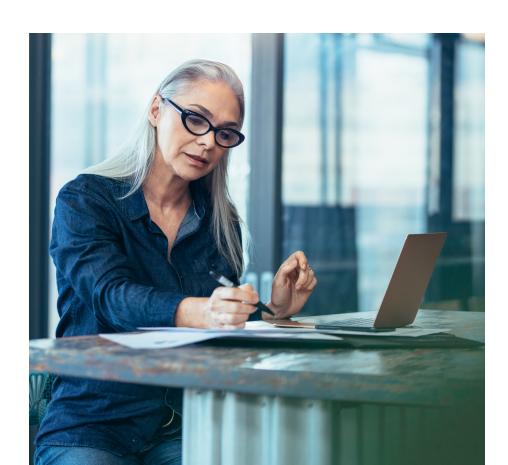**Your soft skills are part of who you are, no matter where you are.**

5 Time Management

Employers value workers who keep their eye on the prize and meet deadlines without any nudging. If you excel at time management, then you know how to focus and use your time efficiently and are someone who prioritizes tasks and commitments and doesn't get lost in multitasking. (In fact, according to the American Psychological Association, multitasking actually hurts productivity!)

This list of soft skills embodies why 57 percent of senior leaders prioritize soft skills over hard skills, according to LinkedIn Learning. If possible, include measurable data from projects where your soft skills made a difference. Be sure to focus on refining the soft skills you have and include them thoughtfully on your resume to secure a meeting with HR.

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9

Technical (Hard) Skills

As the digital experience evolves, technical skills are more in demand than ever. Technical skills differ from the inherent nature of soft skills in that they can be taught and learned by pretty much anyone. Additionally, whereas soft skills are applicable across jobs and industries, technical skills are job-specific and changing practically every day as technologies advance to reveal new needs.

According to LinkedIn Learning's research, the most in-demand hard skills include:

Cloud Computing

Practically every industry is making a mad dash to cloud-based systems—and it's happening faster than people are getting trained. In fact, according to OpsRamp's *From a Cloud-Native Skills Gap to a Full-Blown Crisis* report, 60 percent of companies report having mission-critical services run in or built for the cloud, and 90 percent of hiring managers report that the digital skills gap is "somewhat big, quite big, or huge." A full 94 percent of IT companies in OpsRamp's report are struggling to find the right talent, which means that all you need is the right training to land a job in this burgeoning market.

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7 Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) used to be a futuristic goal, but it's here—and it's more than just a passing trend. Machine learning, big data, and data mining are all technical skills that fall under the AI umbrella. By 2020, AI is expected to replace 1.8 million jobs and create 2.3 million new jobs, according to a Gartner report. With the right AI training, you can advance where you are and take on new roles or fill the growing job gap.

8 Analytical Reasoning

Analytical reasoning allows you to look at both qualitative and quantitative information and find patterns within that information. With the rise of big data, companies need data scientists and engineers who can efficiently make sense of the bucketloads of data they're collecting more than ever.

9 People Management

This skill isn't natural for most of us, but training can help you master the art of managing people. The truth is that this skill will pull in a lot of your soft skills, such as communication, and mold them into the right way to manage employees. To properly manage people, you've got to have the ability to coach and empower them, and that can definitely be trained.
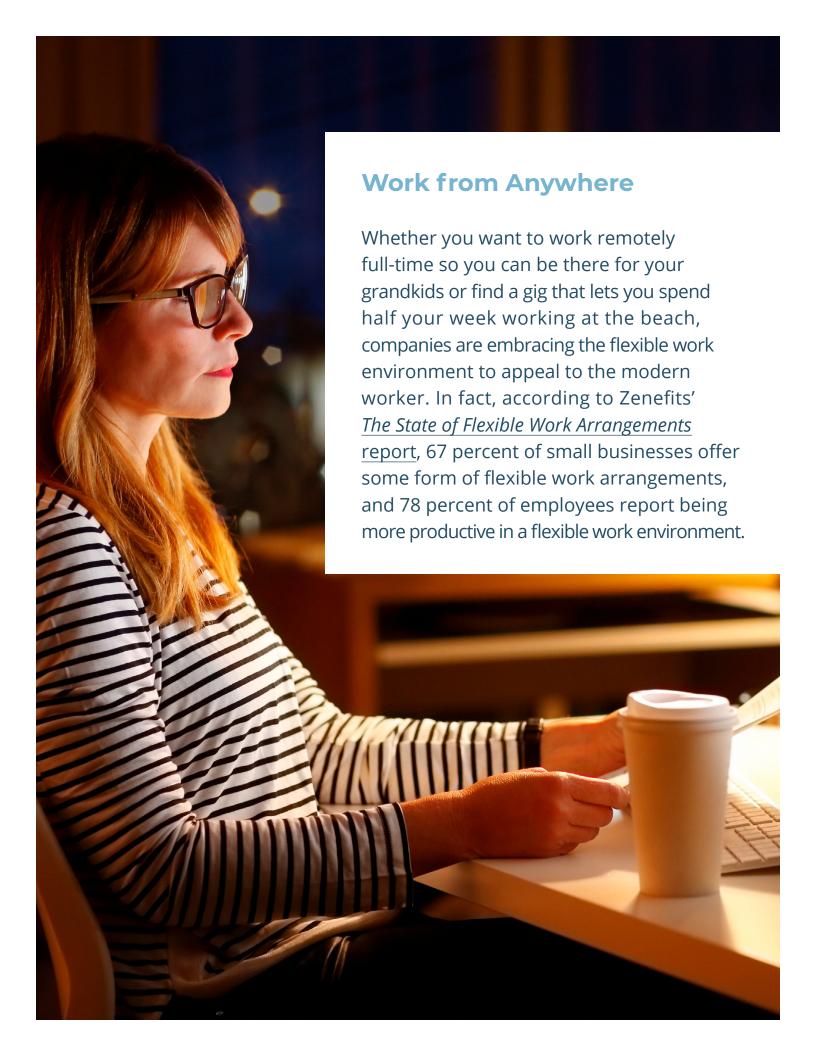
11

10 UX Design

The digital world has to work for humans, in a human way, and this is where UX (user experience) design plays a vital role. The world of UX design comprises every single interaction that a customer has with a company, its products, and its services. UX designers create product prototypes, create sitemaps and storyboards, analyze feedback, conduct a competitor analysis, and do so much more. Some of the most important UX skills to develop include engineering, graphic design, psychology, and marketing.

Certifications are a great way to demonstrate that you're up to date on the latest technologies and techniques. Most certifications have to be renewed regularly to account for changes and advances, so be sure to stay current on your technical certifications as proof that you're on top of trends and advancements.

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Work from Anywhere

Whether you want to work remotely full-time so you can be there for your grandkids or find a gig that lets you spend half your week working at the beach, companies are embracing the flexible work environment to appeal to the modern worker. In fact, according to Zenefits' *The State of Flexible Work Arrangements* report, 67 percent of small businesses offer some form of flexible work arrangements, and 78 percent of employees report being more productive in a flexible work environment.

Hybrid Skills

Employers are also looking for workers who can demonstrate hard skills, such as computer programming and database management, that are tempered by soft skills. When combined, these hybrid skills create an environment where success is almost guaranteed. Some examples of these general skills include:

○ **Communication |** Working effectively with others requires good communication skills—both verbal and written—as well as good listening skills. It also requires leveraging hard skills to comfortably and effectively use social media, project management software, video and chat solutions, and more.

○ **Analysis and problem-solving |** Today's businesses use data-driven decision-making and apply hard metrics gathered and analyzed using technology. Problem-solving and data analysis require both technology and an understanding of how to approach and assess a problem. If you don't ask the right questions, you can't find the right answers.

○ **Project management |** Understanding how to deliver a completed project is a complex task that requires both technical skills and a wide range of soft skills. You need to be able to assemble the right technical and human resources to complete the task, which requires communication, collaboration, time management, and more.

The Growing Demand for Technical Skills

Millennials now comprise the largest segment of the technology workforce, according to the Pew Research Center. At the same time, TechRepublic reports, Generation Xers are hired 33 percent less often than millennials, and baby boomers are hired 60 percent less. Companies are looking for more technical skills while keeping salaries low, which is why the industry shies away from older workers.

However, according to research from Indeed Hiring Lab, older tech workers are attractive candidates because of their management and business acumen. Top tech jobs for applicants under 40 tend to be skills-specific, such as Java developer, AI engineer, or data scientist, while older workers bring a broader and more diverse soft and hard skill set and tend to apply for jobs with more managerial responsibility, including:

- Director of IT
- Chief engineer
- Director of quality assurance

The combination of business experience, soft skills, and technical know-how makes older workers strong candidates for today's technology jobs. Improving your technical skills with career training and certifications is an ideal way to round out your tech credentials.

15

What technology credentials are best for you? Here are just some of the technology jobs that are most in demand and the certifications that go with them:

Systems Administrator

The SysAdmin is responsible for installing, updating, and managing office systems, as well as systems optimization and basic data security. It's an all-encompassing role with, according to Glassdoor, an average salary of more than $68,000 that requires you to install, manage, and troubleshoot hardware, software, and external resources such as cloud computing services. To demonstrate SysAdmin capabilities, consider the following certifications:

- CompTIA A+
- Microsoft Certified Desktop Support Technician (MCSA)
- Microsoft Certified Solutions Expert (MCSE)

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16

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Computer Network Administrator

A network administrator designs and builds data networks, such as local area networks (LANs), wide area networks (WANs), and corporate intranets. They are also responsible for developing cloud computing strategies and management procedures, implementing systems upgrades, and overseeing systems security. With the outlook of a yearly salary of more than $68,000, the certifications network admins should pursue include:
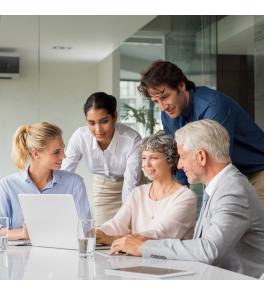
- CompTIA Network+
- Cisco Certified Networking Technician (CCNT)
- Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA)
- Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP)

Software Application Developer

All industries need custom software to help make operations run more smoothly, creating an ongoing and stable demand for software application developers, whose average salary is more than $80,000. Almost any organization can use a skilled coder, so consider these certifications:

- Microsoft Certified Solutions Developer (MCSD)
- Adobe Certified Expert
- Amazon Web Services

17

Cybersecurity Specialist

Data security is a growing concern across industries, and companies are clamoring for cybersecurity analysts who can protect their business information and ensure compliance with federal and industry-specific regulations. Cybersecurity specialists earn more than $62,000 per year, with some salaries as high as $94,000. To stand out as a cybersecurity specialist, you'll want the following certifications:

○ CompTIA Security+
○ Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP)
○ Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH)

Database Administrator

Today's businesses are increasingly data-driven, and that information has to be maintained and organized in increasingly complex databases. A database administrator averages a salary of more than $80,000 per year and is responsible for designing, managing, and securing these business-critical databases. To prove your database skills, consider certifications such as:

○ MCSA: SQL Database Administration
○ MCSA: SQL Server
○ Oracle Database Certification

18

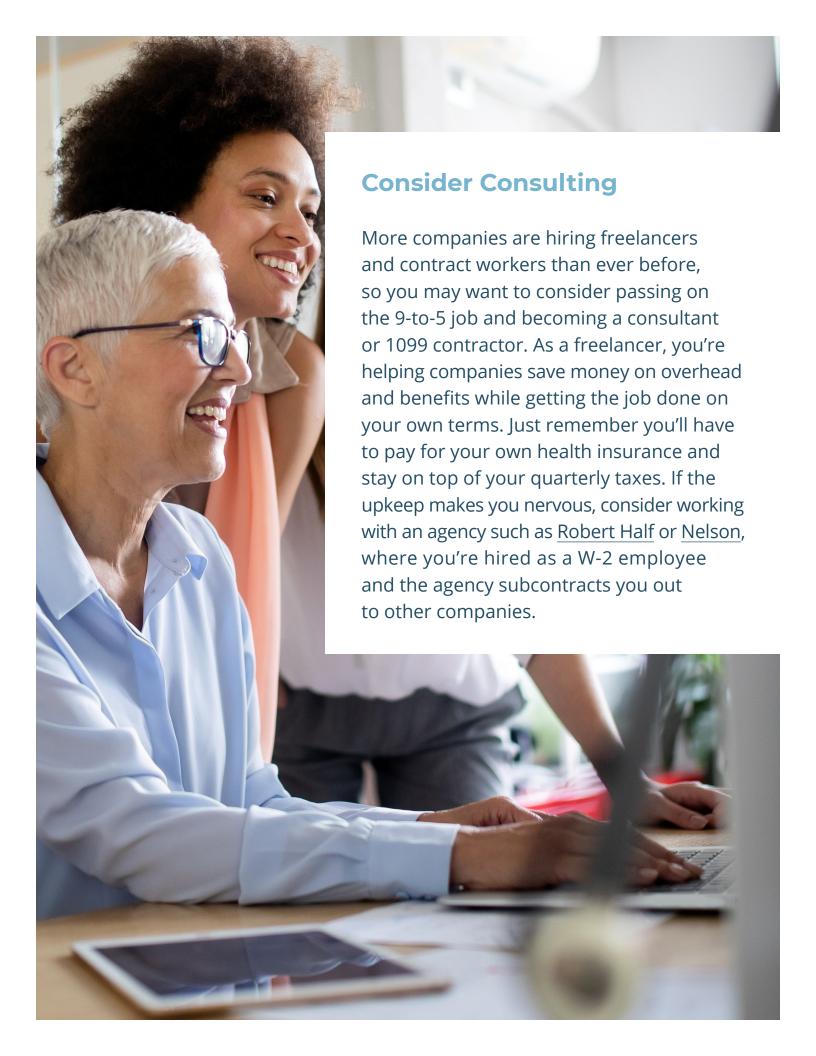**It takes more than technical credentials alone to help you stand out from an avalanche of resumes.**

Office Administrator
Beyond Credentials

The role of the office administrator continues to evolve as new technologies enter the workplace—and the national average salary for this position is more than $38,000 per year. To stand out, make sure you've got your Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification to show that you know how to use the full suite of Microsoft Office features.

It takes more than technical credentials alone to help you stand out from an avalanche of resumes. With the perfect balance of work experience, soft skills, and technical skills, you'll be able to land the right job or advance at your current company like a pro.

The key to staying relevant and on top of the latest advances is keeping your technical credentials up to date. Consider taking refresher or continuing education courses so you stay ahead of the curve, and remember that most credentials require you to be recertified periodically (e.g., CompTIA requires that its A+ certification be renewed every three years).

19

Consider Consulting

More companies are hiring freelancers and contract workers than ever before, so you may want to consider passing on the 9-to-5 job and becoming a consultant or 1099 contractor. As a freelancer, you're helping companies save money on overhead and benefits while getting the job done on your own terms. Just remember you'll have to pay for your own health insurance and stay on top of your quarterly taxes. If the upkeep makes you nervous, consider working with an agency such as Robert Half or Nelson, where you're hired as a W-2 employee and the agency subcontracts you out to other companies.

Improve Your Hireability with Certifications

Whether you want to switch jobs, change careers, or even become better at your current job, updating your professional skills should be your first priority. If you can keep your skills and certifications current, you'll have a much better chance of advancing your career.

Certifications stand out in a crowded job market. Credentials from career training and vocational courses not only refresh your current skills or teach you new ones, but they also provide unquestionable validation of specific skills that you can use on a resume or job profile. Certifications get you noticed, whether it's in a job database or a quick resume scan.

According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 63 percent of workers surveyed reported taking some type of training course. Of those workers, 65 percent said the training expanded their professional network, and 47 percent said it helped them advance within their current company.

The top types of technical training and certifications that can demonstrate your abilities and worth to employers include:

- Network administration
- Systems administration
- Database administration
- Cybersecurity
- Project management
- Software development
- Healthcare IT
- Office administration

If you can combine your existing job experience, including your soft skills and the hard skills you've trained for, with newly minted certifications, then you're sure to stand out as the best candidate for the job.

Get Started with New Horizons Career Development Solutions

If you're interested in IT career training, whether to break into a new technology field, refresh your credentials, or update your skills to advance your career, New Horizons Career Development Solutions is here to help. We offer a broad range of career training programs designed to help you get to the next level so you can achieve your career—and life—goals.

Contact us today to learn more about the best career training options for you, and see how we can help you become the model modern employee for a growing, changing technology job market.

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