

# The Total Package

What do employers want to see when they begin evaluating college candidates for employment? The entire package! The following comments were extracted from responses to the question, "What are the five most important skills or competencies that a candidate needs to possess in order to be considered for employment?" The "total package" that candidates should possess includes these skills:

**The Total Package:** Candidates need to be academically prepared in their discipline as it pertains to their employment; this is considered a given by employers. Plus,

- **Communication skills** that demonstrate solid verbal, written, and listening abilities. The capstone is presentation skills that include the ability to respond to questions and serious critique of the presentation material.
- **Computer/technical aptitudes** based on the level required for the position being filled. Computer ability is now perceived as a given core skill; right up there with reading, writing, and mathematics. The ability levels (expectations) for computer knowledge and application continue to rise.
- **Leadership** – the ability to take charge or relinquish control (followership) according to the needs of the organization; closely aligned with possessing management abilities.
- **Teamwork** – working cooperatively and collaboratively with different people while maintaining autonomous control over some assignments.
- **Interpersonal abilities** that allow a person to relate to others, inspire others to participate, or mitigate conflict between co-workers.
- **Personal traits.** The shape of the above competencies are molded by a combination of personal traits, specifically initiative and motivation; flexibility/adaptability in handling change and ambiguity; hard-working (work ethic); reliability; honesty and integrity; and ability to plan and organize multiple tasks. Emerging as a key personal trait is an individual's ability to provide "customer service" – anticipating customer needs and the demeanor to respond positively to customer concerns.

**The Wrapping:** Several skills or experiences bind the package and are essential to holding it together. Without these skills, a candidate may not be able to deliver the package.

- **Critical thinking/problem solving** – the ability to identify problems and their solutions by integrating information from a variety of sources and effectively weigh alternatives
- **Intelligence and common sense**
- **Willingness to learn quickly and continuously**
- **Work related experiences** that provide an understanding of the workplace and serve to apply classroom learning

This list should be no surprise to anyone – these skills and competencies have been bantered about since the new economy began to emerge in the late 1980's. Why this section needs our attention is the context in which many employers expressed their qualifications. Because the

economy is moving so quickly, candidates must enter their positions already demonstrating their command of these competencies. There is no time or the luxury of training a highly qualified academic candidate in these skills. Employers demand that the "total package" be delivered at graduation.

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