

## Consider Transferable Skills When Hiring Staff

When hiring a new employee, it's important to find a good fit – someone who has the experience, training and skills that will enhance your company's bottom line. But many employers don't look beyond a potential candidate's employment history and education to also consider their "soft skills," those non-job specific traits that people acquire through general life experiences.

Leddy Group, a Dover, NH-based staffing firm, recommends taking into account a potential employee's transferable skills when making a new hire. These skills, including flexibility, likability, and the ability to use common sense, are tremendously important in jobs across all industry sectors.

Leddy Group, which specializes in administrative, accounting, light industrial staffing and business consulting services, has successfully placed employees in a wide variety of industries and companies. They have consistently found that transferable skills are as important as any other qualification.

"We've found that many degrees – ranging from peace studies to English or psychology – are transferable to a variety of industries. Employers should consider the 'bigger picture,' which is all of the skills, experience and personality traits that a potential employee would bring to their company," said Mary Leddy, principal owner of Leddy Group.

"For instance, if a manufacturing company has an opening for a semi-skilled position, they may want to hire someone who lacks on-the-job experience – but has a great attitude – and train them in the skills they'll need to perform in this position," Leddy continued. "In many cases, it's easy to train someone in specific job skills, like learning how to build your company's products, but is far more difficult to teach someone how to communicate effectively or to be a team player."

Employers should examine each potential employee's transferable skills in the following categories:

- Working with people (e.g., sales, management),
- Working with things (e.g., repairing or operating machinery)
- Working with data/information (e.g., budgeting, researching and analyzing).

Additionally, your new hires should possess the following foundation skills:

- Basic (communications, reading, mathematics)
- Thinking (decision-making, problem-solving), and
- Personal qualities (integrity, honesty, friendliness, likeability).

A number of universities and professional organizations, including California State University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon University, Quintessential Careers, and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), agree these transferable skills are important.

In fact, the NACE has compiled a list, based on extensive research, of the qualities and skills that employers request the most, including:

- Analytical skills
- Attention to detail
- Communication skills
- Computer skills
- Creativity
- Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Friendly/outgoing personality
- Honesty/integrity
- Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
- Leadership and management skills
- Motivation/initiative
- Organizational and time management skills
- Real life experiences
- Self-confidence
- Strong work ethic
- Tactfulness
- Teamwork skills (works well with others)
- Technical skills
- Well-mannered/polite

Other key transferable skills that are relevant in most industries include:

- Communication
- Research and planning
- Human relations
- Management and leadership and
- Personal/organizational skills.

When hiring a new employee, it's important to determine whether their "soft skills" will enhance your corporate culture. For example, don't overlook a candidate who has been a stay-at-home mother for years, dismissing her for not having recent – or relevant – job experience. Instead, realize that she has likely developed strong organizational, multi-tasking, budgeting, and negotiation skills, which will serve her well in most – if not all – industries.

During the interview process, consider potential employees' extracurricular activities, hobbies and other experiences to help determine their best assets. Perhaps they've played team sports their entire lives and, therefore, are goal-oriented and work well with others. If a person volunteers to coordinate fundraisers for a charitable organization, it's likely that they are benevolent self-starters who are organized, resourceful and tenacious.

"Soft skills" – such as friendliness, integrity, the ability to problem-solve and so forth – will be invaluable to your company. You can teach someone how to sell a car – or repair its engine – but it's nearly impossible to train them to become sociable or ethical.

"In today's challenging economic climate, it's important to hire people who bring the greatest assets to the table, and in many cases, the most valuable traits are flexibility,

dependability, integrity and adaptability,” Leddy added. “It’s important to look beyond a person’s resume and consider how their ‘soft skills’ can enhance your team.”

Leddy Group, with offices in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, works with more than 300 clients. For information, visit [www.LeddyGroup.com](http://www.LeddyGroup.com) or call (603) 749-4810.