

In-Demand Soft Skills

CHRIS MILLER: [INAUDIBLE] soft skills webinar. My name is Chris Miller. I am the Global Campus career counselor, career advisor. And I also brought in my email address here. It's the easiest way to get in touch with me. I work with Global Campus students, Global Campus alumni, also prospective students, who are looking at the Global Campus as an option. And I help them with career development, all those groups with career development questions, and I try to help address your career needs. So I wanted to just put that in the front. I'll have contact information at the end also.

We're also joined with-- joined by Andrea Jimenez, who is the Global Connections program coordinator. So if you have any technical problems during the presentation, or if you need help, just go ahead and put that in the chat box, and Andrea can help with that. And if you have any content questions for me, also put those in the chat box, please. And I will address those at the end.

Again, thank you for joining. Let's see. Our topic today, in-demand soft skills, specifically for liberal arts students and our social sciences and humanities students, and basically highlighting what they bring to the table, what their skills are that they develop as a liberal arts student, as an online student, and how you can present that information professionally to employers. We're going to identify those, talk about what you develop and some strategies for presenting those to employers. So let's see if there's anything else I should say here at the beginning. I don't think so. Oh, one thing I did want to point out. I'll go ahead and share some of the band-- or save some of the bandwidth here.

I did want to point out just a caveat about this term, "soft skills." And it's kind of a no-no for me to use that term. Honestly, it's-- we're trying to get it to go away and to change it. And I will kind of highlight why I did that, too, but there was a nice little article that a career coach by the name of Dr. Ann Villiers wrote in the National Career Development Association, just a few months ago, actually.

And she wrote that in a changing-- rapidly changing world, people of all ages need to understand what skills will enable them to adapt and succeed in whatever context the future brings. There is a wealth of information available to help gain this knowledge, but care is needed in how these skills are described and grouped. So skill terms used include employment readiness, transferable, 21st century skills, STEM or STEAM, and STEAM is just STEM with arts included, tangible, intangible, technical or non-technical, and soft and hard. And that two words that are particularly unhelpful she identified are the soft and hard skills, and their use is widespread.

And "soft" may seem like a convenient shorthand, which is the reason why I still have been using it up to this point and why I had it in the title, because it kind of describes what people-- it communicates what people-- it communicates the idea that people will understand. And so she

writes, "While it seems like a convenient shorthand, the term is imprecise, inaccurate, and gender-biased," and that it's time for us to stop using the terms, soft skills, and instead, use the term, social skills, as a better catch-all for all these different non-technical skills.

So I will try to do my best to avoid saying it. I'm going to try to avoid my best going forward and not using it, but I just wanted to point that out as kind of my warning, my tisk-tisk to myself.

OK. I think I always start webinars off with just a snapshot of the career development process and just to kind of see where we're at with this topic. And talking about skills, about social skills, it's really all over the place here, because we're talking about knowing ourselves, so what we're good at.

Also, exploring options and getting focused, knowing what skills are important to employers, what they're looking for, and that action planning, part of getting focused. Are there skills we need to work on further for our target employment audience? And also, taking action, so that'll be the latter part of the webinar talking about how we're actually presenting that information to employers. So yeah, we're all over the career development process tonight.

So what do employers say they want? And this is from a somewhat recent survey of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and this is updated from a 2014 one that 91% of employers say the demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major. And this has been true of my personal experience. This has been true of my professional experience working as a career advisor, working with employers.

And it furthers the truth that academic major does not equate-- does not equal specific job length, specific occupational opportunities in most cases. You know, there are obviously some majors that are very occupationally-driven for us. At the Global Campus, we have accounting. You know that's a very occupationally-driven, skill-driven academic major. But the majority of them show that academic major does not equal specific job options.

And that's why it's difficult when a student will ask, what can I do with a social sciences degree? What can I do with a humanities degree? There's so much that you can do. It depends on your background, your interests, the skills that you develop, and what you want to do and what you're bringing to the table. So it's a really difficult question to answer in a way that is satisfactory for the person who's asking it.

What else do they say they want? And so WSU did a focus group with employers a handful of years back, and these were with employers that recruit WSU students. And they asked them, what are you looking for in a WSU student candidate? What are you recruiting for? And they identified these nine areas-- genuine interest, interpersonal skills, competence, dependability, compatibility, initiative, communication skills, customer focus, and commitment.

So what were some of the comments, and what do they mean? So genuine interest-- they said you need to be truly interested in the company, what it does, and the position for which you're applying. If you're not excited about the position, the person assessing you will be concerned if you really will apply yourself to the job and if you will stay with the company.

Interpersonal skills-- they identified that you'd work well with others and maintain a good relationship with your supervisor and co-workers, that you would listen properly to those around you, taking time to comprehend fully what is said and assimilate their requests or instructions into your approach to tasks or projects, to be competent, caring, and assertive. In most positions, a person who is timid and withdrawn will be perceived as someone who may have trouble getting things done.

For competence, your supervisor will be looking for employees who can make prepared decisions and clearly state what they believe are the appropriate pathways or solutions. Employers want people who have the requisite skills for the job or have the ability to quickly learn them. For dependability, employers want employees who are organized and manage their time well, so things like being prompt and getting reports or assignments done, arriving on time to work, meetings, and appointments, showing examples of timely project management.

For compatibility, employers want employees who work well with others, participate in social activities so they can get to know you better, keeping in mind your actions and how you behave professionally, maintaining discretion, and the amount of socializing you do on work time, and also valuing your role as an effective team player.

For initiative, employers want an employee who is self-motivated. To be successful in many of today's jobs requires a certain amount of drive, so taking extra courses or training outside of work, mastering technology, keeping current with skills, and showing initiative like arriving early, leaving late, making suggestions, working hard to make deadlines, and volunteering for committees or projects to become recognized.

Communication skills-- obviously, employers want and need employees who have good communication skills, written and verbal. Nearly all positions requiring a college degree require employees to write and do presentations from time to time. Clarity and also brevity are strong indicators of clear business communication.

A customer focus, when relevant, so employers build their success on their interactions with their customers. It's critical that you also understand the need for excellent customer-focused skills. It's also very important to understand that all business processes have either internal or external customers, so whenever it's appropriate, frame your thinking on projects to, what does the customer want or need, and that will help with your success.

Lastly, commitment-- when you use your strengths or your natural talents, you're doing your best work, which provides satisfaction. When you use your strengths with purpose, you connect

differently, more strongly with your work, and you take responsibility for developing work satisfaction.

So what else do these employers want? And as you'll start to see there, we start to blend in what they want. And clearly, a liberal arts education provides a vast majority of these things as part of the process. So if you're looking for a job that says in the job ad, a humanities degree preferred, you probably won't find many of those. That doesn't mean that your degree doesn't lead to a job, but you have to think in terms of marketing the skills that you have developed. So you have to translate your skills for the employer.

This is where your ability to understand and communicate becomes crucial. So what skills have you gained with your education? Here's a good list of a lot of things you will likely develop as a liberal arts student, as an online student, as a college student. Independent learning, so the ability to learn and recognize opportunities to learn, research skills, the ability to find information and ideas, the ability to critically distinguish between various sources of ideas.

And so when I talk about marketing your skills, this is kind of what I'm talking about also is not just writing it, but also how you explain it to an employer. Writing skills, writing and reading skills-- the ability to structure your thoughts coherently and express yourself in ways that are appropriate to the occasion, to the ability to understand language and systems of meaning.

Critical thinking-- the ability to tell better ideas from worse and the ability to test ideas by subjecting them to relevant criteria. Adaptability- the ability to apply knowledge and skills to a wide variety of contexts. Time and resource management, so the ability to work under pressure and maximize resources to produce a desired outcome.

One of the more unique ones here is electracy, which was coined by Gregory Ulmer, which is the ability to read navigate and create the digital environment. So think of it as literacy for print. Electracy is for the digital environment. Problem solving skills-- the ability to understand and express a problem that needs to be solved, the knowledge of various methods of analysis that might be relevant to the problem.

Interdisciplinary skills-- obviously, that's a big part of social sciences and humanities. The ability to work at the borders of traditional forms of knowledge using the resources from more than one area to help define a problem or ask a question and suggest approaches to addressing the problem or question. Global understanding and cultural sensitivity-- so the ability to appreciate cultures and traditions outside of your own. Historical knowledge-- the ability to see how and why things came to be as they are and how they might be different. Lastly, perspective-- the ability to understand how other groups or people think and to value the difference.

So what do liberal arts majors bring? Well, I've already highlighted a bunch. I'm going to definitely continue to underscore some of them and really, at times, be a little bit repetitive just to be-- just to really be emphatic about all the skills that you bring as a college graduate, that you develop as an online student.

So interests that cut across departmental boundaries-- obviously, multi-disciplinary skills, adaptability, analytical skills, creativity, curiosity, communication, cultural awareness, imagination, sense of context, familiarity with history, reading and listening, comprehension, organizational ability, ability to work independently, ability to work in teams, time management-- that's a huge one, obviously-- understanding and using data, dealing with complexity and flexibility. Liberal arts provide students with a powerful academic foundation and gives them the opportunity to develop skills, both social and technical, that employers value.

So it's important to highlight that your liberal arts education enhances your social skills. And your success as an online student depends on developing a lot of these skills, so being self-motivated, working in a team, communicating effectively, collaborating, exposure to technology. You're using so many different platforms as you go through this. Understanding using data, critical thinking-- like I said earlier, complexity and flexibility-- interpersonal skills. So how can you also flesh out something like that? Interpersonal skills-- accepting feedback, conflict resolution, mindfulness, netiquette, emotional intelligence, so social awareness, self-awareness, self-management. Those are all the things you are developing as an online student.

Some notable examples-- oh, and before I go there, just to finish that point off again, you're fostering these skills like learning how to write well, potentially in different styles, organizing your work and life to meet deadlines. Obviously, that's a huge part of being an online student. Learning to convey meaning precisely, learning to summarize, make arguments, draw conclusion, learning to research, analyze, organize, present data logically.

These are some notable business examples of people that have been successful with a liberal arts education. Obviously, some of these people had to pursue a graduate level degree also, but they started with this liberal arts education, and they were successful in the business world. Of course, some of these people were born into wealthy circumstances also, which is a factor to keep in mind. But there are a lot of examples of people who have taken their liberal arts education and gone on to something that seemingly doesn't fit that background and been very successful.

With the Global Campus, I've worked with lots of people that have been social science students, humanities students. They've gone on to become things like tech execs, correction officers, police officers, hockey coach, academic advisors, claims adjusters, lawyers, sales directors, teachers, IT managers, library technicians, nurses, social workers, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, counselors, all sorts of different backgrounds, people go into.

So as we start the transition from identifying the skills you developed with your background and with your education as an online student, you'll start to have to think of ways to translate that to the employer, translate your education to the employer. So some of the ways in which we do that are through effective job search strategies, so having an interdisciplinary academic background might make your job search a little bit more difficult, because some employers

might not know what that means. So you might need to do more explaining and more networking and more connecting.

So the idea is to figure out the needs of the employees and connect your skills to that. And that's what this general next few slides are about. Richard Bolles is the author of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, and iconic career development novel or-- eh, not really novel-- textbook or book that helps people with all their career development problems. And he identifies in one of his chapters a bunch of effective job search strategies and talking about how what's the most popular job search strategy usually ends up being the least effective.

And these are just general job search strategies that I think are important for any student, but I would highlight them as more important for any liberal arts student that doesn't have that undergraduate foundation that is various technically skill-driven or occupationally-driven, which is, I would say, the majority of people, majority of students.

So he points out that the least effective methods of a job search are by applying to open listings on the internet and posting your resume to a resume posting site, or, even still, sometimes still mail, do direct mail, mailing your resume to a company or an employer. And those have a success rate of 4% for open listings on the internet and 7% for the posting or mailing resumes, so very low success rate compared to upwards of about 10 I know he identifies in the book. And I would highly recommend the book as a great resource for anyone who's job searching or exploring careers, trying to figure out what they want to do.

So he identifies researching target employers and making contact by phone as a highly effective strategy. Introducing yourself in person when possible was a very effective strategy pre-COVID-19. And it'll be interesting to see how this changes and how it is modified going forward as we hopefully get to a post-COVID-19 society.

Understanding which companies are easier to network with is a very important skill to know, too, that it's very hard to break down the barriers of larger companies where they have 500 or more employees. It's a lot easier to network with companies that have 50 or less. And just knowing that, that could provide some frustration for someone who is really looking to target one of those huge companies.

Activating your network-- just asking people that you know about job opportunities and explaining what you've done in your education. So there are many ways to search for a job, and while some are more popular or easier than others, it's important to know what works best in order to manage your time and really manage your energy, too.

So with marketing your education and making your case to the employer, it's important to have an elevator speech prepared for both your education and employment as you never know what the right target will be. So if you're going-- if it's for an educational pursuit, it's good to have an educational one that talks more about your education. And if it's really for an employment pursuit, to talk about your background and how your education fits for that. And how do you

put this together? It's via understanding yourself, understanding your degree, the answer to the "so what?" principle, and finding out how your experience and education fit the needs of the employer.

And so there are a lot of resources for developing an elevator pitch. There are a lot of good resources online. People can do whole presentations about it. But just to briefly explain it, most people do know-- have some experience with it, but it's your personal pitch to summarize your background, skills, goals, and how you can solve your target business or organization's problems in less than 30 seconds.

You know, for my generation, I always think of the example of the movie Tommy Boy, which I probably watched 100 times in high school. Toward the end of the movie, when he finally meets Ray Zalinsky in the elevator, and he makes his pitch to try to save Callahan Brake Pads and Auto Parts, so that is, for me, the quintessential elevator pitch moment.

And so for an employment elevator pitch, it's important to know yourself and to communicate or to at least review your interests and your values and your skills to know what you want to communicate, to state a clear objective, ask how the company or organization can utilize you and your skill set, compare it to an educational elevator speech, which is really knowing your academic concentrations, why you're interested in them, why you're pursuing them, and how those transfer to the working world, highlighting the skills you developed via education, and how you can solve their problems again.

It's the "so what?" principle at the end. So the idea is that you should do your pitch, and ideally, the employer or the person you're networking with won't say, well, so what? How does that solve any of my problems? That's what you want to avoid, boiled down.

Again, making your case-- your resume is a great way for you to market your education and your experience. So how is that done? A lot of it is by doing things that other people forget to do, they get through a stretch of laziness and don't do, or they're just so overwhelmed that they just miss little parts.

So making your case in terms of your resume-- what are some common resume mistakes? Lacking accomplishment statements, a lack of action verbs or a repetition of wording, a lack of a competitive advantage, differentiation, which I will talk about in the next slide, providing irrelevant detail, poor formatting, ambiguous phrasing, poor grammar, typos, just having an objective-- an objective statement at all, really, these days, but having one that's not clear and concise.

So you want to focus on transferable skills that you've developed with your experience and with your education. Another way of tailoring your resume and providing effective resume content is through the ETHOS method, which is just an acronym for writing resume content.

So E for Experience, T for Tasks, H for How-- so how did you accomplish, what was the behavior-- O for Outcomes, and S for Skills. So whenever you're filling out your resume experience sections and really trying to fill out those bullet points and explain what you did at your job, what was the experience? What were your responsibilities? How did you do it? And then, what skills did you develop, and what were the outcomes? That's a great acronym for really brainstorming effective resume writing content.

And the relevance of lead-in is very important with your resume. So this refers to the top third physical section of your resume. Since the vast majority of job applications are done online, the employer or HR manager will pull up your resume, and that first thing they'll see is that top third section. So that's your first impression, that lead-in.

And also, more importantly, I would say the lead-in for each section. So that first bullet point should be that highest point of qualification that speaks to the job posting. And four questions you should ask yourself when you're writing resumes, resume content is, did you deal with money? Did you work with customers? Were you involved in making decisions? And did you supervise? Because those are going to really speak well and really translate well to an employer.

So competitive differentiation, standing out-- so doing the things, essentially, that other job seekers are not doing or not doing often enough or forget to do. So like we said already, having this tailored resume, but you need to have a tailored resume for every application, for every job target, every company you're applying to. You need to highlight keywords that you ideally would have from that job posting.

And if you're applying-- if you are reaching out to a company, you're networking, you're going through the hidden job market, there's not actually a posted job, then how do you find keywords? You can do that a few different ways. One is through networking with people. Another is using a career researching site, like the Occupational Outlook Handbook, to find keywords that are important to that industry, to that job.

I mentioned Resume Worded, and I'll try to show you where that is at the end of the presentation here. But it's like an ATS applicant tracking software system tool that you plug in the job posting, and you plug in your resume, and it just does a scan of each to show you what that employer is looking for based on the job posting and how you are or you're not doing a good job of focusing on those needs in your resume.

Using data, using actual numbers on your resume-- you need to quantify your experience. So the quantity of your work, the quality of your work, the scope of your work environment, and the impact of your work-- in other words, the outcomes. And those are often seen as, like, percentages on resumes. So putting actual numbers on your resume can be super helpful. Eyes are drawn to numbers.

Also, are you networking? Are you coping with a difficult job search? If things aren't going well with your job search, do you have a good support network? Are you maintaining a positive attitude throughout your job search? Are you cultivating strong working relationships, which is - refers to the people you build and sustain a working relationship with are the people that have confidence, that you have their best interests at heart.

So what qualities make up for this successful working relationship? If you were viewed by a customer or a co-worker or a manager, the following words should come up-- trust, respect, empathy, resilience, tenacity, perspective, integrity, accountability, competence, something like that. What is the formula for success? And this is a point that comes from TED Talk superstar, Shawn Achor, He's a psychologist who teaches positive psychology, and he says that most people believe that the formula for success is that how hard you work directly affects how successful you become, and how successful you become defines how happy you will be.

But he challenges the people to reverse the formula, that the actual formula for success is that raising your level of positivity in the present will release dopamine. So there will be an actual physiological change in your system, which will make you feel happy and turns on different learning centers in your brain, allowing you to adapt to your surroundings in a different way. And he says, your intelligence rises, your creativity rises, your energy level rises, and every business outcome improves.

It's also important to be mindful of technology's impact on those writing skills, so on your communication skills. Texting, emailing, social media, for a lot of people, allow writing and grammar skills to slip. So skillful writing shows attention to detail. And if you write "excellent communication skills on a resume," if you have a typo on that resume or a major grammatical issue, you could be eliminated from the competition.

So another important point is just being there, having a presence. Right now, it's not the same way that it used to be, and we don't know what it's going to be like going forward. But conducting informational interviews is a great way to have a presence. And so that's just talking to the people that are doing the work that you're interested in pursuing, finding out how they got there, what they think is important for someone who is pursuing that line of work. You know, what education is required?

You'll find a lot of different opinions and different pathways that people took to get to the place that they are. Sending thank you notes, and the old rule was that a handwritten thank you note after an interview, a networking event, an informational interview, it always had to be handwritten and always had to be sent that day or the next day.

But now, a lot of companies highly value conservation, and they value electronic communication. They don't want to waste paper, so that's something to think, about knowing that company's culture. Should you send a handwritten thank you note? Should you send something electronically?

Do you have a LinkedIn profile? If you're a job seeker, you need to have one. If you're going to look for a job within the year, you need to have one. You need to build it. You need to have a tailored URL, when you do have your profile, that you put on your resume in the Contact Information section.

Your online presence is important. So what is your presence on social media sites? Have you googled yourself to see what's out there? It's helpful for people who are blessed with generic names like me. There is a lot of Chris Millers in the world, so that's a little bit of extra privacy for someone. But you need to know what your online presence is.

And also, in *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, the book I referenced with effective job search strategies, there is a chapter entitled "Google Is Your New Resume," and Richard Bolles points out that you lose some control with your online presence compared to a resume and that 91% of US employers have looked up a candidate's social networking profile and that 57% of those have rejected a candidate because of what they found.

And that-- again, it's knowing your audience, because for a lot of people, they say, fine, I don't do anything online anyway. And for some jobs, that's OK, and for other jobs, it's not. If it's a job or a company that deals a lot with social media platforms, they're going to want to hire people that know how to use them or have some kind of activity there.

And so the recommendation that Richard Bolles makes is to edit what you have, so edit your existing material that's online to make sure everything's appropriate. Fill in an update, so complete any empty profiles that you have or sections of any platforms that need to be filled out, and then to expand when possible, to join LinkedIn groups or forums or following blogs or staying up to date with relevant YouTube videos that might fit into a professional area.

So yeah, those are just some of the ways that you can make sure you are differentiating yourself from the competition. You're writing effective resume content. You are preparing ahead of time to be able to communicate. You are connecting with employers and really trying to share information about your background, your education, and why you are a good fit, and how you can solve a company's problems or be a contributor.

So yeah, that generally, I think, brings me to the end. I want to just say, thank you so much for joining. I will check the chat box here in a second to see what questions you have. Here is my contact information. Like I said, I work with prospective students and also, obviously, current Global Campus students and alumni members.

And I have-- through just the general Global Campus website, you can find the career information, how to connect with me. And also, with the Global Campus blog, I'd like to show a- - I like to provide information about online events for online students, so education fairs and career fairs and networking events and things like this, obviously.

I know I said I was going to show you Resume Worded and where it is, too, so let me do that, actually, before I over to the comments here. So just a second while I share my screen with a switch here. Make sure that's on. And just a moment-- that one. You should be able to see it.

So this is just the home page for the Academic Success and Career Center, the career services side of things, so ascc.wsu.edu, and on the left hand drop-down menu, Career Services is the option you would want to find here. And then just clicking on Overview will bring you to this page that I'm on. And then on the right side, you'll see Resume Worded. And that's the place where you would go to post-- to input job posting information and also your resume, and they'll do a comparative analysis for that. It's a great tool.

OK, let me jump back over. Whoops, don't want to go that far. OK. Again, thank you so much for joining. I will look at the questions now.

"Do you think cover letters are essential when applying for jobs, or do you think it's more of an optional thing to add when applying for jobs?" And so, in my opinion, I think they are a great opportunity to provide more detail, because with a resume, you're providing that-- hopefully that ETHOS method formula of content. And you don't have the space to provide as much detail as you could and as you would in, say, an interviewing environment.

And so if you really have a positive story to share, that's something you'll hopefully get to communicate in an interview. But in order to get to that interview, you need to have a strong resume, and the opportunity to provide more detail with a cover letter is great. You don't want to be too-- you don't to be repetitive, just repeating things from a resume. But you're finding those points that you can provide more detail on, and that kind of speaks to that leading in part I talked about earlier.

What is the most relevant point for you to focus on for that job posting? Resume Worded will help point out some of the things you need to focus on. Is there something there you can pick and choose from to really provide more detail on? And that cover letter is a great opportunity to do that.

I understand why you're asking, because a cover letter is kind of a formulaic introduction. This is where I found it. And then the ending is, thank you so much. Here's my contact information. I'd love to meet with you, or here's a specific day I will follow up, blah, blah, blah.

So yeah, I think that's-- I think that's a great question. I think it's an excellent opportunity just to provide more detail. All right, thank you so much, everyone. I'll stick around for a little bit longer if you do have any questions. Thank you again for joining, and I hope you're all doing well, as well as possible right now. And thank you so much, and take care.