

Press release
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What do Kiwi employers value more: technical skills or soft skills?

- 54% of New Zealand HR managers place greater emphasis on technical skills for management-level roles, a figure that rises to 66% for staff-level roles.
- 31% say they place equal importance on both technical and soft skill capabilities for staff-level roles, lowering to 27% for management-level staff.
- 40% think leadership acumen is the top skill that needs development among their management-level staff.

Auckland, 17th May 2017 – As the modern workplace continues to evolve and become more collaborative, jobseekers need to take steps to improve not only their technical skills but also their soft skills. Independent research by specialised recruitment company [Robert Half](#) confirms strong technical skills continue to be a fundamental requirement for a successful career. However, soft skills have gained in importance as they allow professionals to add significant value to an organisation.

When evaluating candidates for management-level positions, more than half (54%) of New Zealand HR managers place more emphasis on the candidate's technical skills, with less than one in three (27%) saying it's an even split between their technical capabilities and soft skillsets. For staff-level (or non-management) roles, 66% place more weight on technical skillsets, yet one in three (31%) place an equal amount of importance on the candidate's technical and soft skillsets.

Megan Alexander, General Manager at Robert Half New Zealand said: *"In an employment market facing a growing skills shortage, companies need professionals who have the technical capabilities to be able to perform their role, and candidates with solid technical skills will always have an advantage during the recruitment process. However, a jobseeker's soft skills can be what sets them apart from the competition."*

"In order to build more collaborative and innovative workplaces, employers need staff members who can not only perform their job well, but who also demonstrate sound communication, leadership and team-building qualities. Soft skills have evolved in recent years from 'nice-to-have' to 'need-to-have' competencies."

The soft skills in highest demand

When asked what the top soft skills they'd like to see their employees improve, companies are quick to specify leadership as the top required skill, particularly for their management-level staff. Four in 10 (40%) HR managers rate leadership skills most highly for senior roles compared to 26% when considering staff-level employees.

It is apparent the functional-based skills required to perform the role is paramount to almost half of employers (45%) as job-related skillsets were cited as the top area for development among their staff-level employees.

"Professionals at every stage of their career need to continually develop and refine their soft skills, which demonstrates to their employer a willingness to go above and beyond the job description and add measurable value to their role and the company. Skills such as interpersonal communication, leadership and strategic planning are incredibly valuable skills to master," concluded **Megan Alexander**.

3 soft skills and tips on how to develop them to advance your career

1. Leadership aptitude

Climbing the ranks throughout your career will be next to impossible if you can't prove your ability to manage a team, which inevitably requires mastering the so-called "soft" skill of leadership. If your employer doesn't offer any leadership workshops, look into leadership courses outside of work.

If you can't afford the course or can't spare the time, ask your boss for extra responsibilities or new projects at work, both within your department and in other areas of the company. Spearheading new initiatives shows employers that you're proactive and a natural team leader.

2. Communication

As you rise in your career, it will become increasingly important to express your ideas clearly and succinctly. To develop sound communication skills, practice active listening with both your supervisors and direct reports, and use writing skills to produce flawless reports.

To boost your communication talent, try to be self-aware during every interaction. If you can't get your point across when speaking, try saying it another way rather than repeating yourself. A good tip for speaking more clearly is to skip jargon and buzzwords, and always maintain a professional tone. Do the same with your writing, and be sure to proofread everything twice.

3. Adaptability

Technology and other resources are transforming the modern workplace at breakneck speed, and to demonstrate your relevance, you need to stay on top of current trends and embrace change. For example, if your company is heavily invested in its online presence, you should fine-tune your social media skills to contribute to the business in more meaningful ways. Another good way to demonstrate adaptability is to become more proficient in the latest updates relating to your specific industry and business.

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Notes to editors

About the research

The annual study is developed by Robert Half and conducted in April 2016 by an independent research firm, surveying 100 New Zealand HR managers. This survey is part of the international workplace survey, a questionnaire about job trends, talent management and trends in the workplace.

About Robert Half

Robert Half is the world's first and largest specialised recruitment consultancy and member of the S&P 500. Founded in 1948, the company has over 325 offices worldwide providing temporary, interim and permanent recruitment solutions for accounting, finance and technology in New Zealand. More information on roberthalf.co.nz.

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