



# SOFT SKILLS TOOLKIT

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# Welcome!

Welcome to our toolkit on soft skills essential for the workplace. Soft skills are the intangible abilities, attributes and traits that are often highly sought after by employers, such as teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills. While hard skills can easily be measured or quantified, this is not the case with soft skills, which may come with experience, or be inherent to the candidate in question.

“Soft skills are what make you easy to work with and give you the tools to grow in the job,” says Gradireland editor Ruairí Kavanagh. Overall soft skills are hugely important in work and in finding work, and are highly desired by employers.

In this toolkit we will be looking at ten soft skills in depth, their importance in the work place, and how you can improve upon them.

They are:

- Commercial Awareness (business acumen)
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Negotiation and Persuasion
- Problem Solving
- Leadership
- Organisation
- Perseverance and Motivation
- Resilience - Ability to work under pressure
- Confidence

## Useful Links



The Irish Times | [Why Soft Skills Matter for Graduates](#)



The Irish Times | [How To Showcase Your Soft Skills in an Interview](#)



Mindtools.com | [Why Soft Skills Matter](#)



# Commercial Awareness (Business Acumen)

Commercial awareness, or business acumen, is the understanding of how businesses and industries operate, and what qualities are necessary to make a business succeed.

It is about knowing what is going on in the world and analysing the way it might impact on your chosen sector and company.

Commercial awareness is a highly-valued skill in the current employment market, and is also a relatively easy skill to develop with a little application and thought, particularly if you have some work experience under your belt already. You can develop your commercial awareness through professional experience, including on a voluntary basis, or even by reading and studying. Reading the business pages of newspapers, watching or listening to news channels, and keeping an eye on markets all help to develop commercial awareness and an understanding of how industries function in a national and international context.

Commercial awareness is of huge value to the business you work for, as the context in which you work is constantly changing, and having an employee who is consistently up to date with these changes is reassuring. For the individual, commercial awareness is particularly helpful as it helps you in the day to day aspect of your job, but would also be of huge benefit if you were considering moving job.

Practical tips to improve your commercial awareness could be:

- Read a journal article every day
- Listen to a business podcast
- Watch the 6pm news every day

## Useful Links



Mindtools.com | [Developing Commercial Success](#)



SkillsYouNeed.com | [Commercial Awareness](#)



CorporateTraining.ie | [Business Acumen Training](#)

# Communication Skills

Good communication skills allow you to communicate information, ideas and feelings effectively and efficiently.

Strong communication skills are important in both large and smaller working environments, to ensure that every person is aware of what they are contributing, and how it fits into the bigger picture.

Communication skills are also integral to ensuring minimal miscommunication, both in the work place and outside of it, to avoid confusion.

Examples of communication skills questions that may be asked in an interview include:

- Describe a situation where your communication skills made a difference to a situation.
- Describe a situation when you failed to communicate appropriately. How was this situation resolved?

When in work environments it is often easy to get lost in work specific language and jargon. It is best if at all possible to try and simplify your language to ensure effective communication, and to make sure that everyone you work with or on your team is fully aware of the task at hand, and how you plan to reach your end goals.

In work environments you may also spend a lot of time communicating with colleagues or clients online or via the phone. Face-to-face communication is likely the easiest way to avoid confusion and miscommunication, so when using other mediums of communications it is important to use clear concise language, and to ask questions or follow up if there is any confusion. You will not be criticised for clarifying things, it is better to ask a question at an early stage to make sure of something rather than wasting time and resources at a later stage due to a minor miscommunication that could have been easily cleared up.



# Communication Skills


How you verbally express yourself and listen are imperative to communication, but there are other ways to effectively communicate too. Working on your body language and maintaining good eye contact are also important to making sure you are heard and understood.

You can improve your communication skills by:

- Practise being a good listener
- Ask for honest feedback from those around you
- Take notes in meetings, and reread to make sure you understand

## Useful Links

 [Study.com | Workplace Communication Importance Strategies Examples](#)

 [HRTechnologist.com | Effective Communication in the Workplace](#)

 [CareerAddict.com | The Importance of Effective Communication in the Workplace](#)



# Teamwork Skills

Teamwork skills are the qualities that allow you to work well and succeed when collaborating with others on projects, in meetings and in work in general.

These skills are of particular importance in a work environment as they allow individuals to perform to their strengths, while ensuring the overall quality of the task at hand. Working as part of a team can ensure that work is completed in a more timely manner, and that the workload is more evenly spread out, ensuring one member of the team is not under undue pressure.

Working as part of a team can be of benefit to the business as when employees learn to work together effectively, their productivity may increase.

On an individual level, teamwork skills generally encourage you to compromise and work better with others, which can be of benefit in your personal life as well.

Competency based interviews frequently feature questions about teamwork and teamwork skills. Some examples are:

- What is your definition of a good team player?
- Describe a time you were a member of a team and there was a conflict.
- Describe a time you were successful in ensuring your team worked together effectively.
- Describe a time you had to compromise within a team to ensure your task was completed to the best of your ability.

Improving teamwork skills comes through practice, and many workplaces place great emphasis on team building activities, and organise teambuilding activities and days out, with the sole purpose of bringing the team closer together in a non-work environment, such as orienteering, escape rooms, back to back drawing, etc.



# Teamwork Skills

When working as part of a team it is important to think of the team as a whole, and not argue over who gets credit. Complaining about different aspects of a project is also not conducive to a positive work environment for your team. Laying down ground rules early on in group meetings or projects can also increase group productivity.

Tips on how to improve your teamwork skills could be:

- Teambuilding exercises – be they a game or a quick exercise warm up
- Learn and accept your teammates' strengths and weaknesses
- Celebrate achievements together

## Useful Links

 [TheHappyManager.com | Why Is Teamwork Important?](https://www.thehappymanager.com/why-is-teamwork-important/)

 [TheBalanceCareers.com | Teamwork Skills](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/teamwork-skills/)

 [Davitt Corporate Partners | Important Teamwork Skills](https://www.davitt.com/corporate-partners/important-teamwork-skills/)



# Negotiation and Persuasion Skills

Negotiation skills are the qualities which allow people to reach an agreement or compromise, while persuasion skills are those where someone can influence or change the opinion or attitude of another person or group, or encourage them to act in a specific way.

These skills are important both when dealing with clients or customers, but also when working with colleagues.

Persuasion skills are particularly important when working in customer service or dealing with the public, as you effectively persuade potential customers or members of the public to purchase your goods or services over someone else's.

Negotiation skills are invaluable in the workplace, as negotiation takes place at every level of a business. Employees and employers often negotiate over salaries, businesses enter into negotiations with suppliers, others enter into negotiations with potential clients and customers regarding what services will be made available to them.

Examples of interview questions based on this include:

- Describe a time you negotiated to bring about a resolution to a conflict.
- Can you tell me about a time you failed to reach an agreement in negotiations?
- Describe a work situation when you persuaded someone to see things your way.

Simple tips to improve on your negotiation and persuasion skills could be:

- Prepare yourself and do research wherever possible before a negotiation
- Be a good listener and empathetic
- Don't hesitate to personalise things and tell your own story in negotiations

## Useful Links



Indeed.com | [Persuasion Skills](#)



TheBalanceCareers.com | [Persuasion Skills and Examples](#)



TheBalanceCareers.com | [Negotiation Skills](#)



# Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving skills refer to the ability to troubleshoot and overcome obstacles and potentially unexpected situations that may arise in the workplace. A strong problem-solver can identify the problem, decide on the best solution, and implement it in a timely manner.

Problem solving skills are important both to individuals and organisations because it allows us to take control of our environment and adapt them as necessary. In business issues constantly arise and things need to be changed and fixed, some things change over time and others are broken from the get go, they all still need to be addressed.

Someone who can take the initiative to address these issues head on and ensure that things are correct is invaluable to a business.

Problem solving skills are easily transferable to essentially all kinds of businesses and industries.

Questions about problem solving are often asked in interviews, such as:

- What was the most stressful situation you faced at work? How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation at work when you were faced with a problem you could not solve. What did you do?
- Describe a time when you used a creative solution to tackle some job-related problem.


Tips to boost your problem solving skills include:

- Practise puzzles, crosswords or sudoku in your free time
- When faced with an issue, write down the problem and a list of possible solutions
- Use mindmaps where possible to visualise any number of outcomes

## Useful Links

 [CareerBuilder.com | Why Problem Solving Skills are Important](https://www.careerbuilder.com/why-problem-solving-skills-are-important)

 [Graduateland.com | Problem Solving Skills](https://www.graduateland.com/problem-solving-skills)

 [ICAEW.com | Job Essentials and Employability Skills](https://www.icaew.com/job-essentials-and-employability-skills)

# Leadership Skills

Leadership skills are the strengths and abilities you use when organising other people to reach a shared goal. Strong leaders know when and to whom they should delegate work, and are good communicators and motivators.

Good leaders are thought to possess a range of attributes. Some of the skills good leaders need include:

- Strategic Thinking
- Planning and Delivery
- People Management
- Change Management
- Communication
- Passion and Influence

A good leader will have the ability to inspire confidence in their colleagues and to improve morale across departments. By focusing on the positives of a job well done you will be able to encourage your team members to match that effort.

If employees feel that they are appreciated by their colleagues and leaders in a work environment, they are more likely to want to be in work, and to carry out their duties well.

Potential interview questions enquiring about your leadership skills could be:

- Can you tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills?
- Are you able to delegate responsibilities efficiently? Describe a time you did this.
- Tell me about a time when something went wrong at work and you took control.


Practical tips to improve your leadership skills include:

- Be honest – admit your own strengths and weaknesses and ask for help when necessary, delegate accordingly
- Develop good relationships – ask your colleagues how they are and how they are finding their task at hand
- Practise discipline – set deadlines, wake up early, reply to all your emails every morning etc.

## Useful Links

 [CareerPortal.com](https://www.careerportal.com) | [Leadership in the Workplace](#)

 [TheBalanceCareers.com](https://www.thebalancecareers.com) | [Top Leadership Skills](#)

 [Open Colleges](https://www.opencolleges.co.uk) | [Leadership Skills for Success](#)

# Organisational Skills

Organisational skills refer to the ability to use your energy, time and the resources available to you in the most productive way possible to ensure your work is carried out to the best of your ability.

Organisational skills are highly coveted in the working world, as candidates, and later, employees, with strong organisational skills can enhance productivity in the workplace.

An individual with well-developed organisational skills is deemed to have the ability to manage their duties and responsibilities through time optimisation, good forward planning, and prioritisation, without losing crucial attention to detail. These skills are essential to the running of a successful business, and ultimately organised employees help save the company time and money.

These skills are also among the most important transferable job skills you can attain, because they enable you to complete difficult assignments and projects without missing a beat that can be used in a wide range of circumstances and positions. Having strong organisational skills will stand to you in any job, no matter what the industry.

Questions regarding organisational skills that could be asked in an interview include:

- Describe a time when you worked under a tight deadline.
- Can you describe a time when your organisational skills helped you succeed.
- Tell me about a time when your planning led to positive results.

You can improve your organisational skills by:

- Making lists – to do lists, lists of goals, even shopping lists
- Planning your time
- Start tasks early – don't put off tasks until the last minute, you will only stress yourself out more, and do a sub-par job

## Useful Links



[IrishJobs.ie](https://IrishJobs.ie) | [Organisational Skills and the Workplace](#)



[TheBalanceCareers.com](https://TheBalanceCareers.com) | [Organisational Skills List](#)



[CareerTrend.com](https://CareerTrend.com) | [Workplace Organisational Skills](#)

# Perseverance and Motivation

Perseverance is continuing to do something despite adversity or difficulty you may come into contact with, while motivation is the driving force behind why someone behaves the way they do. If someone is highly motivated, they are likely to persevere and continue to do their work to a high standard.

In a business or work context, perseverance and motivation are extremely important for both the day to day and long term running of a business.

You must be motivated to do your work every day, to finish that project you're working on, or to make the business successful in the long-term.

Perseverance and persistence are equally crucial in the work required to turn a business into a viable enterprise, given the challenges and roadblocks that can appear along the way.

Motivated and dedicated employees are of huge benefit to a business, as they will carry out their work to the best of their ability but can often inspire others around them.

Motivated individuals also tend to be happier doing their own work, and will do their work in a timely, efficient manner.

Tips to stay motivated and persevere in work include:

- Create small short term goals and celebrate as you complete them
- Stick to strict work hours so you don't burn out
- Ask for help if needed

## Useful Links



[ReadyToManage.com](#) | [Is Perseverance the Key?](#)



[GradJobs.com](#) | [The Importance of Workplace Motivation](#)



[Business.com](#) | [The Benefits of Motivated Employees](#)



# Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulty and continue regardless of any situation. In the context of work or business, this is particularly important as it can ensure continuity of service and products. Resilience itself is a mindset, that can be learned and improved upon with time.

Past experiences of facing up to challenging situations can help you with future challenges.

Resilient individuals tend to have these common characteristics:

- A positive attitude.
- Confidence and calmness.
- A willingness to ask for help.
- Empathy and understanding.
- Persistence and determination.

Resilience in the workplace focuses on how businesses can maintain their usual operations in the face of unexpected disasters.

“Business resilience” is a term that comprises crisis management and business continuity and that represents the ability of organisations and businesses to quickly adapt and respond to all types of unexpected situations – such as natural disasters, supply chain disruptions, etc.

It is possible to boost your own resilience. Techniques to do so include:

- Keeping a hopeful or positive mindset
- Focusing on what is within your control, and only that
- Being compassionate and kind to yourself.

## Useful Links



IrishLifeHealth.ie | [Resilience in the Workplace](#)



HeadsUp.org | [The Role of Resilience in the Workplace](#)



PositivePsychology.com | [Resilience in the Workplace](#)

# Confidence

Confidence is the feeling or a trust in yourself or your abilities. In a business context, confidence is particularly important because it shows that you know your value and worth, and expect to be treated accordingly, be that through colleagues or customers.

As an employee or member of staff, if you are confident in your abilities you are more likely to be given more responsibility, which may lead to a promotion further down the line.

From a business or business-owner's perspective, confidence is key in showing your customer or clients that your product or service is of the highest possible standard, and worth their while, and money.

Clients and customers are also more likely to go with a business that is confident enough to publish and publicise their achievements, as it gives them a metric to quantify how successful the business is, and emphasise if they wish to work with your business.

For example, businesses that publicise awards they have won, or good reviews they have received, or even just emphasise the quality of their goods or services, do so to make potential clients and customers aware of their high standards. This makes them more likely to want to work with or purchase from your business.

Tips to build your confidence in yourself, for your personal and professional life:

- Set small goals for yourself and achieve them. You can't do everything at once!
- Think positive, focus on the things you can achieve rather than dwelling on what you cannot, or what may be difficult.
- Acknowledge your own achievements, no matter how small.
- Admit when you make a mistake and learn from it for the next time, rather than shirking the responsibility or catastrophising the situation.
- Accept compliments graciously. If you worked hard on a piece of work, and someone congratulates you on a job well done, simply say thank you, you don't need to be overly modest!

## Useful Links



LiveCareer.com | [Increasing Workplace Self Confidence](#)



MotusRecruiting | [The Importance of Workplace Confidence](#)



Career-noomii.com | [Confidence is Key](#)



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Opportunities For All