

Beyond the Numbers: The Ever-Growing Importance of Interpersonal Skills

By Robert Half/Accountemps

Interviewing for a new payroll position? You'll want to highlight far more than just your proficiency with numbers. Chief financial officers across Canada polled in a recent Accountemps survey said that interpersonal skills are the attribute they find most valuable in job candidates. Thirty-four per cent of CFOs said that when evaluating applicants with similar qualifications, "personality or people skills" tip the balance over technical knowledge, industry-specific experience and advanced certifications. (This is up significantly from a similar survey conducted five years ago when a mere 1 per cent of CFO respondents cited interpersonal abilities.)

Following are three key people skills, along with tips for showcasing them during a job interview:

The skill: Communication. Prospective employers give high marks to articulate interviewees who are able to clearly convey information and ideas.

How to demonstrate it: Throughout the interview, maintain eye contact, smile occasionally when appropriate and listen attentively to the interviewer's questions. When responding to questions, be succinct and organized. Be careful not to interrupt, talk excessively or use slang or jargon.

The skill: Diplomacy. Interviewers look for job candidates who can work harmoniously with others even under challenging circumstances.

How to demonstrate it: Position yourself as a positive-minded problem solver who enjoys collaborating with others. In previous positions, perhaps there was friction among colleagues that hampered productivity and morale. Think about instances when you mediated disputes to help your team get back on track. Moreover, always be tactful when speaking about former managers or coworkers. Remember: Badmouthing others will only make *you* look bad.

The skill: Leadership. Hiring managers seek individuals who are able to oversee projects, resources and coworkers to deliver optimum results.

How to demonstrate it: Even if you've never officially supervised someone or been a "manager" of a project, chances are you've shown leadership qualities during your career. Have you trained junior colleagues or mentored interns? Can you think of situations in which you showed initiative by providing assistance or support before being asked to do so? Review your previous work experience, looking for times when you took the lead in solving problems by pitching a more efficient plan or process.

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