

83% of Companies Say “Willingness to Learn” Essential for Job Applicants

Need for Soft Skills May Indicate Low Employee Productivity During COVID-19 Pandemic

Latest Results from The Harris Poll

OKLAHOMA CITY, July 28, 2021 – U.S. hiring decision-makers are looking for a willingness to learn, dependability, adaptability and initiative, among other soft skills, in what may be fallout from the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is according to a new survey from The Harris Poll commissioned by Express Employment Professionals.

When considering applicants to hire for their company, U.S. hiring decision-makers commonly look for certain soft skills in their applicants. Specifically, more than 8 in 10 say willingness to learn (83%), dependability (82%) and/or communication skills (81%) are absolutely essential or very important when considering applicants.



More than 3 in 4 say problem-solving skills (79%), adaptability (78%) and/or initiative (78%) are of high importance. The focus on these attributes may in part be because more than half (57%) say their company had problems with low employee productivity during the coronavirus pandemic compared to before.

“Having survived closures brought on by the pandemic, most employers have reopened their doors only to navigate new obstacles,” said Nancy Reed, Express franchise owner in Texas. “Hiring new employees now brings in more challenges such as the ability to work together, work in chaotic environments and less training. Employers will expect employees to be more flexible, optimistic and take initiative. Additional stress will be added to workplaces as positions are redefined, new personalities enter the workplace and demands increase.”

For Reggie Kaji, Express franchise owner in Michigan, communication is at the top of his list for job seekers, particularly with the need for remote work and employer flexibility. He views this, and other soft skills, as strengths that have suffered over the past year ... and even before.

“Soft skills undoubtedly suffered prior to the pandemic but the existing problem has been accelerated as a result,” he said. “I can’t seem to find people who know how to think critically. I think with the age of technology we have suffered in remembering the basic soft skills.”

Returning physically to the office after so much time away also brings its challenges as

employees adapt to sharing environments with coworkers once again.

“People may have forgotten how to work with others,” Reed said. “They are used to working alone and cohabitating in the workplace will have to be relearned as they go back in person. Employees also became conditioned to making their own schedules and working at their own pace, so there will be areas where employees need to be flexible with leadership and one another.”

As for which is more important, hard or soft skills, Reed says soft skills take priority in her book because those are the skills that have been lost during the pandemic. For those who remained employed, they utilized their hard skills regularly.

However, in the increasingly tight labor market, Kaji said soft skills are important in making hiring decisions but many employers are overlooking them in the interest of production. They just need to “get things done.”

“Soft skills are much harder to teach than concrete knowledge, but those skills could be the difference between a hiring manager passing on a candidate or a job offer and progression up the career ladder,” Express CEO Bill Stoller said. “Those who are dependable, flexible, communicate well and get along with others offer the full package for employers looking to add quality employees to their workforce.”

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between March 23 and April 12, 2021, among 1,001 U.S. hiring decision-makers (defined as adults ages 18+ in the U.S. who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than one employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data was weighted where necessary by company size to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

If you would like to arrange for an interview with Bill Stoller to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena (Karami) Hollander, Director of Corporate Communications and PR, at (405) 717-5966.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the international staffing company has more than 830 franchises in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Since inception, Express has put more than 9 million people to work worldwide.

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At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Our international network

of franchises offers localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, employing 526,000 people globally in 2020. For more information, visit www.ExpressPros.com.