

# “You need to be able to listen, you need to be able to collaborate”

*The “soft skills” assume ever-greater significance in today’s workplace*

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Today’s work environment is a lot more complex than it was, years ago. So much work is shared, so many assignments are handled in teams. Expectations are different, and so are the skills necessary to meet them.

We look for emotional intelligence, awareness of self and others, “self-actualization” – for example, in college, did someone try to take-on special assignments, internships, and so forth? And lack of dependability is the one thing that just fries any employer: “If I can’t count on you ...”

Certainly, you still need the technical skills to be able to do your job. But there’s much more than that. There’s more emphasis than ever on the “three C’s” of critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. Those last two, in particular, are driving where things are going. Individuals who don’t have very good communications skills and aren’t good self-starters, they’re just going to get stuck and not progress.

To succeed in today’s workplace, you need to be able to listen, you need to be able to collaborate. That can be a real challenge, especially for this generation of workers, since so much of their communication is electronic.

Work ethic, commitment, and dedication also are very

different today. A generation ago, you stayed put more, with one employer. Today, turnover is much higher than in the past. As much as 45 percent of today’s new hires are not long-lasting, and that’s largely due to a lack of soft skills.

As an employer, you have to really assess what turnover costs you. The “soft costs” of turnover can run fairly high. For example, in Illinois, if you let an issue with

a new employee go beyond 30 days and have to let him or her go, and that worker then files for unemployment insurance – well, you’re the employer of record, and it’s on you.

Now, it wouldn’t be realistic or fair to treat the “soft skills” problems as a strictly “Millennials” issue. These challenges absolutely cross generational boundaries.

In fact, we have a young man who’s a Millennial or at the end of Generation Y.

He’s managing a team of people, and putting good communication clearly in front: He sets goals and timelines. He gives recognition when it’s due. I see him doing a better job as manager of a team than I might have as a Baby-Boomer, earlier in my career! I was so self-reliant and self-directed. But it’s a two-way street.

