

SKILLS STILL MATTER

By **PATRICIA RIVERA**
CTW Features

So often it's about being in the right place at the right time – and for landing a great job, add to that mix possessing the right skills to make the ultimate impression.

But those right skills aren't always what you think. Take for instance active listening, listening comprehension and critical thinking. Who takes a class in active listening? Yet listening to what other people are saying and asking questions is critically important in many of the nation's fastest growing jobs.

"These are also transferable skills that are useful in almost any industry and occupation," says labor market analyst and New Jersey author Laurence Shatkin, who has written more than 18 books on career trends.

Shatkin studied the Bureau of Labor Statistics' latest employment projections anticipated through 2022 to see what skills dominate the occupations that will be growing fastest. He summed them up and put them in descending order.

Other skills in the top 10 are: speaking, monitoring, coordination, social perceptiveness, writing, service orientation and judgment and decision-making.

Some of the skills are difficult for people to develop on their own. For instance, critical thinking is often learned as part of larger curriculum or course – or through purposeful independent study.

Yet it's important to develop because so many jobs are being automated and outsourced to individuals outside of the United States with lower education or skills, Shatkin says. Smart employees must know how to analyze information and evaluate results to choose the best solution and solve problems.

"That is why the jobs with greatest growth potential require workers to evaluate options critical decisions quickly," he says. Jobs in greatest demand, including those in health care and technology, require employees to acquire information, making sense of it and communicating it effectively.

Others skills such reading, writing and reading comprehension can also be honed through classes, workshops and hands-on experience. Some colleges even offer continuing education courses in these topics.

"These are communication skills considered perennial necessities," Shatkin adds.

Active listening, social perceptiveness and service orientation – also on the top 10 list – reflect the growth in the health care.

"But you also see other jobs across a variety of industries that place an emphasis on working with teams," he adds.

Shatkin says active listening also comes in handy in the technology industry as it's a skill that allows workers to master the stream of new technologies, new markets and new business practices that affect their jobs.

"These are all the types of transferable skills that carry the most clout and lead to higher incomes," he adds..

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Percent of workers who say cell phone use and texting is their biggest productivity stopper at work.

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WHEN IT COMES TO THE JOB HUNT, DESIGN RESPONSIBLY.

By **DAWN KLINGENSMITH**
CTW Features

It won't bring solace to those who are out of work, but people have actually gotten paid to determine how long recruiters spend looking at job applicants' résumés. One eye-tracking study by TheLadders online job search site found that recruiters spent a scant six seconds on average scanning each résumé. With precious few seconds to make an impression, should jobseekers use graphic design elements to set theirs apart?

Especially outside of a creative field, employers generally prefer a "clean, concise" résumé that makes it easy to see at a glance the specific information they use to qualify or eliminate applicants, says John Herath, director of human resources at Orion International recruiting firm headquartered in Cary, North Carolina.

That does not preclude using graphic design to spiff up a résumé, but it won't make up for poor content. Design elements should enhance rather than distract, so consider

limiting them to text boxes, sidebars or charts showing quantifiable achievements, suggests professional résumé writer and career coach Charlotte Weeks, of Weeks Career Services in Chicago.

While she says setting off a testimonial with display type can add visual appeal as well as relevant information, Herath believes a résumé is not necessarily the optimal place for what essentially amounts to a reference.

A designed as opposed to simply formatted résumé can be part of a personal branding strategy, tying in with stationery and business cards. In creative fields, it's not uncommon for people to turn their name or initials into a logo. For most industries, "I don't think a full-blown logo is needed, but a nice type treatment with your name would be a nice touch," says Dan Antonelli, CEO and creative director of the New Jersey advertising agency Graphic D-Signs Inc.

Save the document as a PDF to "lock in the design so the formatting doesn't get messed

up" when transmitting electronically, Weeks advises. If special design software is used, converting the résumé to a PDF also enables recipients to download and open it.

No matter how painstaking the design, also create and keep on hand a plain text version, stripped of all formatting, in case employers ask for one. When applying for jobs online, it may be easier to copy and paste from the plain text version, Weeks says.

As for basic layout and sequencing, Herath says a conventional approach is best. The vast majority of résumés are laid out the same way for good reason, with the contact information on top followed by a summary statement (ideally loaded with keywords used in the job posting), employment history in reverse chronological order and so on. HR professionals "tend to like these best because we know exactly where to find key information and process résumés in an expedited way," Herath explains.

Hiring managers and certainly network contacts may be

more impressed than HR folks by smartly designed résumés, Herath adds. That's because the HR office typically sorts the qualified candidates from dozens or perhaps hundreds of unqualified hopefuls, and then the hiring manager steps in to identify the ideal candidate and may take flair into consideration.

Jobseekers who want a "designed" look but don't know their way around design software might want to hire a graphic designer or professional résumé writer for the best results. While résumé writers focus on content, many know how to maximize the potential of Microsoft Word for a graphically designed effect, Weeks says.

An amateurish design will draw attention in a bad way, Antonelli says, whereas a pro "will be able to design a more atypical résumé and break some rules while still being professional, clean and forward-thinking."

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PAYROLL

DOES THIS CHECK OUT?

Millions of workers are constantly juggling the numbers – counting the dollars in their wallet and the days left until payday.

Sometimes, the math presents frustrating challenges, due to paychecks that are smaller than workers expect, says University of Houston Law Center professor Jim Hawkins.

In an article to be published by the Minnesota Law Review, Hawkins outlines how, ironically, checks can come up short because employers have previously over-paid workers, and rectify the error by subtracting from a future check. Since pay involves many

variables – like rates for over-time, benefits and taxes – mistakes and clerical errors can occur, Hawkins notes.

An employee overstating the number of hours worked on a time card is among the common reasons for over-payments, notes Bill Dunn, director of government relations for the American Payroll Association.

Hawkins argues that workers need laws governing the recovery of overages in paychecks, so that they won't receive a



explanation of the pay," advises Dunn.

Paychecks that are for a lesser amount than what's rightfully due can also occur because of clerical errors in entering wage and hour data, notes Hawkins.

Although he's advocating for legal protections, Hawkins advises that anyone now confronted with a paycheck he feels is too small, "should bring it up with his employer or ultimately consult a lawyer if it can't be resolved."

– Marilyn Kennedy Melia
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future check with a sizable payback deduction, forcing them to scramble to pay their current expenses.

"If any employee has reason to believe he or she is not being paid the proper amount, that employee should ask his or her manager, Human Resources and Payroll for an

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