

The 5 soft skills and 15 characteristics that can accelerate your career

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Being successful in your veterinary career is about more than just technical skills. True, you went to veterinary school to learn a tremendous number of technical skills, but there is more to the job than just what those skills entail. After all, you will be working with other people at each of your employers (and in today's employment marketplace, you can expect to work at multiple employers during the course of your career).

Not only that, but as a veterinarian, you will also be interacting with pet owners. And since in some cases, their beloved pet or companion animal will be sick—or worse—they very well may be emotional, irrational or some combination thereof. And in such a situation, technical skills will not be of much use to you. That is why you must give some attention to soft skills or interpersonal skills, because they very much have an impact on the arc of your career and how much success you can enjoy within it.

With this in mind, I have five soft skills, in addition to 15 characteristics that can accelerate your career:

#1—Communication

The ability to communicate well is a sought-after skill in the marketplace. Being proficient in all forms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is essential to increasing your worth and value. I encourage you to continue improving your communication skills, both before and after graduation.

#2—Active listening

This one is especially important. If you are talking the whole time or interrupting someone, you will miss out on hearing important information. It is important to learn active listening skills and to be able to focus on what the person you are talking with is saying.

#3—Time management

Time management equates to higher levels of production, which in turn equates to higher levels of profit for your employer. And that is exactly how you tie a skill directly to an employer's bottom line.

#4—The art of persuasion or influence

This does not mean you have to work in a sales role. However, the ability to “sell” something, including an idea or your point of view, is valuable no matter where you work or your position. If you possess the ability to persuade or influence others, then you possess value other people do not.

#5—Leadership

Organizations need leaders, and they need them at all levels. They want to hire them, grow them from within and do whatever they need to get them. Specifically, they need genuine, authentic leaders.

On top of these five soft skills, here are 15 characteristics that have nothing directly to do with talent or technical skills:

#1—Being prompt and punctual

How difficult is it to be on time? I'm talking about being on time for work, appointments, meetings and job interviews. When you are late, it sends this message: “This is not that important to me. It is okay if I'm late because I don't really care about it.”

#2—Working hard

Putting forth maximum effort has nothing to do with talent. It has everything to do with desire. You can have all the talent in the world, but if you do not have the desire to put forth your best effort, you'll never reach your potential.

#3—Being positive

Positive people carry tremendous value. That is because they see obstacles as opportunities or challenges. They do not look for reasons something cannot be done; they look for reasons something *can* be done. They are a can-do person.

#4—Being energetic

It is so important that you exhibit energy in the workplace. The number of energetic people is in short supply. People are drawn to those who are energetic. By and large, they provide a positive experience for others.

#5—Being persistent

The bottom line with being persistent is that you cannot give up. Many times, a person quits right before they achieve their goal or get where they want to go. Branding yourself as someone who is persistent is a good way to brand yourself.

#6—Being self-aware

I have noticed that some professionals are lacking in the area of self-awareness. These professionals are not aware of what they are doing in proximity to those around them. When you are not self-aware, you are self-destructive. This is because you do not know the effect you are having on other people or how other people perceive you.

#7—Practicing self-control

This is an extension of being self-aware. When you are self-aware, you are more likely to have self-control. An employer will not hire someone who is not able to control their words or their actions. That is because they know that person will reflect poorly upon the organization.

#8—Being passionate

Being passionate about what you do for a living can take your career to a whole new level. That is because in a way, it holds the key to everything else on this list. When you are passionate, you are on time. When you are passionate, you are energetic. When you are passionate, you work hard.

#9—Being prepared

Once again, how difficult is it to be prepared? If it is important enough to you, then you will have the desire to be prepared. And those who are prepared are more successful and more valuable.

#10—Being flexible

Those who are flexible and not rigid in either their thinking or their ways can contribute a great deal to an employer. This is especially the case when you are working in a group or as a member of a team. The ability to be flexible in the pursuit of solving problems can give you a tremendous advantage in both the workplace and marketplace.

#11—Doing what you say you're going to do (being reliable)

This might be the most important one on the list because being reliable is the first step in being trustworthy. Also, do not talk about other people behind their back. Nothing good ever comes from gossiping, so the best course of action is to avoid it at all costs. You want to build trust. You don't want to "burn bridges."

#12—Being proactive and showing initiative

This is a great way to brand yourself, especially if you're just starting your career. Employers love professionals who take initiative. From their perspective, that is one of the top forms of value.

#13—Under-promising and over-delivering

This means do not promise more than you can deliver. On the other hand, do not set your goals too low. However, if you promise something, make sure you promise something you know you can deliver. And then, if possible, go beyond what you promised.

#14—Staying "hungry"

This is important because you cannot become complacent. You always have to be moving forward, and if you are standing still, then you're actually falling behind. The problem with wanting to be comfortable is that it is the first step to being complacent. And if you are complacent, you're not growing.

#15—Being resilient

As a recruiter, I speak with hiring managers all day, so I have a good idea of what they are looking for in a candidate. And one of the things they are really looking for is resilience. In fact, if you ask them, resilience is in short supply in the marketplace.

Once again, technical skills are critical. You need to acquire them and develop them. However, you cannot underestimate the equal importance of soft skills, especially in terms of your career



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and your goals for advancing it. Objectively assess yourself in regards to the five soft skills and 15 characteristics listed above, determine your strengths and weaknesses, and create a plan for leveraging your strengths and improving your weaknesses. This will put you in a better position to succeed quickly when you enter the workforce and then continue growing throughout your career.