



Over 1 in 4 American Workers Unsure How to Develop the Skills Needed to Reach their Employment Goals

Nationwide, 41% of Americans Use Soft Skills Most Frequently On the Job

May 5, 2021 (Seattle, WA) - According to a new survey from BestColleges.com, 27% of the American workforce is unsure, and another 10% say they do not know how to develop the skills they need to reach their career goals. When asked what they used most frequently in their current or most recent jobs, 41% of Americans use soft skills (such as communication and creative problem solving), compared to 20% who use trade-specific skills (such as knowing how to operate certain machines or tools) and 11% who use hard skills (such as coding, technical knowledge, and lab skills).

Click here for more information:

<https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/1-in-3-americans-soft-skills-most-important-on-job-market-survey/>

Working Americans, full- or part-time (50%), are more likely to say they use soft skills most frequently in their current or most recent job compared to those unemployed and temporarily employed (37%). Nearly half of women (46%) say they use soft skills most frequently compared to 36% of men, but men are twice as likely as women to say they use trade-specific skills most frequently in their current or most recent job (27% vs. 13%).

“Those who lack an understanding about their own skill development might feel their employment goals are unreachable,” said Melissa Venable, Ph.D., Education Advisor for BestColleges.com. “However, there are steps they can take, such as networking with people already working in their field, to identify specific, in-demand skills and how they can be developed throughout their careers.”

One third of Americans developed the skills they use in their current or most recent job through on-the-job experience (33%), compared to those who acquired skills through college or attendance at a trade school (19%), self-directed learning (10%) and employer-provided learning (10%).

About one third of Gen Xers (18-24) (38%), baby boomers (57-75) (37%) and the silent generation (75+) (33%) say they acquired the skills they use most frequently through on-the-job experience, while the younger generations are less likely to say so. For the age group with the highest percentage of recent college graduates, millennials (25-40), 22% attribute their skills development to higher education.

While 50% of the eligible workforce (those working full- or part-time, unemployed and temporarily employed, and students) nationwide say they have a plan to develop skills for the job they want, 37% are unsure if they have a plan and 13% have no such plan. Among college students, most (63%) have a plan to acquire the skills needed to reach their employment goals, 31% are unsure and only 6% have not made a plan to acquire the skills they need.

“College students can develop workplace skills while they are in school, through opportunities they are exposed to in- and out-of-class,” said Dr. Venable. “Their first job post-graduation could be the first test of their abilities, especially where soft-skills are concerned. Being aware of the skills they need, and taking the initiative to learn and practice them, are essential for navigating employment in a challenging economy”

Competitive candidates in the current job market must possess soft skills according to more than one third of Americans (34%), compared with 26% who believe trade-specific skills and 22% who believe hard skills are most important in today's employment landscape. Among students, 38% consider soft skills to be paramount for job seekers, while less feel that hard skills (21%) and trade skills (11%) are most important.

Methodology

BestColleges.com commissioned YouGov PLC to conduct the survey. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov PLC. The total sample size was 2,574 adults. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all U.S. adults (aged 18+). Fieldwork was undertaken on April 7-9, 2021. The survey was carried out online and meets rigorous quality standards.

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