

# Soft Skills for Job Hunting

When looking for work, job hunters must apply all their skills to their search. The assistance that soft skills provide is often overlooked so, in this article, we break down what soft skills are and offer a range of related advice to enhance work finding effectiveness.



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# Why soft skills essential for job hunting



**Just saying that you have a particular skill is not very meaningful for a potential employer. Instead, it is better to demonstrate that you possess this quality by sharing examples of times when you have used it, thereby enabling a hiring manager to visualise your skill awareness.**

While specific hard skills are necessary for particular roles, smart employers now look for job applicants who retain particular soft skills. Many employers recognise that it is often easier to train a new start with a hard skill than a soft skill (think of the difference between teaching somebody to use a specific online platform and training them to be creative).

Job seekers should give strong consideration to the skills required by a particular job and recognise that the skills to highlight on CVs, cover letters or during interviews will vary depending upon the role applied for. For example, effective communication, customer care skills and organisation may be necessary for a call centre job but are unlikely to be critical for an electrician.

As well as acknowledging documented job skill requirements, critically assess what an employer may need but have not stated. Try to identify skills that you possess that will meet those unstated needs and improve your engagement chances by demonstrating your awareness of the skills that the position requires.

Soft skills like critical thinking will enable you to conduct novel research and identify that the smallest businesses have only 6% fewer vacancies than 12 months ago. In contrast, the largest companies have 40% fewer vacancies than a year ago. Such assessments may provide some direction to your job hunting.

Curiosity may encourage you to run some checks on expanding sectors, and you would note that construction, utilities and real estate are sectors on the rise whereas arts, entertainment and recreation is one of the worst-hit sectors by the pandemic.

# Why you should network to find work

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**When considering networking, I first reflected on how I secured previous roles with employers, and I was a little surprised to find that all but one of my jobs was sourced through networking. Over the last twenty-five years, all my positions have come through former colleagues or referrals to head-hunting with my first job sourced through my family network, and only one job formally applied.**

I have perhaps had some good fortune in my career, but the point I am making is that you can create extra luck through extensive networking. I dramatically increased my appointment likelihood through networking. While it may seem unfair, we are social animals, and we should not lose sight of the benefit of 'working the angles'.

So, develop your contact lists – speak to your friends, family, people you know in work such as neighbours, contact professional associations and lean on anyone, such as former colleagues, that can generate leads for you to follow up.

We all know, you can imply anything you want with statistics. My example and more informed

surveys consistently stage that networking is now the primary source for securing work. Recruitment firms like Orion, job boards to a lesser extent and speculative submissions remain hugely important, but you miss a trick if you do not use your network to help you find work.

You may want to think out of the box and identify who is likely to be a company's hiring manager. There is no harm doing some speculative introductions; you might just be forwarded onto somebody who is hiring. Alternatively, speak to Orion and ask one of their team to make contact on your behalf – sometimes an impartial approach with a skills recommendation can go further than a more direct one.

Remember also to keep your options open. Take a temporary job if you can, they often develop into something else and enable you to put yourself in the shop window within that company. Most companies prefer to retain and redeploy current workers rather than hire new. Do not stop networking once your temporary role is over; add these former colleagues to your networking list and keep in touch with them.



# The power of perseverance and resilience

**Adapting positively to challenging circumstances (resilience) and persistence when times are tough (perseverance) are closely related skills essential for successful job hunting.**

Resilience and perseverance have come up time and time again throughout my career, and it is hugely important not just for your potential success but also for your wellbeing. On appointing me to a new role, an old mentor said to me 'you have learnt by the old school of hard knocks'. This comment was meant as a compliment; his point was that I had endured some challenging projects and developed a core resilience that demonstrated I was right for the senior appointment.

**So, what can perseverance and resilience do to assist us with job hunting?**

Well, a big part of job-hunting resilience is rejection. Please do not take rejection personally, nobody is aiming it at you, and few hiring managers think about the hopes and desires behind every CV that lands in their inbox. They are going through a process to fill a job they most likely desperately need somebody in, and, at this point, you are just a number. It would help if you recognised that you only become real to many employers when you turn up at an interview.

You are of course in the same boat as everybody else, but perseverance will enable you to be at the front of the queue as you will be applying for that extra position when others have given up. Recruitment can be a numbers game!

Remember, failure is a large part of trying and rationalising this thought will aid resilience. It is difficult not to get down when you are rejected or perhaps worse receive no feedback. Rather than let dejection set up, flip it around and use the rejection as a learning opportunity. You can assess your interview performance and identify improvement areas, you can recognise mistakes that need to be minimised or removed, and you can note things that went well to do next time. Taking a more positive approach to the hard knocks that come with job hunting will protect your general wellbeing and improve your hiring chances.

When looking for work, consider your health and welfare. While you need to do research, do not just become a 'keyboard warrior', break up your day, go for a walk, have some structure, and make time for other things. By doing this, you will not lose sight of your primary goal to find work.

I have run teams that have hired 1000s of people, and I'm struggling to think on any able and engaged job hunters who have not eventually found work. It may not have been their first choice job (or even second), but positive people are very employable so do not give and believe you will find work - it's much easier to sell yourself with a positive mindset than a negative one.

You may want to look at your career journey, a sort of route map with lots of stops, starts and turns. Your next role might not take you closer to your final destination, but it may take you to a faster road. This way, you are less likely to rule an opportunity that is worthwhile pursuing.

# Developing resilience for life

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**A big part of developing resilience is rationalising what is going on and understanding your influence on a situation or the likely outcomes. So, do expect your CV to be rejected frequently, do not expect regular feedback and remember only a small percentage of any application group are interviewed.**

Remember, you might have as little as 10 seconds to impress somebody reviewing your CV. While this is difficult to accept, I've been there reviewing hundreds of CVs, and it is true. Recruiters and hiring managers develop keyword search skills and can be incredibly efficient (ruthless) at shortlisting candidates. Some of this is automated now with AI, and there is also self-selection where you inadvertently deselect yourself through a series of online questions. For these reasons, you must always keep in mind, the critical requirements of a role you are applying for and cover them in your application.

Your CV will not, of course, get you a job by itself, it is typically just a tool to get you an interview. Remember, you are not bound to use the same CV for every job; however, so change it to suit. Prepare several template CVs as there is no rule that you have to use the same one; it just has to be factual.

Also remember to be creative, within reason, regarding your skills. Try to draw out all your relevant experience and be explicit as not all hiring managers are equal when reading between the lines.

Given the amount of information around on CV writing, it is incredible how many mistakes are still made. Please avoid personal email addresses, spelling 'mistooks', long paragraphs and grammatical errors. And yes, don't write a long list of personal information and add a photograph as, contrary to popular belief, neither help especially when it comes to unusual pastimes.

Although it can be difficult, consider adding a covering letter. A covering letter is a great place to add other details about flexibility, willingness to travel, availability and alignment with the job. Avoid using template letters at all cost as your letter needs to relate to you and the actual position you are applying for. Most of all, keep your details relevant and remove anything that does not add value to your application.

Bear in mind that some companies have working practices or policies to limit feedback ranging from providing none to very generic responses. It is not just about managing hundreds of candidates; there are concerns regarding implied discrimination and rouge applicants who cleverly suggest discrimination to pursue tribunal claims.

# Consider generational differences

**It is worth giving some thought to your target audience, hiring managers. It is possible that they are from a different generation to you, typically an older one. The following are generalisations to make an essential point that there can be generational differences, and understanding them will help improve communication and relationships.**

Zoomers (Generation Z) have been hit hard with job losses, zero-hour contracts and reduced engagement changes. If you are from Generation Z, you will be aware though may not accept, the assumptions made about you. This includes having no life experience of pre-internet life, being well behaved/risk-averse, having a greater focus on academic attainment and career prospects than previous generations and more worryingly having increased levels of mental health problems.

It is unlikely that a hiring manager will be from Generation Z. They are more likely to be Generation X or Y. X are the MTV generation, initially alienated but now in mid-life. They have typically worked hard/played hard, are industrious and entrepreneurial, were able to afford homeownership, lived in times when job finding was easier, are generally happy and active. Y are tech-savvy and prefer electronic communication to Generation X, who are more phone focussed. They are confident, retain high expectations, are willing to move job, seek more feedback than X, are collaborative and family-oriented.

You obviously cannot ask what the hiring manager's age is, but a quick LinkedIn check will let you know how long they have been working or when they studied. You then may want to keep in mind typical generational differences.

## For example:

- Your answer to a question might be 'google it', but that is unlikely to wash at an interview with somebody from Generation X who is a discipline specialist
- You also may prefer your smartphone to a computer but do not be surprised when seniors prefer a desktop or laptop and think of a smartphone as just a mobile
- You may have significant social media activity across Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr, Reddit, TikTok and the rest but do not expect everyone to be the same (I quite happily get by with LinkedIn and YouTube – many people of my age 'don't get it')
- Other generations may even seem dismissive of your generation's differences, but ignorance is bliss, and some people will expect everyone else's views to match theirs
- You may have strong brand awareness and connectivity, but this is likely for different reasons than more mature generations who focus on brand loyalty (it might even be blind loyalty)

Given the potential generational differences, consider focusing on skills that cross generational divides such as hard skills, communication, flexibility, team-working, etc.



**Consider how you stand out and do not just say what you did, say what skills you developed, how you grew them, and what you learned from applying them.**

When looking for jobs, do not just look for jobs in your immediate location, look for jobs where you have family or friends and somewhere to stay. Don't give the impression that you need time to relocate or organise yourself, employers like a can-do attitude, say you can start immediately.

In the current climate, there is a lot more home working, and this is likely to continue for some time. Apply for work further afield advising that you have a home office – you only need a laptop and wifi to do this.

Look at temporary work; it will fill an income need while you look for longer-term work and many roles become permanent or are the start of a career in the sector you just fell into.

I am sure you are familiar with SMART goals, set some to keep on target with your job-hunting activity or for preparing larger, more complex applications. Putting the extra work in will make you feel more confident.

It is important to note that patience is a significant component of perseverance. Completing lots of applications can increase your reach, but using patience to focus on quality will improve your chances of landing a job.

It may not be easy, but at an interview, be relaxed, think of it as a discussion about you, an opportunity to tell somebody what you can do. Also, be genuinely enthused about the role (it will be noted and you will be liked for being positive).

Always be prepared and do your research. It doesn't matter if you can't use your intel, you will feel more relaxed having it. If no job description is provided, don't wing it, look up similar jobs and develop an understanding of what the role is likely to involve.

Practice being interviewed even if you simulate the situation yourself – there are loads of interview question summaries, work through them to help prepare. Also, identify what helps make you relax; it could be something as simple as deep breaths.

Use open questions to find out more about the job as your interview will become more conversational (closed questions will quickly focus the attention back on you).

Most of all, remember that, in terms of your job search, perseverance means not giving up on finding a job position when things are tough, and resilience suggests that, you can bounce back quicker and stronger from the challenges you experience job-hunting.





## About the Author

Ross MacRae has worked in Human Resources for thirty years. He is Group HR Director & Deputy MD, a member of the Orion Group board of directors and is in his tenth year at Orion.

Key responsibilities include leading the Orion ISP recruitment out-sourcing capability and account

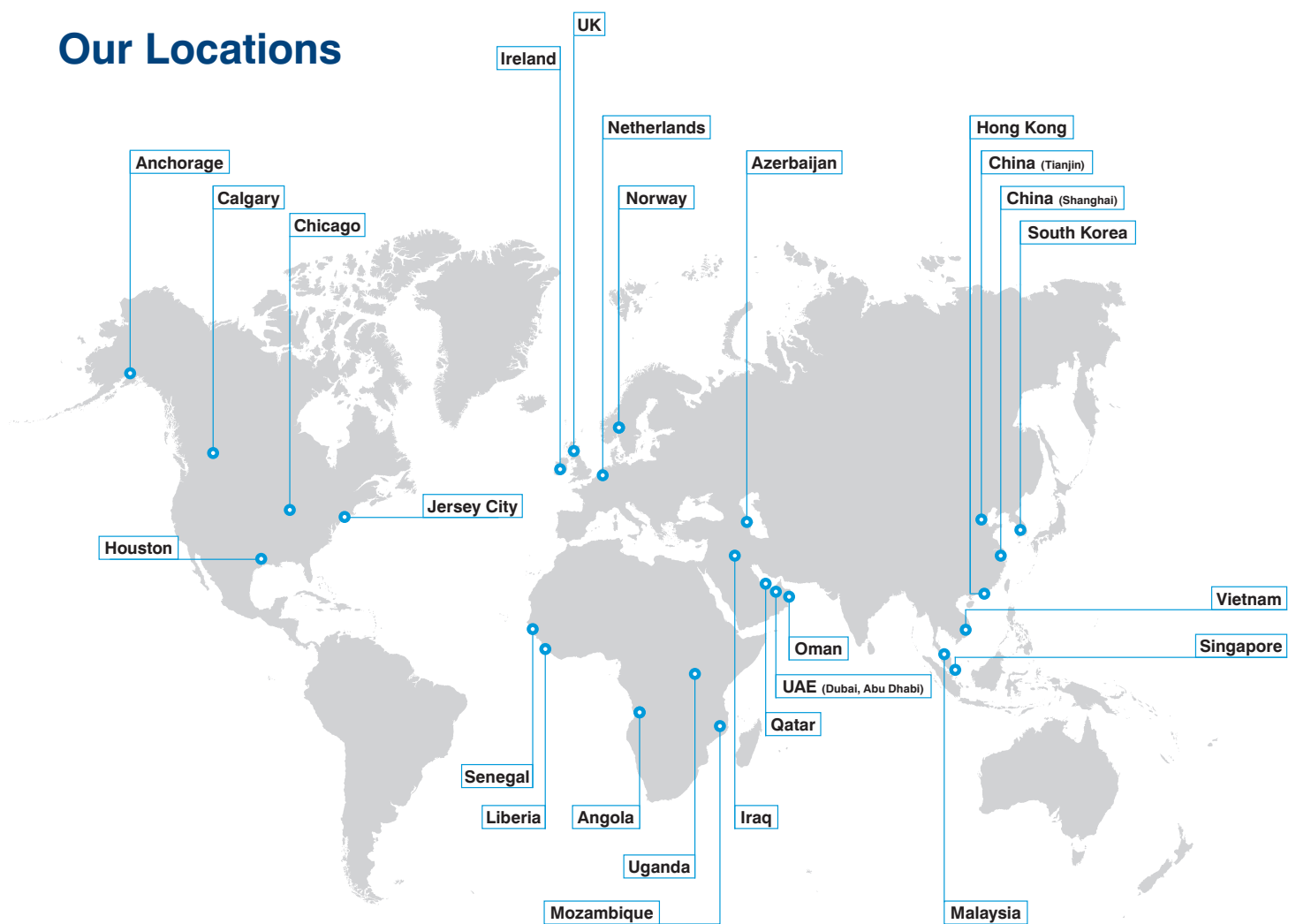
management of a key and fast-growing client. Ross also directs Marketing, Commercial, Business Management Systems and HR functional services within the business and has a number of divisional teams report to him.

Key skills are driving a performance-based culture, leadership team trusted advisor, talent analysis, benefits provision, keynote speaker, leading people strategies and

directing diverse teams across multiple sectors, functions and regions.

Ross is a Chartered Fellow of CIPD and a Fellow of the Institute of Recruitment Professionals retaining a PGDip in HR, PGCert in Management and BA Degree from the Open University. He is also a member of several advisory bodies providing sectorial, regional and career guidance.

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