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# Employers Cry Out for Employees with Soft Skills: Concordia University – Portland Heeds the Call

Gregory L. Hutzell

*Concordia University - Portland*, ghutzell@cu-portland.edu

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Employers Cry Out for Employees with Soft Skills:  
Concordia University – Portland Heeds the Call

Gregory L. Hutzell, DBA  
Associate Professor School of Management  
Concordia University - Portland  
ghutzell@cu-portland.edu

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The axiom echoing in the halls of commerce is, “I can train someone how to do something, but not how to be human.” This echo is reverberating through the halls at Concordia University - Portland (CU), as well, where the emphasis on soft skill development is tantamount to students learning important hard skills.

According to an article by Kate Davidson published in the Wall Street Journal on August 30, 2016, firms are finding it a challenge to find job applicants who possess sufficient soft skills to fill all of their hiring needs. The article also reported that a Wall Street Journal survey conducted last year found that 89% of the nearly 900 executives responding, reported challenges finding new hires with soft skill attributes. Furthermore, LinkedIn found 58% of hiring managers surveyed said the lack of soft skills among job candidates is limiting their company's productivity. It appears the echo is getting louder.

Soft skills collectively include interpersonal skills, a mind-set, and several different personal attributes, such as friendliness and integrity. Important soft skills include the ability to communicate both as a speaker and listener with others. The capacity to work with others whether in pairs or teams. Being able to think critically and solve problems. To have the ability to resolve conflicts with others, and adapting to various conditions, such as the stress of deadlines and competition.

These soft skills when combined with hard skills contribute to the likelihood of success of an employee. Ann Rhodes, the Executive Vice President of Human Resources at Doubletree, and formerly with Southwest Airlines, believes there are seven dimensions required of an employee in order to have success on the job. These seven combine hard skills, such as practical learning and sales skills, with soft skills like teamwork and motivation. The other dimensions are tolerance for stress, attention to detail, and adaptability and flexibility.

According to Michelle Cowing, Dean of CU's School of Management, “CU has for many years recognized the need to instill and reinforce the development of soft skills in our students, regardless of their educational major.”

Specific examples of CU delivering on their commitment to embolden students with soft skills today's employers require, can be found in the stated goals and outcomes of CU's general education curriculum. Foremost of these address critical thinking along with problem solving. To those ends, CU develops students to be keenly aware of the world around them; having inquisitive minds with a discerning eye for and capacity to, address problems with thoughtful and innovative ideas. Having students possess enhanced communication skills is another key goal. Students are trained to understand the vagaries of individual and group interactions, then be able to engage in meaningful and constructive ways. Soft skills encompass a variety of human experiences which CU classifies as life skills. These life skills include the need for mind

and body awareness, a work life balance, citizenship with community engagement, and an ethical value system. Further, CU wants students to be able to utilize a wide variety of disciplines to live a more productive and meaningful life. Moreover, that students have an appreciation for the richness that comes from experiencing and then integrating their holistic educational and life experiences. Lastly, there is a goal which addresses the requirement for students to possess the capability to integrate their knowledge and provide evidence of their ability to apply and generate valuable outcomes which serve to enrich mankind.

Throughout the student's education at CU, coursework activities are designed to provide some measure of how students are doing towards growing in their soft skills certainly hard skill acquisition is continually assessed as well. But nothing is more evident of the impact of the soft skill emphasis at CU than the personal experiences of students who are recent graduates and working their first post graduate job.

Recent graduate, Donald Anderson Jr, states, "I was hired by the Japanese government right out of CU to work as a language instructor and translator. Much of my ability to be an effective practitioner in international education comes from my time at CU, with its focus on soft skills and collaborative learning. The soft skills I honed at CU set me apart in the job market."

Concordia has heard the echo of commerce and the marketplace for the need to graduate students who not only possess strong hard skills, such as technical knowledge, but as some have observed, the equally important soft skills, that when possessed together enable both employees and their employers to succeed and prosper.