

## The Skills Every Employer Wants

(by Adam Stone - Special to Military Times)

Michael Warren knows he has the chops. The question is, how does he prove it to an employer?

A 28-year-old shift engineer at Nuclear Power Training Unit Charleston, S.C., the Navy lieutenant communicates well. He can organize his time, lead a team and teach others. He's flexible and has self-confidence. In short, he has everything known in hiring circles as "soft skills."

"The skills are all there in the military," said Warren, who leaves the Navy in January. "The trouble is, it's just not apparent."

Inherently subjective, these skills are hard to prove, yet they're critical in today's workplace. Bradley-Morris recruiter Brian Tabinga, who specializes in placing military officers in civilian jobs, identified the top intangible skills he says employers are looking for:

- Communication
- Leadership
- Diplomacy
- Time management
- Problem solving

"Soft skills show a culture fit, which is paramount for any hiring process," Tabinga said.

### Describe What You've Done

Nation-building activities in Iraq and Afghanistan are prime examples of ways in which today's service members develop interpersonal communication, said Tony Palmer, director at recruiting firm Stanton Chase International.

To keep the fragile peace in these regions, success depends on relationships with the locals. "You have to influence them to go along with the mission," Palmer said. That kind of persuasive skill goes to the heart of the interpersonal capabilities employers seek.

Having done it, be ready to describe it.

"Use examples, something that is specific enough so that someone can relate to it: A real-life example with some results or benefits tied to it," Palmer said. "That's how you bring soft skills to life. You apply to them situations you faced, the actions that you took and the results that you achieved."

While track record counts, presentation can be just as important, especially in an interview. Warren has fallen back on a technique he learned in debate club. He'll watch the news, read a magazine, then respond to the information flow with questions of his own. "It forces you to get past the facts and figures and start developing the kinds of questions and conversations you want to have with an interviewer," he said.

### Develop Your People Skills

Six ways to improve your people skills, courtesy of Palmer and Tabinga:

- Practice nonmilitary speak. Watch business videos on YouTube to see how leaders communicate their ideas, and then practice doing the same. Read nonmilitary business magazines, too. You'll prove you can communicate by speaking the native tongue.
- Take an interest in your subordinates' professional and personal development. The civilian world expects this of you. Keep track of how you prepared others for success.
- Prove you can be flexible. Volunteer for special projects. Interact with other departments. Show how you sought experiences outside of your specialty and how you led people effectively even without being in charge.

- Get out in front. Make presentations, give talks. Public speaking is a great way to develop communication skills.
- Compile stories. By cataloging specific achievements, you're gathering stories to tell in interviews, while at the same time identifying areas where you may need to improve.
- Learn to finesse. That "get it done" attitude serves you well in the military. In the corporate world, it'll be: "Shall we all get this done, together, if you're not too busy?" That may not come naturally, but employers want to see it.

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