It’s important to market your soft skills in the job search

As many Americans continue to search for employment, everyone is looking for ways to make the most of every interview opportunity. Of course, a good resume will reflect your technical training and experience. However, there is more to your overall qualifications than that. Your soft skills are an important part of the whole package.

Two professionals at Brown Mackie College — Boise offer advice to help you make a more comprehensive case as an optimal candidate for the position you seek — a case that includes your soft skills.

Barbara J. Schafer, director of Career Services, and Carilyn Penrod, Human Resources coordinator, work daily helping students and graduates to be ready to enter today’s workforce or preparing them to enhance their current professions.

“The workplace remains highly competitive in terms of finding a job,” says Schafer. This is evidenced by the current unemployment rate. A U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics press release reports a slight drop in the national unemployment rate, dipping to 8.2 percent in March 2012. While the number of new jobs created was fewer than the job gains in recent months, the sectors showing growth include hospitality, health care and financial services.

No matter what field interests you, it is beneficial to include your soft skills in your pitch. “Before you can market your soft skills, you must know what they are. Soft skills are personality traits; the things that make you who you are,” says Schafer. “You seldom learn soft skills in trade school or college. They are life skills that you develop through your experiences.”

“Confidence and a positive attitude are important soft skills that many employers value as much as technical ability,” says Penrod. Examples of other soft skills include a strong work ethic, flexibility, time management skills, good communication skills and working well in a team environment. You may already have some of these characteristics listed on your resume without realizing that you are marketing your soft skills.

“The main items I look for in interviewee, apart from hard skills, are self-confidence, eye contact and a firm handshake,” says Penrod. These soft skills, combined with integrity, appropriate dress and good grammar, can be collectively defined as professionalism. “Listening skills matter, too. Is the candidate paying attention to what I’m saying? Is the candidate providing thoughtful responses?”

All of these attributes combine to create an element of trust between employer and applicant.

Listing your soft skills on a resume is a good way to introduce them to a prospective employer. However, you will need to prove you actually have them by providing examples of how each manifests in your work. “If you say you have good communication skills, you must be able to explain this well in an interview,” Schafer says. “Failure to do so will convince the employer that you really don’t have good communication skills. This holds true with any skill, hard or soft. Know yourself and address it confidently with the employer.”

“The initial interest a prospective employer will have in you will be for your hard skills, your ability to perform the technical part of the job. In the end, however, the things that will help you seal the deal on that interview will be your ability to market your soft skills and match them to the position,” says Schafer.

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