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10 Professional Skills You Need To Stay Ahead Of The AI Curve

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Soft skills matter more than ever in the technology age.

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In the age of artificial intelligence, it's all about your tech skills, right?

Not quite. Data analysis, reporting tools, cloud computing and machine learning may top the list of hot tech skills, but if those are all you bring to the table, you may get left behind. Recent research by Pearson uncovered the [top 10 soft skills](#) that professionals need as AI continues to reshape the workplace. No matter how impressive the AI, it can never be human, and therein lies your advantage.

Soft skills may not sound like a big deal, but they are anything but soft. In fact, I advocate for the term “soft skills” to be changed to “professional skills.” Calling them “soft skills” sounds like they’re not important, but saying “professional skills” sounds highly valuable. The more of them you have, the more professional you are.

It doesn’t matter what industry or role you work in. It doesn’t matter how elevated or humble your job title. People with a competent array of professional skills are in high demand and always valued.

10 Professional Skills You Need Now

Pearson found 10 essential soft skills workers need in the age of AI.

1. Communication Skills

No surprises here. Communication seems to top every list of soft skills ever compiled. The ability to communicate clearly prevents costly misunderstandings and mistakes, reducing frustration and burnout on teams. Clear communication not only allows you to convey your ideas and needs effectively, but also helps you listen actively to what others are saying. It's little wonder that this skill is in such high demand across all industries.

2. Effective Teamwork

Whether you work in person or remotely, the quality of the team you're on can make or break your experience. Strong teams are simply more effective than those distracted by infighting or simply disengaged. That's why being able to work well with others is a skill that will elevate you above other candidates. The good news is, you can practice being a strong team member even if others on your team aren't by taking initiative.

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3. Verbal Communication

It's interesting that among the top four soft skills Pearson uncovered, three have to do with communication. Verbal communication is growing in value while return-to-office **mandates increase**, bringing employees into face-to-face contact perhaps more than any other time in the last five years. Being able to communicate effectively in person isn't just about how well you speak. It's also how well you make eye contact, listen to others and express interest in their point of view.

4. Written Communication

AI can write everything for us these days, right? No. It is my belief that no matter how good AI gets, there will always be a premium placed on words written solely via human agency. Even if we do use AI-generated content as a starting point, it can only produce what we tell it to. Organizing ideas, composing a compelling argument and putting the final touches on a written work are human-level skills we all still need. Being able to compose and communicate your thoughts effectively will never become obsolete.

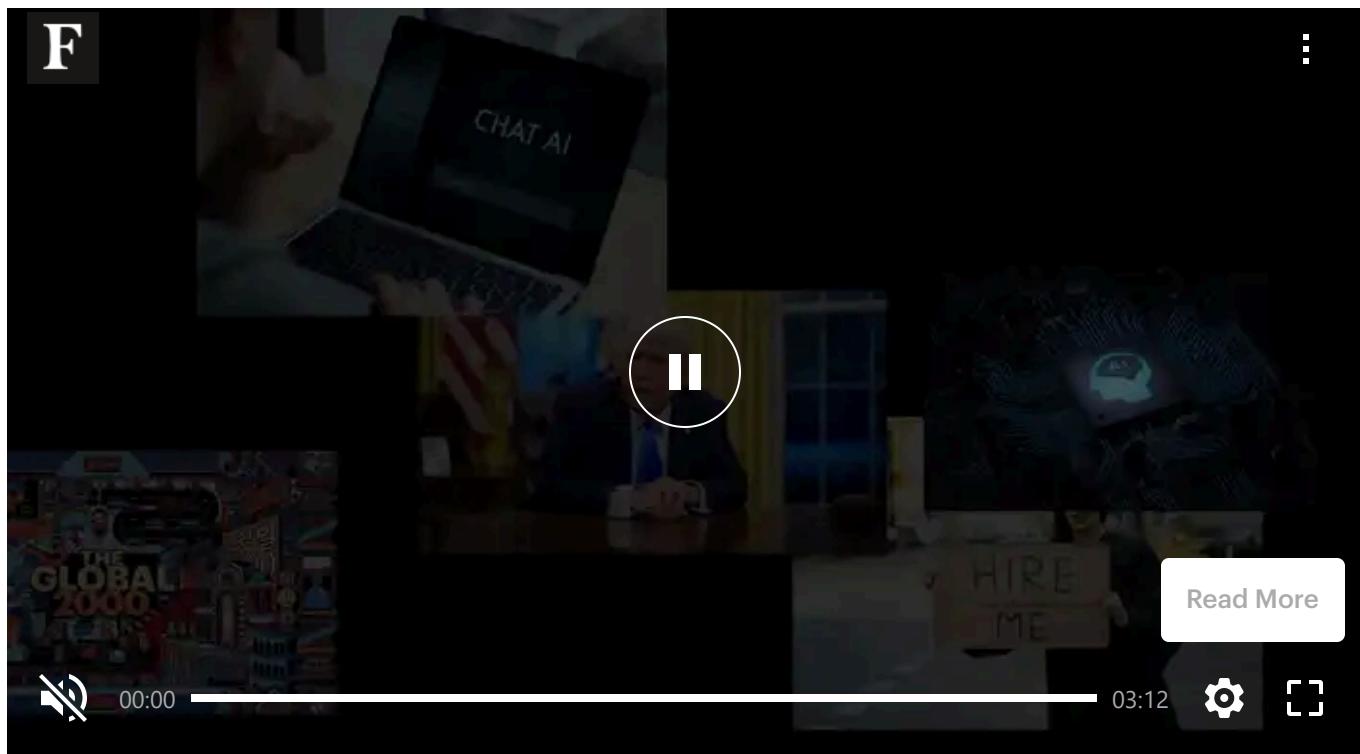
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5. Organizational Skills

We live distracted lives and many of us toggle between personal and professional tasks many times a day, or often, many times an hour. Executive function, or those cognitive skills which help us organize our lives by managing tasks, planning ahead and problem solving, is key to staying on top of everything we have to get done. Organized individuals have good executive function and can adapt to and prioritize the needs of the moment.



6. Interpersonal Skills

I frame interpersonal skills as the ability to create and sustain human connection. To connect with someone is to make them feel seen, heard and valued. No matter how brief or sustained their interaction with you, it means you make others feel their thoughts and feelings matter to you. Strong interpersonal skills encourage increased motivation, engagement and a positive attitude about whatever you need to accomplish together. Simple ways to connect with others more effectively with those in your sphere is to practice eye contact, active listening and validation of what they're saying. It doesn't mean you have to agree with it, but let them know their perspective is worth hearing.

7. Computer Literacy

Is this tech skill really a professional skill? I believe so, because what's the purpose of using a computer? Somewhere, somehow, everything we do online ultimately affects others. Computers exist to help humans. Your ability to navigate the digital world with ease allows you to be a better team member because you can focus on the work and people at hand, rather than the mechanics of using the technology.

8. Leadership Skills

Leadership is not about the title you hold. Anyone who influences others in a positive direction is a leader. We need more people like this. While only **6% of Gen Z workers**

aspire to senior leadership roles within their organization, that will not prevent them from exercising the core skills of great leaders: vision, purpose, negotiation, empathy, teamwork, communication and more. In a way, all professional skills are on display in great leadership. It's the skill that requires all the rest in order to be effective.

9. Problem Solving

Before I hire someone, one of the most important skills I look at is their ability to solve problems. Every day presents a new set of challenges to overcome and employers need people who can tackle these problems without a lot of handholding. Though critical thinking is a vital component to good problem solving, I find that it's more about the attitude people bring to problems than their actual abilities to solve them. A smart, tech-y person who nevertheless displays a give-up attitude in the face of challenges is not a problem solver. We should all strive to meet problems head-on and work proactively on a solution before leaning too heavily on those around us to solve it.

10. Attention To Detail

I'm thrilled this skill made the top 10 because it's one that I prize in every member of my own team, and I don't think it gets enough attention. Attention to detail is what sets the great apart from the good. People who are motivated to pursue perfection in the small things are the ones who produce the best work. Details matter and can make all the difference in the final result. That said, I'm not advocating for perfectionism, but I will advocate all day for caring enough about the outcome to get the details right. People who care at that level about the work they produce are in high demand.

Developing Your Professional Skills

The challenge of professional skills is that we never fully arrive. There's always room to grow. This should both encourage us and spur us to continue our journey of developing these vital abilities. At the outset of my career, I had to be very intentional in order to develop my professional skills. I listened to recordings of leaders in my field.

I paid attention to the habits of the people I worked with every day who displayed strong professional skills. I took honest stock of my own abilities frequently to assess where I was improving and what still needed work. I made it a conscious goal to become great at what I did, and I knew that strong professional skills were key to my success.

It may seem that today, technology has taken center stage in the job market and everyone should focus on developing their tech skills above all else. Yes, technical competencies absolutely matter, maybe more now than ever. But without professional skills, tech skills fall flat. It's still people who matter most, not machines.

The staying power of your career does not depend on skills that expire within a few years, but on your lifelong commitment to become a consummate professional in your field. Professional skills are the future-proof currency that all of us need.

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