

# TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

A glossary of highly sought-after skills.

**Agility / Flexibility** – being quickly adaptable/responsive in a situation

In an ever-changing and fast-paced world (cliché but so true) there is a genuine requirement for everyone to be as agile as they can be. Gone are the days of taking a brief (getting someone's requirements) and then disappearing off to work on it with no further consultation. Agility requires constant check in, adjustment, and collaboration. Another word that is often used in this context is *co-creation* – where the expert works closely with the recipient of the product or service to get the best outcomes. In a way, it's a common-sense approach that should probably have been the norm (but like many common-sense things, may not always be that common!).

**Coaching** – seeing the potential in others and supporting/challenging them to achieve that potential

Usually, it involves doing a lot more asking than telling. It's about seeing beyond what people are doing to what they could be capable of. Someone who does this well will use a lot of *open* questions (e.g. those that start with *what, which* and *how*) to understand the person's hopes and aspirations and then more open questions to get them thinking about how they might achieve those aspirations. This could be in the context of a task, project, or soft skill they are looking to develop.

**Collaborating** – working well with others to get results – in other words, teamwork

Organisations now expect and need everyone to collaborate as widely as possible – not just with their direct teams. Collaborating well requires an open mind and checking in on your level of judgment of the other person or team – truly seeking to understand their perspective and being able to articulate yours in a way that maximises their ability to be open to hearing it. Collaborating well will require most of the skills listed in this section.

**Communicating** – speaking and listening to others

It is about listening with genuine curiosity to understand the other party, using a constructive tone of language and body language, and contributing your views in a way that is likely to have them heard and understood. The outcome of outstanding communication is that both parties fully understand the other's view (without necessarily agreeing).

**Creative thinking** – thinking outside the square

Finding new solutions to old problems or finding solutions to new problems or desires that you can see ahead but others have not yet thought of. People who do this well are very disciplined about carving out time for themselves to escape the fray. Creative thinking is virtually impossible to do while caught up running from meeting to meeting in the operational relentlessness of today's working life. If you don't think you are very creative, use that carved out time to facilitate the thinking of others who are. That said, most people are probably much more creative than they give themselves credit for.

**Critical thinking** – ability to think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe

This will likely involve reflection and independent thinking. Being logical and rational will contribute to sound critical thinking and so does checking in on your own beliefs and values and what they bring to a situation or argument.

**Dealing with ambiguity** – ability to act without the complete picture

The ability to cope with uncertainty and risk becomes more and more important as the pace of change continues relentlessly. Acting without the complete picture requires an understanding that some of your decisions will be wrong, and means being okay when at times there isn't a defined plan.

**Developing others** – enabling others to get better at what they do / broaden their skills & experience

This is really an intrinsic part of motivating others. When delegating tasks to others, there is always an opportunity for their development. It's even more effective when we truly understand what makes that team member tick – their career aspirations, interests, values, and goals. Similar to motivating, you are looking to meet others where they are at on any particular task (identify their level of skill and motivation) then providing the right level of support and challenge to develop them beyond their current place.

**Emotional intelligence** – also called EQ or EI, is about understanding and leveraging your emotions

EQ involves understanding your emotions and making them work for the benefit of yourself, those around you, and the outcomes sought from any particular situation. Another way of putting this is expressing emotions in the right way to the right person at the right time. Emotions are incredibly important and valuable – they give us great information. Understanding your emotions is key to leveraging them in the best possible way.

It's important to manage your emotions before, during and after any given situation:

- *Before:* Set yourself up for success by sleeping, eating and exercising well.
- *During:* Notice where in your body you feel an emotional response, so (if useful) you can press the pause button (take a breath, walk around the block) and then choose how to respond rather than be at the mercy of your "unchosen" reaction.
- *After:* Make sure you process emotions of the day, particularly stressful ones, through yoga, meditation, walking, gym, deep breathing... or whatever is your thing.

### **Influencing others** – getting others to come on board (to an idea or action)

The important piece here is influencing others for the good of the business and/or your team – not for purely self-serving reasons. It involves standing in the shoes of the other to get their perspective and get clear on what is “in it for them” and what challenges they may foresee. In short, it’s about gathering good information that helps you influence others to come on board with an idea or action.

### **Leading / Managing others** – lots of overlap, but broadly speaking a leader creates a vision and motivates others to follow, while a manager directs resources to deliver outcomes. Clearly, you can be both!

Anyone can take on a leadership role without the title – there are many moments in the day to step into being a “leader”. It used to be that a leader would have followers by virtue of their title. Now a leader has to earn that “followership”. One of the biggest things that can get in the way of someone exercising their leadership potential is that they either micromanage or leave people to sink. Getting the balance right is more of an art than a science, but there are some excellent resources to help you, such as *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*.

### **Mentoring** – helping others benefit from your experience

Unlike coaching, mentoring is where you do tell (share) your experience for another’s benefit. Good mentoring will ensure that the stories and sharing are very much tailored to the benefit of the mentee. Really good mentoring draws on coaching techniques to understand where the other is at and what their current knowledge and motivations are.

### **Motivating others** – getting your team to take action

Subtly different from Influencing (which is usually around an idea or concept and can involve peers, stakeholders, or more senior colleagues), motivating instead is about direct reports or people on a project team you are leading. Here you need to motivate them to do what needs to be done, to do it well, and to find opportunities to develop from the task. Telling them what to do and expecting them to just do it is no longer the way to go. Instead, meet them where they are at – understand their motivations and demonstrated ability to deliver on the task. Provide the right level of support and challenge.

### **Political savvy** – understanding & using an organisation’s dynamics to achieve a greater good for all

Where you have people, you have politics. Being politically savvy is really all about understanding your own and others’ perspectives, motivations, and goals, and then working in that complex playing field to achieve the greater good for all. There are two types of politics – those that are entirely self-serving and those that are for the benefit of all. Any evolved organisation will promote organisation before team and team before self. Keeping this in mind helps those who don’t like “politics” to make their best contribution. An ability to work with ambiguity also helps.

### **Presenting** – sharing information with your audience

The art of great presentations is to think less about yourself and more about your audience. What will interest them, what’s their perspective? A good presentation is well prepared and an outstanding one looks like it had very little preparation ... but you can guarantee it will have.

### **Relationship building** – understanding the importance of relationships in organisations

It’s different from friendships (though no less important). A good “people person” builds relationships based on respect for self and others. Having curiosity and empathy also helps to build strong relationships. Good conversations build strong relationships and strong relationships build great outcomes.

### **Social intelligence** – working with others’ emotions

Similar to emotional intelligence except it’s about recognising other people’s emotions and being able to respond in the best possible way to get the greatest outcome for them, for you, and for the situation. It includes having curiosity for others – tuning in to how they are reacting or responding.

### **Solution-focused** – a tendency to look for solutions to any problem that arises

Identifying problems even when they aren’t in your area, and quickly and creatively looking for solutions. Remember the old saying, “if you aren’t part of the solution, you are part of the problem”? Rather than complaining about a problem, it’s about working out how to resolve it and what your contribution could be. It also involves understanding that just because there isn’t an immediate or clear-cut solution, it doesn’t mean taking no action is the answer.

### **Stakeholder management** – looking after relationships with anyone who has an interest, dependency or influence on what you do in an organisation

The first key step is identifying who these stakeholders are. Secondly, have a plan for how to interact with them. Thirdly, call on many of the skills we’ve covered here, such as collaborating, communicating, influencing others, and relationship building.