

7 Qualities Of A Good Employee and Candidate (According to Research)

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How can we define the [qualities of a good employee](#)? What do employers look for when separating the average worker from the best and brightest? While every business will have its own unique needs, there are some top employee characteristics that everyone seems to value.

Understanding these employee traits, and recognizing them in candidates, can help improve your recruitment process. Do your senior leaders value employees who are confident and self-motivated? You could assign applicants a task and see who takes the most initiative to go above and beyond the assignment.

To better understand the common qualities of a good employee that the average employer is looking for, [CareerBuilder conducted a study with Harris Poll](#) last year. They surveyed over 2,000 hiring managers and HR professionals on the subject of soft skills—those less tangible characteristics related more to personality than ability.

Some of the results may seem obvious (how many job descriptions don't call for a candidate who is organized?), but perhaps the biggest outcome was the importance of soft skills overall. More than three quarters of respondents—77%—said soft skills are just as important as hard skills. An additional 16% described soft skills as more important than hard skills when evaluating candidates. In this post we'll examine some of the specific qualities of a good employee hiring managers are after.

1. Strong work ethic: Setting and achieving goals

Tied for first place, a strong work ethic was clearly one of the most popular qualities hiring managers look for in a candidate. According to CareerBuilder, 73% of respondents want to see applicants demonstrate their ability to work hard. Candidates who set high goals for themselves, or respond well to stretch goals from supervisors, indicate a willingness to [do more than clock in and clock out every day](#).

2. Dependable: Consistently following through

Also chosen by 73% of respondents, dependability can make all the difference between a candidate who usually follows through, and one who always does. Candidates who show a commitment to completing tasks on time, as assigned, during the application process will likely continue this behavior as employees.

3. Positive attitude: Creating a good environment

At a close third among respondents to the CareerBuilder survey (72%), a positive attitude has myriad benefits for individual employees and their colleagues. Positivity leads to a more productive workday, and creates a better environment for fellow employees. Great employees consistently stand out for their upbeat attitudes and earn positive reputations for themselves. One trait to look for in a candidate is their ability to acknowledge mistakes and [still move forward in a positive way](#). This suggests they'll be equally resilient in the workplace.

4. Self-motivated: Working effectively with little direction

Two-thirds of respondents, 66%, listed self-motivation as a key soft skill among candidates. When it comes to finding good employees, hiring managers often look for candidates who can take initiative and get work done with little to no encouragement. Sheer enthusiasm and interest in the work is often enough to drive these employees. And this self-motivation goes hand in hand with confidence—chosen by 46% as a top soft skill among candidates.

5. Team-oriented: Making the most out of collaboration

Think about the great employees you already have. Do they work well with others? Are they comfortable collaborating with a team? According to CareerBuilder, 60% of hiring managers look for team-oriented candidates during the application process. Many companies succeed based on the work of teams and entire departments, not just individuals. So as you review applications and conduct interviews, look for [candidates with a history of collaboration](#), as well as giving and receiving constructive group feedback.

6. Effective communicator: Understanding the benefits of clarity

Another top soft skill chosen by hiring managers was communication—56% look for effective messaging from candidates. Ideal employees will understand the importance of good communication, and just how badly things can go wrong when a message is unclear or missed altogether. When looking for this quality among applicants, ask questions about their preferred methods of communication, or for examples of good communication they've experienced. If their responses (verbal and nonverbal) align with your expectations, they may well become a great employee.

7. Flexible: Adapting in a meaningful way

Rounding out our list is flexibility, or adaptability, chosen by 51% of respondents. A good employee will not resist change blindly, but instead embrace it and adapt to it as it proves necessary for the business. Are the candidates you interview comfortable with unknown elements of a job? Are they willing to pick up new skills and adjust to shifting goals? If your applicants can demonstrate flexibility, you can be confident they'll adapt easily to their new work environment.

You might not entirely agree with the importance of each soft skill, but you probably have an idea of what makes a good employee for your organization. One thing to keep in mind is that not every applicant will possess every one of these research-backed qualities of a good employee—but [some can be developed over time](#). Some candidates may not have much experience working in teams. Others may not have had to communicate with other departments, senior leaders, or external partners.

As we shift from a jobs market that favors employers to [one that favors employees](#), don't let issues of quality or quantity get you down. If you are confident in the skills and attributes you

need in a candidate, and have developed methods to located them, you will already be one step ahead in the hunt for quality employees.