

THE PERFECT CANDIDATE

Chart A	Employers rate the importance of candidate qualities/skills
Communication skills	4.6
Strong work ethic	4.6
Teamwork skills (works well with others)	4.5
Initiative	4.4
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)	4.4
Problem-solving skills	4.4
Analytical skills	4.3
Flexibility/adaptability	4.2
Computer skills	4.1
Technical skills	4.1
Detail-oriented	4.0
Organizational skills	4.0
Leadership skills	3.9
Self-confidence	3.9
Friendly/outgoing personality	3.8
Tactfulness	3.8
Creativity	3.6
Strategic planning skills	3.3
Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker	3.2
Sense of humor	3.1

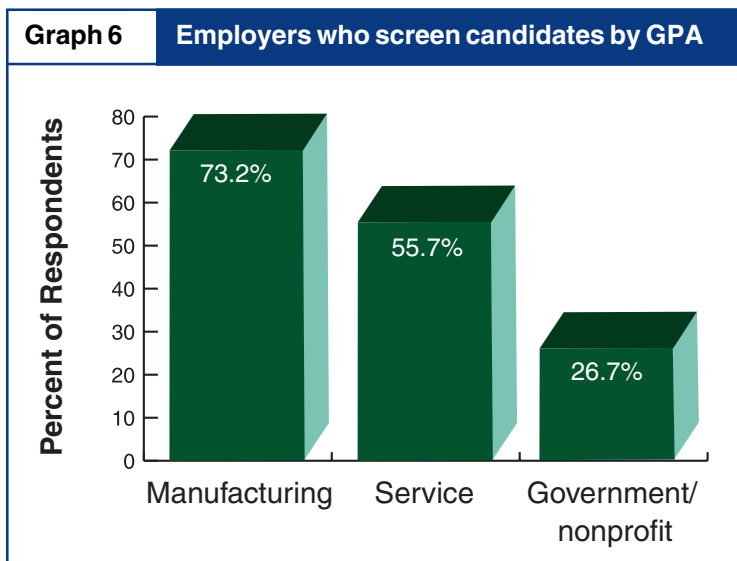
(5-point scale, where 1=not important; 2=not very important; 3=somewhat important; 4=very important; and 5=extremely important)

COMMUNICATION SKILLS, STRONG WORK ETHIC ARE KEY

Generally, the skills, qualities, and attributes that employers value in candidates vary little from year to year. (See Chart A.)

There are, however, some new items to note. Employers were provided with a list of skills to rank order; this year, problem-solving skills, technical skills, and strategic planning skills were added to the list. Of the three, problem-solving skills received the highest rating while strategic planning skills was deemed least important. This suggests that employers want entry-level hires to be able to deal with problems at hand and recognize that strategic planning would likely require more knowledge of and experience with the organization.

Employers were not asked specifically to rate the importance of having a GPA of 3.0 or better, but they were asked separately if they screen candidates by GPA. The majority of respondents (62.3 percent) do screen candidates by GPA, and manufacturers are most likely to do so. (See Graph 6.)



Of the employers who screen candidates by GPA, 61 percent use 3.0 as the cutoff. There were, however, a small number of respondents who reported using cutoffs as low as 2.0 and as high as 3.5.

WHAT CANDIDATES LACK

The failings of new college graduates fell into three general areas: communication skills, workplace skills, and experience.

As has been the case in the past, the biggest group of respondents faulted new college graduates for their lack of communication skills—the skills that employers prize most. Fully one-third of respondents cited failings in communication skills, with most specifically noting that new graduates lack writing skills. Others reported that new graduates lack face-to-face skills, saying that new graduates prefer e-mail communication. Interview skills, presentation skills, phone skills, and overall interpersonal skills—all skills that fall under the communications skills umbrella—were also cited by respondents.

The next largest group cited a lack of skills associated with conduct in the workplace; these respondents said that new graduates lack a good work ethic, analytical and problem-solving skills, business acumen, initiative, specific computer skills, flexibility, and professionalism. Also mentioned were independence, patience, and the willingness to work long hours to get the job done.

The third group of respondents complained about the lack of work experience in new college graduates. Some specifically cited a lack of internships or any type of hands-on experience as well.

WHICH CANDIDATE WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

If an employer has two equally qualified candidates for a position, how does he or she decide which to hire?

Employers were given a list of certain attributes and asked to rate the amount of influence each would have on their hiring decision for one candidate as opposed to another candidate, assuming all other attributes were equal. Leadership experience, closely followed by major, a high GPA (3.0 or above), and involvement in extracurricular activities, topped the list. (See Figure 6, page 28.)

Many respondents cited other attributes not on the list; among those, one-third said they would strongly prefer a candidate who had completed an internship over one who had not, while another 21 percent listed work experience as a deciding factor, and 14 percent cited co-ops. Still others gave weight to the candidate's interpersonal skills, academic course work, and interview performance in choosing one candidate over another.