



Soft Skills in High Demand in the Technology Sector

Results of a 2021 Survey



Soft skills.

Interpersonal skills.

Personal traits.

By any name, there are certain characteristics that are highly prized by employers—
completely apart from the specific educational and technical skills required to do a job.



Stout Systems surveyed hiring managers and human resource managers at thirty technology companies to gain insight into which soft skills are most highly valued. Think of it as the characteristics that distinguish one highly skilled technical candidate from all the rest. Or those skills which, when missing, cause a candidate to be passed over. Or worse, the traits that are the cause of a hiring failure—which is to say that the candidate is hired and then let go.

PROBLEM SOLVER

KEY PHRASE:

Problem Solver

ALTERNATE WORDINGS:

**Creativity
Curiosity**

Almost 100% of managers we surveyed—29 out of 30—are looking for people who have critical thinking skills, can apply those skills to the systematic resolution of a problem or to create completely new ways to solve problems that exceed current capabilities. Dedication to their craft and a willingness to learn new things was identified by many of the managers as a key attitude underpinning this attribute.

“People who are curious and excited to solve a problem—and not intimidated by things they don’t know how to do.”

“Someone that’s comfortable being uncomfortable and willing to challenge existing norms.”

“Creativity. Sometimes we have to create new ideas for solutions that don’t exist yet or are outside of the capability of existing tools.”

“Looks at (the) big picture and determines the real problem to solve.”

“They are constantly learning and growing on all levels. They find ways to succeed. They are often working to improve themselves.”



GOOD COMMUNICATOR

KEY PHRASE: Good Communicator

ALTERNATE WORDINGS: Asks good questions and listens to the answers
Simplifies complex concepts

More than 85% of the managers we surveyed—26 out of 30—value communication skills in employees. They described a variety of ways in which great communication skills impact how well an employee performs. Asking great questions, whether to tease out requirements or to ensure that a problem is well and truly understood. Being proactive about communicating important information such as status or roadblocks. And being able to patiently and skillfully explain complex concepts to a non-technical audience.

“Independent, active communication. Checks in actively at reasonable intervals, without needing to be reached out to. Gives status updates that aren’t overly verbose, but detailed enough to capture any risks. Responds in a timely manner to avoid blocking other people’s work.”

“Takes time to understand a problem well. Asks appropriate questions.”



TEAM PLAYER

KEY PHRASE: Team Player

ALTERNATE WORDINGS: Humble
Positive attitude

73% of the managers we surveyed—22 out of 30—are focused on finding candidates who will fit in with the existing team’s dynamics. Interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence and ability to collaborate constructively were mentioned as major factors that make or break a new employee’s integration with the existing team.

“Someone that works well with others is critical. They are humble, holding the good of the customer and the team as sacred. There is no value in hiring someone brilliant and skilled if nobody wants to work with them.”

“Can this person be a good teammate? Can we trust them to do the work on time and be available for team meetings?”

“Willing to take on unpopular assignments and help others. Forms positive relationships with others.”

“Humble—
sharing credit,
admitting error.”

“Respects others strengths and
weaknesses and is aware of their own.”

“Can this person be a good teammate?
Can we trust them to do the work on time
and be available for team meetings?”

“Builds positive relationships and makes
work environment fun.”



CUSTOMER FOCUSED

KEY PHRASE: Customer Focused

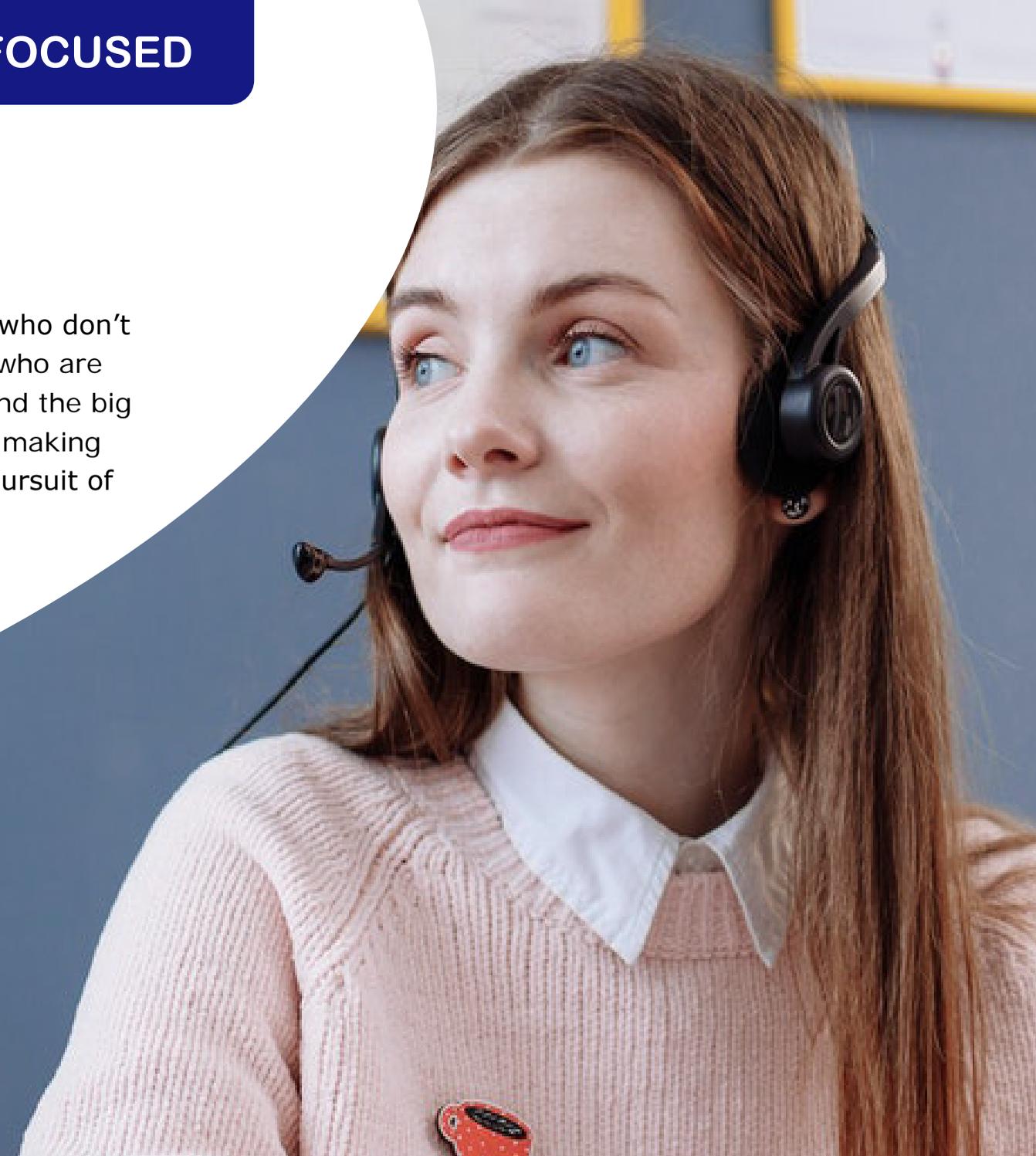
ALTERNATE WORDINGS: Gathers real requirements
Big picture thinker

70% of the managers we surveyed—21 out of 30—want to hire candidates who don't just follow the instructions they are given. They are looking for candidates who are genuinely interested in their customers, their end users, the organization and the big picture. They also know that the perfect can be the enemy of the good—so making sure that their efforts are in sync with the business needs rather than the pursuit of perfection for perfection's sake.

“Finding the line between good enough and excessive can be hard, but sometimes you encounter people who lean too far toward the former, even in the face of client feedback.”



“Ability to align technical plus business side of their work.”



LOGICAL



KEY PHRASE: Logical

ALTERNATE WORDINGS: Organized
Detail oriented

63% of the managers we surveyed—19 out of 30—are looking for candidates with a logical, organized approach to their work.

“Understands cause and effect.”

“Strong critical reasoning skills.”

“Doesn’t over-analyze. Makes decisions.”



“Able to organize. Able to think ahead.”

“Understands root cause of success. Understands root cause of failure.”

“Doesn’t procrastinate. Tackles problems while still small rather than waiting until big.”

INITIATIVE

KEY PHRASE: Initiative

ALTERNATE WORDINGS: Ownership
Self-starter

Almost 50% of the managers we surveyed—14 out of 30—value initiative in employees. Much of the time that takes the form of looking for ways to contribute and make improvements without being told what to do. But the aspect of being self-managing, especially when working remotely, plays into this as well.

“A person is willing to take on an individual task by themselves, but also work as a team. All the while looking at the bigger picture so they see how they’re contributing. Ownership.”

“Management can’t be everywhere. It’s our job as managers to remove obstacles to let the people that get the real work done drive the process.”

“People who finish things and follow through with what they said and can self-manage—especially with things going virtual.”



“Takes initiative. Looks for work and makes improvements.”

In 2021, Stout Systems Development conducted a survey of 30 Hiring and Human Resource Managers. The survey was conducted via several means as requested by the individual: a standard online survey program, a written questionnaire and an over-the-phone survey. Results were tabulated by Stout Systems Development personnel. The results provided in this report are informational only. No guarantees or claims are made about the data provided herein. The results, from most often mentioned to least, were:

Problem Solver

Good Communicator

Team Player

Customer Focused

Logical

Initiative

To learn more about the survey and its results, please call Stout Systems at [734-663-0877](tel:734-663-0877) or email info@stoutsystems.com.

