



Prep your students for the professional world

Insights from their future hiring managers



Pearson

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Introduction

College can be an invaluable tool for learning industry-specific skills; graduates need specialized knowledge to succeed in the working world. But just as important to their success, and often overlooked, are the “soft skills,” also known as “professional skills.” The ability to interact in high-pressure social settings, collaborate, and bring an attitude of growth to the workplace can truly set applicants apart from the pack.

The demand for accessible and effective education is greater than ever, because students want to graduate prepared for the working world. They’re looking to set themselves on a successful career path by prioritizing institutions that’ll teach them the professional skills they need to succeed. By fostering an environment that embraces professional skills, innovative institutions allow their students to flourish and dare them to grow.

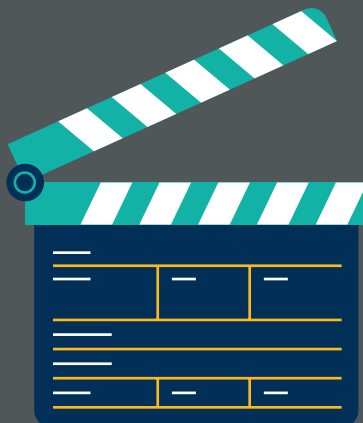
We’ve interviewed hiring managers — in industries from television to nonprofit — to get their perspective on how strong professional skills relate to career success. With this ebook, we hope to illuminate a pathway for building an innovative institution, one that supports students with tools and resources that can be used both in the classroom and in their future careers.



Hannah KS

Okay Goodnight

As a producer for Okay Goodnight, a multimedia production company, Hannah KS oversees a team of coordinators and colleagues. But once she's in production on a show like *Grace and Frankie*, for instance, she's involved in meeting with and hiring department heads and any other crew position that may need filling.



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Once we're on set, the hiring work I do becomes less defined and less straightforward. A lot of the time, I'm the first filter for staffing writers and directors, for example, which sometimes requires looking for different types of skill sets than I would look for in an applicant for a full-time position at the production company. But there are definitely themes and parallels between those skills that any employable person should try to have.

When I'm hiring for *Okay Goodnight*, I look in particular for a demonstration of social intelligence. I know that can sound sort of lofty, but because we're an intimate operation and so much of what we do is navigate between different worlds and coordinate a lot of different personalities, we hope that the people we bring into the fold have the ability to read the room — how to respond to different personalities, how to engage in a way that's comfortable and casual while also being able to be deferential and respectful when need be. The ability to analyze those situations on their own, and not necessarily be told explicitly how to behave, is crucial.

In a creative field like television, project development is sometimes driven by harder-to-define qualities like “taste.” Hannah looks out for new hires who are able to navigate the nuances of the different aspects of creative development.

We hope that our company's taste and vision are aligned with the people that we collaborate with. That means that if you're being brought on to either the team of a production company or a role on a film set, you have to be able to see the vision of the captain of that creative endeavor, understand what makes that vision what it is, and be able to feed into that without overpowering it.

Television specifically is a very collaborative medium, and if you can't play nicely with others and be able to compartmentalize enough to see a good idea no matter where it comes from, it's not going to be a good fit.

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Tamara Hlava

Column Five

As the VP of people at the creative content agency Column Five, Tamara Hlava plays a crucial role in the hiring process — which involves bringing on people who may be fresh out of college and diving into the waters of a professional career for the first time.

LinkedIn: [tamaraburkehlava](#)



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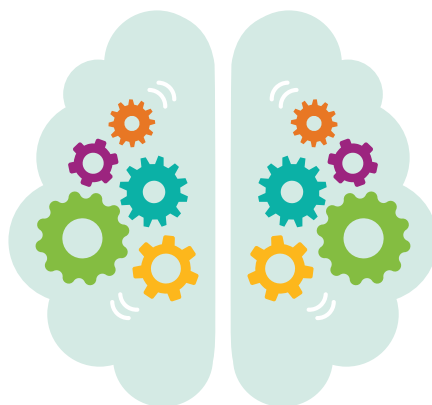
I love the energy I see from the recent graduates that I interview. They're not worn down from a previous role that may have zapped the life out of them. I'm okay with naiveté as long as they're someone willing to recognize what they don't know. I want to hire someone who's empowering themselves to do a good job, someone who checks in and asks questions, who's confident and competent — while knowing that some of that is earned over time.

Overconfidence is something that Tamara strays away from when she's looking for new talent. She's looking for someone willing to learn.

I don't want someone charging in guns blazing. But I also don't want to hire someone with debilitating Imposter Syndrome, someone who doubts their confidence. It's about finding a middle ground and someone humble enough to walk it. The work that it takes to be successful in the workplace doesn't go away as you get older, so you have to teach yourself discipline and really explore your self-awareness. These are leadership skills that aren't reserved for a specific type or quality of person. They should be normalized for everyone.

I'm quoting Gandhi on this one: 'Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.' It's not going to be easy all the time, entering the workplace. It's hard work to learn and grow. It's not just a checkbox.

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Susannah Eaton Ryan

The ARC of Delaware

As the director of employment and outreach at The ARC of Delaware, a large part of Susannah Eaton Ryan's job is supporting her clients' needs.

The ARC is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to serving Delawareans with intellectual and developmental disabilities including, but not limited to, autism and Down syndrome. Susannah oversees a team that makes sure that 150 or so people, many of whom are on the spectrum, are employed and remain employed. Her clients face a range of challenges in the workforce, so she's there to help them conquer those obstacles and maintain successful employment.

Supporting 150 people with special needs requires a certain type of individual — and Susannah's operating budget doesn't allow for a large staff. As a non-profit, limited budgets are a reality of her industry, and the people in her career path work for more than just financial reasons.

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When you're leaving school and entering the workforce, it's all about the attitude. That's what makes you a better employee — being sensitive, paying attention, being able to evaluate a situation, and most of all caring about what needs to be done.

Although we serve a large number of individuals, we do it with a staff of only four employees. It can be difficult to find the right people for the job, though, because they're unfortunately paid little, and are expected to take on a range of different tasks.

So when I'm hiring, the number one quality that I look for in a person is that they care about doing a good job. You see that on the resumes and you get it from talking to them in an interview — it doesn't matter to me what they did in college, as long as they care about doing it well. That attitude carries over from their schoolwork and entry-level work into a more permanent job.

For people I'm interviewing fresh out of school, I'm looking for someone who offers what The ARC needs. That means that I look for people willing to do their homework about the organization as much as they can ahead of time, so they understand whether or not they're a good fit. I believe in good fits, and the drive to research ahead of time is invaluable in revealing that.

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Jonathan Raymond

Refound

Jonathan Raymond is the owner and CEO of Refound, a leadership training company that has grown over the past three years. In order to train leaders, he has to make sure his staff are of a high caliber and can meet the needs of his organization.

LinkedIn: [jonathanrefound](https://www.linkedin.com/company/jonathanrefound)



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I look for a lot of different skill sets when I'm hiring employees. In the interview process, it's important to me to get a sense of who they're *going to be* when they show up on the first day, not just who they are in front of me. I try to test around the edges by asking them questions that don't have easy answers, or floating a scenario: How would you have approached this situation?

Jonathan often finds that potential candidates need more than just the technical skills they develop through college classes and traditional learning. They need the soft skills that can give them a leg up in the working world.

I think higher education needs to be better at holding people accountable for more than just grades. What tends to happen now is that students are good at the technical part, the part that got them the good grades. But they're not getting feedback about the other parts of their work. So much of what counts for success in the workplace goes beyond technical skills: How do you work with others? How do you deal with diversity or communication challenges? Are you resourceful?

It's more than just grades. They need grit. 90% of what makes a good project is grit and hard work — they need to be willing to roll up their sleeves and do the work that, while unsexy, is foundational for the rest of their careers.

They need to have an eye for cutting out distractions as well. There's too much screen time in the workplace these days, too many apps. I advise new employees to keep track of all their apps. Look at their personal habits — what's serving your goals and what's not? How are you spending your day? Most of us have too many clothes in the closet. I look for applicants who think about their work in the same way.

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Jilanna Wilson

Zendesk

Jilanna Wilson is the design operations manager for Zendesk, a customer service software company based in San Francisco. She and her team work with brand designers, product designers, copywriters, and researchers, making sure they have what they need to be successful, efficient, and meet deadlines. She's also the decision maker when it comes to the hiring process for the design operations team.

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Our company's quickly growing and always changing, so it's important to me to find someone flexible, scrappy, efficient, and a good communicator with both stakeholders and non-team members. Someone who's organized too — luckily, most of the people here are already spreadsheet geeks and love project management!

One of the biggest things I look for before hiring is people who come in with ideas to solve business needs; I want to hear that they have ideas without even hearing the full picture. I love when they're already thinking about the challenge and how they would tackle it.

But we do very fast-paced work here. There are lots of pivots and blips in the road, so I'm always looking for someone who can handle situations and go with the flow. If we need to change directions, are they okay with that? How, then, do they also encourage the rest of the team to come on board?

The key to successful design work, Jilanna believes, is the drive to create with a team. She's on the lookout for people with those skills when she is hiring.

Sometimes you have to learn this the hard way, but the nature of our work is such that we have to understand our audience before we can make changes or suggestions. You need people who want to make an impact in a positive way.

So to that end, a lot of the people I hire have different backgrounds and end up doing something totally different than what they studied. You find yourself through your soft skills and your connections, not just your hard skills and what you went to school for. There are so many more paths to a career than what you learned in a book.

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Professional organizations are looking for applicants who dare to grow, which makes professional skills a crucial part of a graduate's skill set. By learning the ins and outs of operating in a workplace environment, students develop and cement habits that can follow them from their first post-graduation job through their careers.

You can support your students by giving them the tools they need to develop those interpersonal qualities that they might not pick up in the classroom alone.

Learn more about career development tools you can use to help prepare future graduates for a successful transition into the workplace.

