

Thinkopolis VIII: The most sought after skills in Canada in 2015

What does it take to get a job in Canada? It takes skills.

Workopolis has surveyed hundreds of employers and analyzed millions of job postings to determine what is in demand in the Canadian labour market – and what candidates need to demonstrate in resumes and job interviews in order to get the job.

Canadian employers told us they want to hire more staff but that they struggle to find candidates with the skills that they need. In the spring of 2015, we surveyed 256 Canadian employers about their hiring intentions and challenges.

One-third (32 per cent) told us that they plan to increase staff over the next 12 months. However 68 per cent said that it is very or somewhat difficult to find the people that they need to hire.

71 per cent of employers surveyed say a shortage of qualified candidates is having an impact on their ability to meet client needs. This is up by 5 per cent from a similar survey we conducted in 2012, where 66 per cent of senior executives said that a shortage of skilled workers was impacting their business.

What do Canadian employers say candidates are lacking?

- Experience – 38%
- Soft skills – 29%
- Technical skills – 23%
- Education – 4%

It's not more education that candidates need in order to be hired. Although as we reported in [Thinkopolis V: Education Nation](#), Canadians increasingly are adding more education to their resumes. But this isn't what employers are looking for.

According to the employers we surveyed, it is on-the-job experience, interpersonal skills, and technical abilities that they want. And the soft skills outweigh the technical.

This is also borne out by what we're seeing in job postings.

There are over three thousand different skills requested in the +- 60,000 job postings on Workopolis at any given time. Here's a look at the most commonly sought after skills in Canada with the size of the word reflecting its popularity in job ads from 2014 through to the present.

How to get experience without experience

Interestingly, many of those vital baseline skills: Communications, Customer relations, Teamwork, as well as the ability to develop and demonstrate a positive work ethic, can all be learned and applied starting with one's very first job. In fact, these are the very skills and attributes prized and developed in the retail and hospitality industries where many young people find their first employment opportunities.

But how do you get these jobs without any experience? How can you get your foot in the door of your first job without real experience to demonstrate you have what it takes to do the work?

To find out, we spoke with Sharon Ramalho, Senior Vice President and Chief People Officer at McDonald's Restaurants of Canada. Her company hires roughly 45,000 people every year. About 70 to 80 per cent of these are people are seeking their first or second job. Here's what her company looks for in entry-level candidates.

"People who are really interested in working as part of a team," says Ramalho. "They don't necessarily have to be extroverts, but they have to be self-motivated. It helps if they want to learn, have a passion for food, and they want to help people have a nice experience in our restaurants.

But that's what we hire for: motivation and a willingness to learn. Once hired, our staff have a detailed training program, and that's where they can learn what we call the 'Skills for Life:' communications, teamwork, functioning in a fast-paced environment, and goal setting."

Because communications is the single most sought after skill in Canadian job postings, and it can mean different things in different career paths or stages, we asked Sharon Ramalho how McDonald's defines this skill:

"We teach people communication skills they don't necessarily come in with: How to speak to their peer group, how to communicate with management, how to interact with customers. Staff learn everything from the basics of making proper eye contact to how to give praise or to provide feedback when necessary.

This is also what we look for in stand-out staff who rise through the ranks: communications, teamwork, and decision making as evidence of leadership ability. And 90 per cent of our restaurant management started out as crew."

So to land that first job, one of Canada's top employers for young people says that a candidate must have: motivation to work and a willingness to learn. And that entry-level job allows you to develop and demonstrate those core skills that are most sought after across industries: communications, teamwork, customer relations and a demonstrated work ethic. These are the building blocks of career success.

Communication skills in focus:

Tips for employers

- Give a candidate's resume and cover letter a close read – not just for the facts, but for their use of language. Are they well written and error free? Are they articulate, or do they use the same words and phrases repeatedly throughout?
- Ask behavioural-style questions in the job interview. "Tell me about a time when..." This forces the candidate to tell you a story rather than merely repeating facts they may have rehearsed. Are they well spoken and able to converse? See if they can speak intelligently on a topic they may not have prepared for in advance.
- Are they socially savvy? It's important to note whether a person can read their audience and knows how to engage in conversation and when to stop talking.

Tips for candidates

- One of the traps people fall into when they are nervous is to try to fill any silence with words, so that they end up rambling and appearing inarticulate. Pause for three seconds before answering a job interview question. It only seems like a long silence in your own head. This gives you time to think about the question and form an articulate answer before you speak.
- Write an engaging cover letter that doesn't sound like a cookie-cutter template, but really tells your story and why you want the job. Make sure that your resume and cover letter are free from grammatical mistakes and typos. Writing skills are amongst the most sought after.

Digital literacy is the new literacy

Keeping up with the trends and technologies of how people communicate and share information is also essential for career success. Once upon a time, reading and writing were considered the basic skills for most jobs. Digital literacy has become the new literacy.

Along with those soft skills we can see a high level of demand for digital literacy and computer skills. This is particularly true in the areas of document production, filing and sharing. Among the top skills sought after in job postings are the following collection:

- Microsoft Office, Excel, Word, PowerPoint
- Microsoft Works
- Reports
- Documentation
- Computer use

What does it take to get hired in 2015? Canadian employers want candidates with demonstrated work ethic plus communications, customer relations, and teamwork abilities who can use computers to create and share documents and spreadsheets, and who keep up with the latest technologies. Highlighting these in your resume and during job interviews can be the key to breaking into the job market.

Hot skills by sector

Both of the preceding word clouds highlighted the skills that are most often sought after or are the fastest rising in demand for *all* jobs – but not necessarily the precise job that you're targeting. So we took a closer look at what employers are looking for in ten specific sectors – *aside from* the most in demand skills list.

For that list, please see the **Appendix: The 10 most sought after skills in job postings specific to 10 popular sectors.**

If you're looking for a job in one of the following sectors in Canada, along with your demonstrated soft skills and digital literacy, highlight a subset of the relevant skillset below in your job application.

The key to a successful career

Because the most sought-after skills such as communications and teamwork are most often gained through work experience, most employers want candidates with some experience even for entry-level jobs. Nearly half (45 per cent) of entry-level jobs ask for two or more years' experience.

For those that don't, motivation and a willingness to learn can be the keys to getting your foot in the door. In a Workopolis survey of employers, we asked the question, "If it comes down to two job candidates with equal skills and work experience, which of the following is the factor that will move you to hire one over the other?"

Nearly half of respondents (45 per cent) said they would choose the more enthusiastic candidate.

Use your motivation and willingness to learn to get your first job, and use those on-the-job experiences to gain the baseline skills that future employers want to see in your resume and to figure out in what it is you like to do. Then look into adding those skills that are particularly in demand in that sector.

These are the keys to a successful career.

Money talks

One final note: while 68 per cent of employers surveyed said that it is very or somewhat difficult to find the people that they need to hire, it could just be that they aren't willing to pay for the skills they're seeking. One-third (30 per cent) said that they attribute the difficulty hiring to the fact that "*candidates are unwilling to work for the salary offered.*"

Skilled candidates are in demand and have options.

Appendix: The 10 most sought after skills in job postings specific to 10 popular sectors

Excluding those that are universally sought after across all job postings, these are the skills appearing most frequently in job postings for a range of sectors on Workopolis.

Accounting / Finance

Financial statements / reporting
Accounts payable and receivable
CPA
Financial analysis
Accounting
Microsoft money
Cash flow analysis
Tax returns
Accruals
Auditing

Arts / Media

Adobe Photoshop
Adobe acrobat
Graphic design
Journalism
Video production / editing
Illustrator
HTML
Graphical user interface
InDesign
Photography

Hospitality and food service

Physical demand
Certified CPR
Food safety
Cooking
Cash handling
Employee training / instruction
Restaurant management
Dependable
Public speaking
Labour relations

Manufacturing

Welding
Machinery
Automotive
Blueprints

Admin/Clerical

Travel arrangements
Administrative support
Medical terminology
Expense reports
Secretarial
Invoicing
Accounts payable and receivable
Office supply ordering
Charts
Office equipment

Engineering

CAD
3d
Graphic design
Professional engineer
Automation
Engineering design
Layout design
Cost control
PLC
Microsoft project

Human resources

Employee relations
HRIS
Labour relations
Organizational development
Training programs
PeopleSoft
Surveys
Performance analysis
Leadership training
ADP

Marketing

Market planning
Market strategy
Marketing communications
Public relations

Hand tools
Computer Numerical Control (CNC)
Power tools
ISO
Warehousing
Machining

Skilled trades

Blueprints
Welding
Machinery
Plc
Automotive
Computer numerical control (CNC)
Electrical work
Machining
Hydraulics
Hvac

Brand management
Adobe Acrobat
Product management
Adobe Photoshop
Press releases
Graphic design

Technology and Digital Media

SQL
Java
Shell scripting
Oracle
JavaScript
Agile
Operating systems
HTML / CSS
Extensible markup language (XML)
Linux

Acquire some of the most sought-after skills in your sector to greatly increase the number of jobs you qualify for. But remember that while these credentials are important, employers across the board will be looking for signs of soft skills—abilities that are more interpersonal than technical—for the stand-out candidates they need to hire.

Acquiring skills

Beginners can learn the basics of coding online for free at **Code Academy**.
<https://www.codecademy.com/>

Coursera offers free online courses from top universities on a vast range of topics.
<https://www.coursera.org/>

MOOCs (Massive open online courses) can be taken for free online:
<http://www.mooc.ca/index.html>

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