



**Do Employers *Really* Value Education?  
Top Skills Employers Seek from Applicants**

While it’s not the dot-com boom of the ‘90s, college seniors are experiencing the best job market in four years. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), hiring of college grads will increase more than 13 percent this year. Furthermore, salaries are up for most college majors, even if we’re not seeing big sign-on bonuses, stock options or campus recruiting blitzes.

*But does a college degree get the job? Does it get the job at higher wages? Outside of a specific technical/professional degree, does it really matter?*

It goes without saying that we want our bridge-builder to have an engineering degree, our accountant to have an accounting degree and our physician to have earned her degree. But what about the rest of the workforce?

Experience and unscientific examination say that a degree is frequently the key that unlocks the gate to professional employment...it cannot get the job for you, but it can gain a person access to apply and interview. You might not get hired because of that History degree; but without a degree, you would not have met the employer’s minimum criteria and the gate would be closed, period.

About the money...Yes, the salary offerings to college graduates are up this year. However they are generally up for everyone else as well. Upon entry into the job market it would be difficult to argue that degreed candidates earn more money across the board. Nevertheless, a degreed individual tends to earn more over the life of his career; perhaps less because of the degree, and more because the individuals who pursue post-secondary education are perceived to be more ambitious, motivated, self-confident and teachable than their non-degreed associates. Often it is that distinction that earns these people promotions, privileges and the extra dollars that come with it all.

As a matter of fact, those attributes listed above, including drive, initiative, confidence, attitude and willingness to learn, are the ‘hot buttons’ of all employers. Whether seeking to hire degreed or non-degreed candidates, employers value ‘teach ability’, interest and commitment—traits presumably belonging to good students.

At the end of the day, it’s less important that you are a Longhorn or an Aggie; a cum laude or a ‘2.9,’ a Finance or a Fine Arts major. What is important—what all employers want—is this:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Performance</li> <li>▪ Initiative</li> <li>▪ Growth Potential</li> <li>▪ Self-confidence</li> <li>▪ Leadership—regardless of level of function</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Compatibility—a personality style and behavior that matches the corporate culture</li> <li>▪ Positive Attitude</li> <li>▪ Social Skills</li> <li>▪ Integrity, and</li> <li>▪ Communication Skills</li> </ul> |
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Employers recently responding to NACE’s Job Outlook Survey were asked to rate the importance of candidate qualities and skills on a five-point scale, with five being “extremely important.”

This is how the most desired characteristics ranked:

<p><b>Communication skills</b>      4.7</p> <p><b>Honesty/integrity</b>        4.7</p> <p><b>Teamwork skills</b>            4.6</p>	<p><b>Interpersonal skills</b>        4.5</p> <p><b>Motivation/initiative</b>      4.5</p> <p><b>Strong work ethic</b>          4.5</p>
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While employers rate communication skills as one of the most desired characteristics, those are the skills that are most lacking in today's candidates—degreed or not. There is such a heavy emphasis on effective communication in the workplace that individuals—degreed or non—who master these skills will set themselves apart from the pack when searching for employment.

In the end, employers value more than a degree. They are seeking educated applicants with certain skills and compatibility, combined with integrity and a strong work ethic. If you believe a diploma is all-important, remember education and experience go hand-in-hand; most managers know this very well.

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