

A Soft Skills Development Resource for Job Seekers and Employees

Many Sarnia Lambton employers, service providers and educators who have participated in Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board consultations and surveys, tell us that a demonstration of good soft skills is critical for an employee in today's workplace.

Soft skills are the non-technical, non-specialized skills that are needed in all types of employment. Soft skills differ from technical skills which include specific degrees, diplomas and knowledge pertaining to a particular field.

The following resource includes a series of information sheets on a variety of soft skills. The purpose of these sheets is to offer job seekers and employees an understanding of how different characteristics of a soft skill can be applied in an actual work setting.



www.slwdb.org

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Customer Service: A commitment to determining and satisfying the needs of others.

- **Why do employers want employees with good customer service skills?** Customer service has a direct impact on a company's profits.

Customer service skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Approachability	You make yourself available and offer assistance.	You are a sales associate for a retail clothing store. A customer picks up a pair of jeans from a table and holds them up to take a look. You approach and greet the customer. You then tell the customer what the different styles of jeans are on the table and other styles of jeans located elsewhere throughout the store.
Patience	You are friendly and listen attentively even in difficult situations.	You take orders at the counter of a fast food restaurant. The customer you are serving is asking many questions about the menu options. You have repeated your explanations several times. You remain calm, continue to listen attentively and respond in a friendly, helpful manner after each question.
Positivity	You respond to others in an optimistic and thoughtful way.	Your job is a general farm worker. You rotate duties with the other workers. One of your co-workers is absent today and your boss assigns their task of cleaning the stables to you. You accept this duty recognizing that the job needs to get done and you remain positive and determined even though it is not your favourite task.
Understanding	You can sense others' feelings and then react in a way that reassures them.	You work as a patient service associate (also known as a nurse aide or unit helper) for the local hospital. Your current task is to serve meals to patients on the 4th floor. You enter one room and a patient is sleeping. You quietly place the food on a nearby tray.
Ability to assess & respond	You observe and ask questions to gather information so that you can determine the best way to meet the need in a prompt and efficient manner.	You work at a deli eatery. Your job is to make and package the food ordered. You notice that there is only one cheese bagel left. You tell your colleagues who are taking customers' orders so that they know there is only one left. When the cheese bagel is gone, you tell them that there is none left.



Communication: Process of understanding and conveying information.

- **Why do employers want employees with good communication skills?** Customers and coworkers are more satisfied when they receive clear and concise information.

Communication skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Listening	You listen carefully to understand what is being asked of you.	You work as a household cleaner for a small cleaning business. After you finish one house, your supervisor comes to inspect your work. Your supervisor points out that there are dust bunnies in the bathroom. You thank your supervisor for the feedback and correct your mistake. In the future, you make sure you thoroughly clean all floors.
Speaking	You are clear and concise when you answer and ask questions.	You work as a cashier at a grocery store. A customer asks you about an advertised sale on cucumbers. You reply, "Yes, cucumbers are on sale. They are 50 cents each until Saturday."
Writing	Your writing is presented in a professional manner and easy to understand.	You work at the information booth in the mall. Each shift, you are required to write down any items customers in the mall lost (e.g., credit cards, phone) and all items found. Normally your writing is messy. You take your time to print your words to ensure that they are readable for other people who work at the information booth.
Reading	You can understand written materials in a variety of forms (e.g., words, charts, diagrams, etc.).	You work as a transport truck driver. During each shift, you are required to fill in a chart for the time spent driving, resting, and loading or unloading. You need to understand where in the chart you write this information.
Presenting	You are able to gather and organize information so that you can share it with others.	You work as a customer service representative at a hotel. Your job is to give directions or offer suggestions on places to go and see in the area. Your supervisor asks you to present to the management team on the questions you typically get asked. You spend some time making notes on the variety of questions asked and organize these questions based on type of activity (e.g., food, retail, events, etc.).
Appropriate body language	Your gestures, stance and facial expressions emphasize the point you are trying to make.	You work as a bank teller. When speaking with and listening to your customer, you look them directly in their eyes. Eye contact assures your customer that you are listening to them. It also helps both people in the conversation understand each other.

 **Work Ethic:** A personal characteristic that motivates people to work hard to complete tasks.

- **Why do employers want employees with good work ethic?** Good work ethic can stimulate a positive work environment and increase productivity.

Work Ethic includes:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Productivity	You work hard at your tasks to accomplish goals.	You work as a salesperson in a music store at the mall. It is five minutes to closing time. Customers are coming into the store and do not seem to be in a rush. You approach customers and inform them about the deals of the day.
Dependability	You arrive to work early for your shifts.	You work as a cashier at a department store. You arrive to work 10 minutes earlier. You have time to store your coat, phone and wallet in your locker and check in with the supervisor to get a till of cash before you head out onto the floor.
Accountability	You take responsibility for your actions.	You work as a server at a restaurant. A customer complains that you just served lasagna but a penne dish is what was ordered. You acknowledge your mistake to both the customer and your supervisor. You don't make excuses for your mistake.
Attention-to-detail	You are careful to follow instructions and rules.	You work as a receptionist at a big law firm. You wear clean dress pants, shirt/blouse, and a nice sweater that has no holes in it.
Initiative	You look for opportunities to improve.	You work as a dietary aide in a retirement home. Your employer has been trying to recruit a cook with no luck. You approach your manager and ask what you need to do in order to become qualified for the cook position.

Teamwork: A commitment to working with others to achieve a common goal.

- **Why do employers want employees who demonstrate teamwork?** Teamwork leads to a positive work environment which can increase performance results for a company.

Teamwork skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Respectfulness	You respect the opinions and ideas of others.	You work as a janitor in an elementary school. A teacher at the school mentions to you that the bathrooms smell of bleach and asks if it is possible to use less bleach or another cleaner. The teacher is worried about the effect of the smell on the children. You consider this idea and look into it.
Active participation	You add value to the team by completing tasks.	You work as a server at a restaurant. You notice a couple of groups of people enter the restaurant. The hostess is currently seating a group of customers. You are not currently doing anything so you head over to greet them and look to see if there is a table you can seat them at.
Supportive	You promote and praise ideas and suggestions of others.	You work as a retail salesperson at a popular clothing store. Only a few people are trained as cashiers in the store; you are one of them. At a staff meeting, a colleague asks the manager if all salespersons could be trained on cash. The manager asks what other people think of this idea. You say that you think this is a great idea and would be willing to help train others on cash.
Flexibility	You are willing to adapt your thinking for the benefit of the group.	You work as a contract labourer for a construction company. The job is to lay down pavement. Your job is to direct traffic using a 'slow' or 'stop' sign. Today is really hot. You want to go home. You notice throughout the morning that no one has complained about the heat. Even the workers laying down the hot tar. You decide you need to accept the weather conditions like everyone else in the crew has done.
Collaboration	You share information ('pool your resources') with others.	You work as a truck driver. You are currently stuck in traffic on a major highway. It looks like there has been a bad accident and you will be delayed for a while. You use your radio to tell other truck drivers about the delay on the highway.

 **Adaptability:** Being able to change or adjust when faced with new circumstances.

- **Why do employers want employees who are adaptable?** Work duties may need to change because of unexpected or new situations. Employees that can adjust to changes in a positive manner will help create beneficial results for a company.

Adaptability skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Acceptance	You accept and are open to changes in your job duties.	You work as a salesperson at a retail clothing store. Your supervisor comes over to you and says a new sale is starting today. You set up signage and start promoting the sale to customers.
Calmness and self-control	You remain calm in situations where change occurs.	You work as a kitchen helper at a busy lunch café. You are currently slicing cucumbers for sandwiches when your supervisor comes over and tells you that you need to stop what you are doing and start slicing tomatoes. The tomato slices are almost gone! You feel a bit frustrated, but, you remain calm and begin to slice the tomatoes as you were instructed.
Ability to assess and respond	You think about situations and move to alternate plans when change is needed.	You work as a bus driver. You are on a strict time schedule; you need to be at your stops on time. You are currently stopped, picking up riders. One rider is having a difficult time putting a bike on the front bike rack. You get out of your seat and help the rider put the bike on the rack.
Positivity	You maintain optimism even in situations that seem difficult or uncertain.	You work as a server. The host just seated a group of 10 people in your section. Great, you think. Big groups are dreaded; too much chaos and often little tips. You take a deep breath and think maybe this group will not be so bad. You serve them with a good attitude.



Problem Solving: Recognizing a challenge or situation exists and then coming up with a solution.

- **Why do employers want employees with good problem solving skills?** Problem solving can save a company money, especially if it results in customer satisfaction or an improved product or procedure.

Problem solving skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Recognition	You identify a problem when it occurs.	You work as a server at restaurant. A customer is dissatisfied with the way their meal is cooked and is becoming loud and angry. Customers nearby are starting to stare. You listen to the customer, validate the complaints and ask if they'd like to choose a different menu item. If this option doesn't appeal to the customer, your backup option is to get the manager and see what can be done.
Analysis	You examine the situation or problem thoroughly prior to taking action.	You work as a cook at a restaurant that offers daily dinner specials. Your manager asks you to come up with these specials for the week. You consider what dishes have been popular in the past and what ingredients are in season and available, and then brainstorm different options. After you create a list, you narrow it down to 7 specials for the week.
Creativity	You think 'outside the box' to come up with solutions.	You work as a shelf stocker at clothing store. You are unpacking boxes and placing the product on the floor and at the designated spot in the backroom. You are currently unpacking size 8 women's jeans. The floor is fully stocked and the shelves in the backroom are also full. But there are still 10 pairs of jeans in the box. You weigh your options. You find that there is shelf space available a few rows down and place the jeans there. You put a sign by the jeans.
Evaluation	You assess how possible solutions will impact the outcome.	You work as a dishwasher at a restaurant. The lunch rush just finished. There are piles of dirty plates, glasses, cutlery, and pots and pans. If you wash the plates, glasses, and cutlery first, the cooks will have plenty of options to place customers' supper orders on. If you wash the pots and pans first, the cooks may have an easier time cooking supper orders. Since food needs to be cooked before it can be served, you decide to wash the pots and pans first.
Persistence	You work to solve the problem even when it is difficult.	You work as a telemarketer. The person you are calling is very rude to you and is yelling at you. You take a deep breath and remain calm. You try to stick to your script but the caller continues to rant. You listen until the person hangs up.



Time Management: Organizing and planning your time so that you effectively achieve your goals.

- **Why do employers want employees who have time management skills?** Wasted time at work results in a loss of productivity and therefore, reduces company profits.

Time management skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Prioritizing	You determine and complete the most important tasks first.	You work as an administrative clerk for a business. Your number one task is to answer the phone. You also have a stack of folders to be filed, documents to be photocopied, and mail to be delivered. You need to prioritize your tasks. You know that your boss needs photocopies as soon as possible so you do this task first, in between phone calls.
Scheduling	You plan your tasks in order to meet deadlines.	You work as a patient service associate (also known as a nurse aide or unit helper) for the local hospital. It is 12pm; time to serve patients their meal trays and assist patients who need help eating. You also have to take a patient by wheelchair to a different part of the hospital by 12:30pm. It will take 5 minutes to do this task. You serve meals and keep an eye on the clock. You decide to collect empty meal trays after you return from transporting the patient.
Focus	You are not easily distracted from the task at hand.	You work as a server at a busy restaurant. You finish taking orders from a table and are on the way to the kitchen when you spot a group of friends at a table. They wave at you, gesturing for you to come over. You wave but continue on your path to the kitchen. Orders need to be placed to the kitchen as soon as possible.
Delegation	You appoint tasks to others when appropriate.	You work as a sales associate at a video game store. Earlier in the day, your supervisor told you 4 boxes in the backroom need to be emptied onto the shelves in the front of the store before the end of the night. You're almost done your shift. You finished unpacking 2 of the 4 boxes. When the evening sales associates come onto the floor, you tell them what your supervisor said, what you have done so far, & what needs to be done.



Creative Thinking (entrepreneurial thinking): Ability to think in an innovative or “out of the box” way to come up with new or unique ideas.

- **Why do employers want employees who have creative thinking skills?** Employers seek individuals who can be inventive and come up with new ideas in order to solve problems or create products or services. Creative thinking can lead to increased profits.

Creative thinking skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Receptiveness	You are willing to look at different ideas and strategies.	You work as a salesperson at a large department store. As customers enter the section you work in, you greet them with a simple “hi, how are you doing?” You notice a co-worker greets customers differently. You decide you need to come up with a different greeting to use.
Determination	You continue to seek resolution even when things are difficult.	You work as a sales associate for a clothing store. A female customer needs help finding semi-formal clothes to wear for a family event that evening. She is quickly dismissing your suggestions. You ask about the clothes she prefers and the family function. You ask if she can go to the change room, while you collect various skirts, shirts, dresses and sweaters in her size.
Resourcefulness	You have the ability to find quick and effective solutions to difficulties.	You work as a cashier at a grocery store. One customer was pushing the grocery cart through the aisle to unload the groceries when a wheel on the cart fell off. There are too many grocery bags to carry for this customer. You page your supervisor and ask that an empty cart be brought to your check out aisle.
Desire for knowledge	You ask questions to enhance your understanding of things.	You work as a server at a restaurant. A customer asks a lot of questions about the ingredients used in different dishes. You ask the customer if the concern is allergies, specific preferences, etc. Having this information will help you make appropriate meal suggestions (or suggestions to menu changes if there are no options for the customer).
Analytical	You give a lot of thought to how work is done and the end results.	You work as a patient service associate (also known as a unit helper or nurse aide). You need to help a male patient eat his soup. You consider the different ways to help him out. You could let him hold the spoon and guide it to his mouth; you remember his hands are shaky and having him hold the spoon would not end well. Another way to help is to hold the spoon for him and bring it up to his mouth. You do not think you have to put the spoon in his mouth. He seems to have control over his head and mouth.



Continuous Learning: A motivation to upgrade your skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis.

- **Why do employers want employees who continuously learn?** Work and products change rapidly. Employees who are able to keep current with new technologies and innovation can assist with a company's ability to compete in the marketplace.

Continuous Learning skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Recognition	You recognize that how work is done can change with the introduction of new technology.	You work as an office assistant. The Microsoft programs on your computer (e.g., Word, Excel) have just been updated from 2007 to 2016 version. You go through the 2016 programs to see what is new. You go onto Microsoft's website to learn about the differences.
Motivation	You want to be up to date on changes to your work.	You work as a kitchen helper at a restaurant. The head cook ordered new knife sets and they arrived today. You are excited; the old knives were wearing out. You ask the head cook if the new knives cut differently and to show you the best way to use them.
Active participation	You take a course to upgrade your skills.	You work as a server at a restaurant. The only beverages you serve are coffee, tea, juice and water. The manager has just informed you that the restaurant has received a liquor license and will soon be selling alcohol beverages. You decide to take a Smart Serve course so that you are current on the rules and regulations to serve alcohol beverages.
Flexibility	You are open to changes in how things are done.	You work as a transport truck driver. You are required to record the number of kilometers driven, the times you drove and rested, the times you picked up and dropped off a load. For 10 years, these paper records have been submitted at the end of every week to your employer. Your employer now asks that these records be entered online using the iPad given to you. Instead of protesting the change, you accept it.



Cultural Competency: Having knowledge, skills and desire to adapt to or understand different beliefs or principles.

- **Why do employers want employees who have cultural competence skills?** The global nature of business and the impact of an aging workforce means that workplaces will have customers and employees who are of different cultures, races, genders, ages, etc.

Cultural competence skills include:

	Example	Example in a work setting
Acceptance	You recognize that there are differences in people related to gender, age, ethnicity, etc.	You are a 20-something working in a retail store. Most of your co-workers are your age, with the exception of a 50-something sales associate. You find that you are learning a lot from this sales associate’s experience and now see the benefit of different ages working together.
Appreciation	You understand that there is value in different perspectives.	You work at a fitness club. The club has a culturally diverse staff. Your supervisor is going around asking everyone for ideas on how to market a new fitness program to customers. You know your supervisor is asking for feedback from everyone because you all have different backgrounds and experiences. These differences among the staff help serve the diverse clientele of the club.
Sensitivity	You are considerate and thoughtful when it comes to the differences of others.	You are a new employee of a grocery store. At the beginning of each shift, you meet a few new people. One person introduces themselves with a name you are unfamiliar with. Instead of nodding and smiling, you ask how to pronounce the name. You want to be able to say it correctly.
Cooperation	You have a desire to work in joint effort with others.	You work as a personal support worker at a long-term care facility. You need help from a co-worker to help lift a patient in and out of bed. It does not matter whether your co-worker is female, male, younger or older. You all work together in order to help the patient.
Understanding	You develop an understanding of differences.	It the middle of December. You are looking forward to Christmas with your family. While talking about the holidays with your co-workers, you notice a couple of co-workers talking about celebrations they do this time of year that are different from yours. You take an interest in this difference and ask questions about their celebrations and what the holidays mean to them.

Some Local Resources Include:

Local Literacy/Upgrading Resources:

Organization for Literacy in Lambton
Lochiel Kiwanis Community Centre
180 College Ave. North - Room 103
Sarnia, ON N7T 7X2
(519) 332-4876
oll@bellnet.ca

Lambton Kent District School Board
– Alternative & Continuing Education
660 Oakdale Avenue
Sarnia, ON N7V 2A9
(519) 383-8787
<http://acec.lkdsb.net>

Indigenous Literacy Program Aamjiwnaang – Alternative &
Continuing Education
978 Tashmoo Avenue
Sarnia, ON N7T 7H5
(519) 336-8410
<http://www.aamjiwnaang.ca/education-aamjiwnaang-alternative-and-continuing-education-program-aace/>

Lambton College- Academic Upgrading
1457 London Rd,
Sarnia, ON N7S 6K4
(519) 542-7751
[https://www.lambtoncollege.ca/Academic Upgrading/Program Description/](https://www.lambtoncollege.ca/Academic_Upgrading/Program_Description/)

Local Employment Services:

Goodwill Career Centre
1249 London Road
Sarnia, ON N7S 4T3
(519) 332-4333
www.goodwillekl.com

Lambton College Community Employment Services
4248 Oil Heritage Rd,
Petrolia, ON N0N 1R0
(519) 882-4333
<https://www.lambtoncollege.ca/CES/>

The WorkPlace Group
St. Clair Corporate Centre
265 Front Street N. Suite 107
Sarnia, ON N7T 7X1
(519) 337-7377
www.theworkplacegroup.ca

Kettle and Stony Point Employment Service Access
9156 Tecumseh Lane
Kettle & Stony Point First Nation, ON NON 1J1
(519)786-6780
<http://www.esalambton.com>

Aamjiwnaang First Nation Employment and Training
978 Tashmoo Ave, Sarnia, ON N7T 7H5
(519) 336-8410
<http://www.aamjiwnaang.ca/employment-and-training>

Walpole Island First Nation Employment and Training
R R 3, Wallaceburg, ON N8A 4K9
(519) 627-7148
<http://walpoleislandfirstnation.ca/operations/employment-and-training/>

Additional Community Resources:

The YMCA Learning & Career Centre

- Immigrant Services, Skills Link, Leadership Challenge,
Community Outreach Resource Education

660 Oakdale Ave, Sarnia, ON N7V 2A9

(519) 336-9622

[http://ymcaswo.ca/p/607/1/547/orgid/22850/t/YMCA Community Initiatives](http://ymcaswo.ca/p/607/1/547/orgid/22850/t/YMCA_Community_Initiatives)

Lambton County Library

Headquarters

787 Broadway Street

Wyoming, ON N0N 1T0

(519)845-0700

www.lclibrary.ca

eCourses

<http://education.gale.com/1-sarn40823/>

Online Resources:

Government of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/essential-skills/tools.html>

Ontario Ministry of Education: Ontario Skills Passport: www.skills.edu.gov.on.ca

The Conference Board of Canada: Employability Skills 2000+: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.aspx>

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of resources, but rather, acts as a starting point to assist your development of soft skills.

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<https://grad.uc.edu/student-life/news/soft-skills.html>
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