

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CALGARY

Does Your Education and Professional Behaviour Affect Your Employment Success?

When we think about our job or future employment, we tend to primarily think about our job title, our salary, who we work with, and the place we work. Yet we tend to spend less time thinking about how relevant our education (often referred to as technical knowledge) is, or how professionally we conduct ourselves at work. We think even less often about what impact each of these has on our ability to get and keep a job.

So what is the difference between our education and our professional behaviour, and how much can each of these affect our ability to get and keep a job?

Most universities and colleges around the world primarily teach technical knowledge specific to a field of study such as history, or an occupation such as medicine. However, few institutions have designed programs that formally require students to develop and demonstrate a strong set of broadly applied professional behaviours that apply to almost every position in the workplace from the most junior to the most senior. These include such behaviours as teamwork, problem solving, communications, work ethic, customer service and customer satisfaction, organizational skills, and decision-making. Most students graduate with a fair amount of introductory knowledge related to a specific field or occupation. They are not, however, formally taught professional behaviour such as how to more effectively listen to the needs of others; work with others as team members; resolve conflict by coming up with more workable solutions; and find more efficient and effective ways to deliver better products and services that will increase internal and external customer satisfaction and help their organizations grow and succeed.

Behaviours such as these have been given many names over the last 50+ years, such as workplace basic skills, essential skills, soft skills, and emotional IQ skills. At Columbia College Calgary, we have reviewed the literature in this critical area, and developed a comprehensive list of generic behaviours we refer to as **professional behaviours**. As much as possible, we have incorporated these behaviours into our curricula.

Over the years, researchers have learned that some 85% of people lose their job due to a lack of one or more of these professional behaviours whereas 15% lose their job due to a lack of a technical knowledge. This clearly indicates just how important this broad set of professional behaviours are to employers and consequently to our employment success.

In 2011, McKinsey and Company released an international report (*Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works*) that reported 72% of post-secondary institutions think their students are well prepared for the workplace, yet only 42% of employers agree. Closer to home, a 2015 McKinsey report, *Youth in Transition, Bridging Canada's Path from Education to Employment*, found that 83% of post-secondary institutions in Canada feel their students are well prepared for work while only 34% of Canadian employers agree. This is a huge discrepancy between what educators think versus what employers think. Both McKinsey reports state that the primary concern employers have is graduates' lack of professional behaviours.

To help demonstrate the importance of both technical knowledge and professional behaviour, this document introduces a legend and presents three assumptions as they relate to our technical knowledge and our professional behaviour. It then uses a simple mathematical formula to demonstrate the range of performance outcomes that are possible when our technical knowledge and/or professional behaviour are strong or weak. The impact each of these will have on us is then summed up in three basic observations.

Legend

- T = Technical knowledge (examples of this area of education include accounting, law, architecture, trades and technology)
- P = Professional behaviour (include generic behaviours that apply to almost every job in the workplace, such as problem solving, decision-making, teamwork, and communication)
- S = Success (consists of the overall performance of individual employees in the workplace and how this affects their chance of success)

Assumptions:

1. T¹ is the lowest level of technical knowledge and T¹⁰ is the highest level of technical knowledge.
2. P¹ is the lowest level of professional behaviour and P¹⁰ is the highest level of professional behaviour.
3. All other factors remain unchanged and, therefore, have no effect on S (Success).

Level of Performance and Resulting Outcomes:

$$T^1 \times P^1 = S^1$$
$$T^{10} \times P^1 = S^{10}$$
$$T^1 \times P^{10} = S^{10}$$
$$T^{10} \times P^{10} = S^{100}$$

Impact on Individual Success:

- When both our technical knowledge and professional behaviours are low, we will have little chance of finding employment and, if hired, this level of performance may reduce our chances of staying employed for any length of time.
- When either our technical knowledge or professional behaviours are high, but our other set of knowledge/behaviours are low, we will not perform as well as we could. This means we could be jeopardizing our future ability to find employment and when an employer has to let someone go, chances are high that it will be us.
- However, if we develop and then continue to strengthen our technical knowledge and professional behaviours, we should perform very well in the workplace. This will contribute a great deal to our ability to find employment and will ensure much greater long-term job security.

Conclusion:

Based on the McKinsey reports (2011, 2015), it is apparent that most post-secondary institutions currently concentrate on producing students with a technical education that focuses on a field of study or an occupation. While most employers seem generally satisfied with the technical knowledge of graduates, they are concerned about their lack of professional behaviours. Our basic mathematical formula clearly demonstrates that to be successful, people in the workplace need to have a strong set of technical knowledge as well as a strong set of professional behaviours.

To ensure long-term employment success, individuals wishing to enter the workforce as well as those who are already employed should continually improve their technical knowledge as well as their professional behaviours.

If you wish to assess your professional behaviours, go to www.columbia.ab.ca, click **Success** on the navigation bar near the top of the page, and scroll down to the document *Professional Behaviour*. The Success section contains many other documents to help you and others succeed.

As a result of incorporating professional behaviours into our students' education, Columbia College Calgary students receive very high employer satisfaction ratings during their field-based work experience (most between 85% - 90%). Our graduate employment rates in their field of education are generally over 90%.