

CAREER CORNER

#4 IN A SERIES

Your Transferable Skills What are they? And what can you do with them?

By Maribeth Gunner Pulliam, MS Ed

Your transferable skills are the general skills you have acquired by working with information, people, and things. These skills are very versatile and can be used in a variety of jobs and occupations. Over the years, you have undoubtedly amassed many skills from coursework, jobs, parenting, projects, hobbies, and other life experiences. If you have demonstrated abilities and experience in areas such as communication, human relations, research and planning, management/leadership, and general work survival skills, then you have developed skills that can easily transfer from one job or career to another. For example, if you operate a home daycare in your community, you have most likely mastered skills in human relations, as well as financial and personnel management, that could easily be transferred to the fields of business and industry if you chose to embark on a new career. Transferable skills, also known as functional skills, are the common thread among all jobs and careers and are an important building block for all of your occupational endeavors.

In addition to transferable skills, most people also possess work-content skills. Together, these two main types of skills reflect the accomplishments and strengths you have gained during your career. Although both types are useful, they serve different purposes in the workplace. Work-content skills tend to be more technical and job specific in nature. They usually require formal training and are associated with specific trades or professions. These skills are used in certain job and career settings, and often have a separate skills-based vocabulary or jargon that is specific to the job. Some examples of work content skills are: programming computer software, teaching history, and operating an x-ray machine. **Although work-content skills do not transfer from one occupation to another, they are important for entrance and advancement in certain occupations. In contrast, transferable/functional skills are mainly acquired through experience, can be**

communicated through a more general, universal vocabulary, and operate across jobs and fields. To illustrate further, a history professor may have an in-depth knowledge of American history (work-content skill), and may also be very proficient at teaching and relating well with students (functional/ transferable skills). The professor's teaching abilities and interpersonal skills can easily be applied in various work settings, while his knowledge of American history is more job specific and not as versatile in the job market. In short, work-content skills do not provide the same amount of fluidity as functional skills.

How Can These Skills Help Me?

Transferable skills serve as a bridge to your career mobility. The ease by which you conduct a job search, seek a promotion, or make a career transition is directly related to your ability to communicate your competencies to an employer and then transfer these functional skills to a new work setting. Prospective employers have one important question: What can you do for us? To get a job, you have to convince an employer that you have the necessary skills and potential they desire. **Many people are unaware that they possess hundreds of transferable skills they use on a regular basis. Identifying and articulating an inventory of your strengths is a critical factor in writing a successful cover letter or resume, interviewing, and negotiating.** Additionally, it will provide you with a better understanding of the depth and diversity of your experience. This knowledge also can bolster self-esteem in your areas of proficiencies and target those skills that may need improvement.

Identifying Your Transferable Skills

There are several steps you can take to learn more about your functional/transferable skills. First, you can begin by "brainstorming" a list of the types of skills you possess based upon past or current educational, work, and life experiences. To get started, think of your accomplishments in terms their transferability to the world of work. Did you enjoy coursework that included analyzing data and writing reports? Do you belong to a community group in which you plan and organize activities? Does your present job require leadership abilities?

If you believe you have proficiency in analyzing, writing, planning, organizing, and leading others, you have just identified five functional skills you can place on a resume, discuss in a job interview, and ultimately put to use in a new work setting. Of course, you have many more strengths to acknowledge— keep brainstorming!

Another method through which to discover more about your transferable skills is to reflect on experiences you have had with friends, peers, and co-workers who know you well. You may even want to talk with them about it. These individuals can provide helpful observations regarding your capabilities that you may not see. Perhaps you have received positive feedback from a supervisor about the outstanding decision-making skills you exhibited on a special project you completed. Maybe you honed some valuable teaching experience while coaching a community sports program. Each of these activities may have helped develop transferable skills that will be useful in your future career.

A final approach to discern more information about your transferable skills is to complete assessment tests and checklists found in career guidebooks (and in some online skills-assessment inventories) to gain a clearer picture of your functional skills. Once you have generated a complete list, be sure to ascertain which of the listed skills are functional/transferable and which are work/content. Remember to update your list as time passes and you gain additional experience along your career path. Creating an inventory of your functional skills will provide you with your own “skills package” that can be a very valuable resource for your future.

Increase Your Versatility

Your transferable skills, in conjunction with your knowledge, interests, values, and interpersonal style, will all be vital factors in your future occupational choices and marketability. Careers are evolutionary. Most people are likely to have several different jobs and perhaps two or three careers during their lifetimes. As you experience your career mobility, your transferable skills will be a key component to smooth and successful transitions in the workplace.

Questions or comments about this article?

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EXAMPLES OF TRANSFERABLE SKILLS*

Communication: The skillful expression, transmission and interpretation of knowledge and ideas.

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|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Speaking effectively | Interviewing |
| Writing concisely | Negotiating |
| Editing | Persuading |
| Listening attentively | Reporting information |
| Facilitating group discussions | |

Human Relations: The use of interpersonal skills for resolving conflict, relating to and helping people.

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|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Motivating | Conveying feelings |
| Counseling | Representing others |
| Cooperating | Asserting |
| Providing support for others | Developing rapport |
| Being sensitive | |

Organization, Management, Leadership: The ability to supervise, direct and guide individuals and groups in the completion of tasks and the fulfillment of goals.

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|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Initiating new ideas | Decision-making with others |
| Handling details | Managing conflict |
| Managing groups | Managing/directing others |
| Teaching | Mediating problems |
| Coaching | Promoting change |
| Selling ideas or products | |

Research and Planning: The search for specific knowledge and the ability to conceptualize future needs and solutions for meeting those needs.

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|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Analyzing, forecasting, predicting | Defining needs |
| Creating ideas | Compiling information |
| Gathering information | Developing evaluation strategies |
| Solving problems | Calculating/computing |
| Setting goals | |

Work Survival: The day-to-day skills, which assist in promoting effective production and work satisfaction.

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|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Implementing decisions | Accepting responsibility |
| Cooperating | Organizing |
| Enforcing policies | Setting and meeting deadlines |
| Being punctual | Meeting goals |
| Managing time | Enlisting help |
| Attending to detail | |

*Adapted from University Of Minnesota, Transferable Skills Survey and Quintcareers.com, Transferable Skill Sets.