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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Commentary: Soft Skills in the Workforce **JOB SEEKERS SHOULD HONE SOFT SKILLS TO GET AHEAD**

CHICAGO, February 20, 2018 – Companies are hiring at a faster rate than people are leaving their jobs. With job openings at a record high of 7.3 million, according to the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, job seekers seemingly have their pick of jobs. However, job seekers who want to make an impact or employed workers who want to get ahead would be wise to sharpen their soft skills, according to one workplace authority.

“Obviously, high competence as well as a string of skills and accomplishments on a resume will open many doors for job seekers. It takes more than just experience to gain employment and move up in a career, however. Specifically, soft skills help talented individuals stand out and build a reputation as a solid, reliable employee,” said Andrew Challenger, Vice President of global outplacement and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

Soft skills are the interpersonal skills required to communicate effectively with colleagues and leadership. While hard skills, like software knowledge, tax law expertise, or coding abilities, enable the efficient completion of work, soft skills allow a professional to stand out as someone with whom people enjoy working and can trust with important tasks.

“Although soft skills are sometimes dismissed as less important than hard skills because they are much more difficult to quantify, soft skills are imperative to success in the workplace. Improving soft skills can help you with team relationships, interviewing, and promotions,” said Challenger.

In fact, recruiters value these skills so much that assessments have been developed to help determine the quality of an applicant's interpersonal skills. Hiring managers will use surveys or group interviews to determine a candidate's confidence and ability to communicate under pressure.

“An awkward interview may lead a recruiter to choose another candidate. Once in the job, soft skills allow employees to connect well with their team, which makes completing projects easier, and those with particularly strong soft skills may be slated for promotion faster than those who struggle to make teammates feel respected and comfortable,” said Challenger.

Hiring employees with soft skills that align with the organization's values is essential to developing and maintaining workplace culture, especially in the age of #MeToo, when creating a safe environment for all workers typically begins with communication.

“Meanwhile, it is helpful for a potential hire to recognize how their set of soft skills will impact the organization. Not every company values each soft skill equally, but interviewees should be able to assess company values through research – reading the company's website, talking to current employees, or asking the recruiters outright,” he added.

“Some of the most important soft skills one can develop are problem-solving, adaptability, time management, organization, and oral and written communication skills. Problem-solving is considered the most important of these skills, but in order to communicate the solution to a problem, workers need presentation and written communication skills,” said Challenger.

“The occasional typo, for instance, will likely be overlooked on the job. However, everything a professional does at work, from chatting in the lunch room to participating in conference calls, builds a professional reputation. If there are consistent misspellings or misuses of grammar in work emails, white papers, or presentations, job seekers should know that it is likely being noticed, and it could lead to managers offering fewer responsibilities and ultimately fewer opportunities,” he added.

Challenger offered the following advice to help hone soft skills.

Read a self-help book. These will help identify useful social skills and provide exercises to help improve them.

Take a class in a new discipline. Learning new concepts helps expand critical thinking. Exposure to new and different ways of thinking can help a professional look at problems from a new angle and potentially lead to better solutions. Classes can also build a resume and help professionals acquire new skills valuable to an employer.

Practice writing. The best way to improve at something is to practice. If a professional finds writing to be difficult, they should practice through journal writing, writing executive

summaries of meetings or conference calls, or summarizing an article relevant to their field.

Attend networking events. Many professionals loathe networking events, but not only are they good for career advancement, they also help professionals develop presentation and public speaking skills.

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