
FOR CAREER

ADVISORS

***The Curse of the
Phrase:
“Soft Skills”***

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TIP SHEET

There's a lot of talk in Human Resources and Organizational Development circles about “soft skills,” a term meant to describe interpersonal aspects of management like communication, influence and the ability to “read” other people. The growing awareness that these abilities matter, that they aren't just nice-to-have, is good, but the term they've been assigned—“soft skills”—is unfortunate.

Business prides itself on the hard stuff, hard data, hard facts, hard analytics, difficult challenges, so calling anything “soft” relegates them to dispensable, tangential to real, revenue-generating work.

Many of the abilities liberal arts students bring with them to the job search fall into this “soft skills” category, but ...

TIP: *DON'T call them “soft skills.”*

Instead, encourage students to be specific about these “soft” abilities:

- Written communication
- Language fluency
- Conducting research
- Organizing qualitative information
- Public speaking

... rather than saying they've developed anything “soft” during their undergraduate years.

Hiring managers want to hear about skills they can put to work right away. Research? Useful. Managing qualitative information? Necessary. “Soft skills”? Nope, can't imagine putting those to work on our bottom line right away.