LADY
BIRD
TALENT

Transferable Skills are the Most Important Tool in the Job Search Toolbox

Smart recruiters hire based on skills instead of experience. Find out how to highlight transferable skills in your job search for your first tech job.

Highlighting your transferable skills is a powerful tactic you should use if you want to break into tech. Many of the recruiters we know at tech start-ups say they look for applicants who can show mastery of skills like problem-solving, relationship-building, and collaboration more than hard skills like coding. They feel if an applicant can join a team successfully and fit in a company culture, they can teach them coding or design, and everyone wins. Don't let the fact that you've never worked in tech stop you from landing that lucrative first job at a startup. You got this!

Here's a direct quote from Doa Jafri, a Fractional CTO,

"I can train someone in coding, but if the employee is not willing to collaborate, learn new skills, take feedback and criticism constructively, or be curious about the things they don't know, they will not fit into the team, nor will they be successful."

So, what does that mean for you? First and foremost, it should open up a whole new world of opportunity! How many job listings have you passed over because you didn't fit the job experience list perfectly? Unfortunately, we, as women, do that too much.

I am giving you permission right here and now to STOP THAT! If you see a job you think you can do, regardless of your experience, don't just dismiss it. Instead, let's see if you can apply your transferable skills to the job.

Our capability to do a job, any job, comes from more than our prior work experience. It also comes from our education, volunteering, participating in team sports, clubs, and other organizations, our personal passions, side hustles, or just life in general. We build our transferable skill set every day in many ways.

So, What Are Transferable Skills?

According to the almighty Wikipedia, a transferable skill is "an ability or expertise which may be used in a variety of roles or occupations." Indeed lists the top transferable skills as:

Communication

Which could include:

- Active listening
- Written communication
- Verbal communication
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Nonverbal communication

Dependability

Which could include:

- Punctuality
- Integrity
- Work ethic
- Meets deadlines
- Honesty

Teamwork

Which could include:

- Relationship building
- Active listening
- Collaboration
- Self-awareness
- Conflict resolution

Organization

Which could include:

- Time management
- Attention to detail
- Analytical thinking
- Prioritization

Adaptability

Which could include:

- Creativity
- Positive attitude
- Flexibility
- Patience

Leadership

Which could include:

- Goal setting
- Conflict resolution
- Team building
- Delegation
- Interpersonal skills
- Conflict resolution

Decision Making

Which could include:

- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Creativity

Empathy

Which could include:

- Listening skills
- Curiosity
- Perspective

Initiative

Which could include:

- Process improvement
- Goal setting
- Self-motivation

Let's face it, anyone with children is proficient at active listening, time management, and problem-solving, am I right? Almost every employer is looking for a mixture of these transferable skills for every job they post. It's up to you to show that you can deliver them.

Transferable Skills on Your Resume and Cover Letter

How do you do that? First, highlight them on your resume by adding a skills list. Generally, a skills list is at the bottom of a resume, but if you want to highlight them, it's ok to move the list up. Keep the list short and to the point. Use subheaders, like "Leadership" or "Communication", to break up the list.

When you can tie a skill to a measurable accomplishment make sure to do that, either in the Skills list or as part of a job in the Experience section.

You could also create a skills-based resume. A skills-based resume focuses on your skills instead of the jobs you've had. This kind of resume might benefit you if you are changing careers or have gaps in your job work history. The skills-based approach allows you to quantify your transferable skills. For example, you can highlight a volunteer fundraising success for your favorite charity as an example of goal setting and teamwork. Or you can focus the research skills you learned as an intern on how that research benefited your employer even after returning to scho

It is also smart to discuss some transferable skills from the job posting in your cover letter. Write about how you mastered these skills at previous jobs or other experiences. For example, you could highlight the critical thinking skills you needed when working on a product launch or building a website. The cover letter allows you to tell the story about how you mastered that transferable skill, even if it wasn't in a position similar to the one you are applying for.

If you need some help in putting your transferable skills into cover letter-appropriate wording, this resource shared in our Discord is an awesome reference.

Focus on Your Transferable Skills at the Interview

The ultimate place to tell that story is at the interview. So be ready to pull out those stories as often as you can. If you are worried about performance anxiety, memorize a couple of "elevator pitches" regarding your most critical transferable skills. Some of the best times to highlight your transferable skills are when you are asked:

Tell me about yourself – This is your opportunity to explain why you are changing careers, have gaps in your work history, or just took a winding road to get where you are, highlighting the important skills you've learned along the way.

Why do you want to work for our company? – Find something unique about the company and show how your transferable skills will benefit or complement that specific characteristic.

Why do you want this job? – Pull out the transferable skills included in the job description and show how you are an excellent fit for the job based on those skills.

What can you bring to the company? – Do some research on the company and tie your transferable skills to the company's goals. Show how you can support the company's strategic plan.

What are your strengths? – Pick a critical transferable skill from the job posting and tell a story about how you excelled at that skill in another job or experience. Make sure to give measurable outcomes if you can.

Tell me about a recent project you've worked on – The answer to this question does not need to be about a project you would be doing for this employer. The intent of this question is usually an invitation for you to showcase your transferable skills. Tell the story of a project highlighting your mastery of the most important transferable skills the employer is looking for.

The Wave of the Future in Hiring

According to the Harvard Business Review, more employers realize that hiring workers with specific transferable skills will benefit the company more than hiring those with higher education or work experience.

These employers are 36% less likely to experience talent shortages compared to companies that do not regularly hire workers based on skills.

They also report these new workers "outperform their peers on attitude and work ethic, productivity, quality of work, engagement, attendance, and innovation."

For all of the right reasons, skills-based hiring is on the rise. Smart recruiters and tech leaders like the ones we spoke to during Hire Women Week are doing it now. So be ready for the wave by identifying and highlighting your transferable skills as you search for that perfect job.