# Career Elevator

**May 2024**

## 6 Soft Skills That AI Can't Replace

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) continues to shape today's workplaces, often making learning technical and hard skills easier. However, soft skills can't be outsourced to AI. Soft skills are important for everyday life and can help drive your career development and growth.

> **A LinkedIn survey revealed that 72% of U.S. executives place more value on soft skills than AI-related skills.**

It may seem like many organizations are focused on reskilling or upskilling workers, but technical expertise often is not enough to thrive. Soft skills are just as essential as hard skills. Although most people would support the idea that soft skills are inherent and cannot be taught, they can also, to a degree, be learned and nurtured over time. Here are six valuable soft skills and strategies you can use to foster them:

1. **Active listening**—Active listening is more than just hearing words; it involves fully engaging with the speaker to understand their message, feelings and perspective. For example, maintain eye contact and nod to show attentiveness, ask clarifying questions and avoid interrupting the speaker.
2. **Problem-solving**—Good problem solvers are always willing to learn and know there is room for improvement. They can understand an issue, rally others together and efficiently solve it.
3. **Resilience**—Resilience and adaptability are essential in navigating uncertainties and setbacks, but they require patience, practice and a willingness to learn.
4. **Emotional intelligence (EQ)**—EQ enables you to recognize, understand and manage your own emotions and those of others. The key elements of EQ are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. While building EQ, it's important to ask for feedback continually to learn and grow.
5. **Communication**—Effective verbal and nonverbal communication is vital to any team's success. The words you use are important, but nonverbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, gestures and eye contact, also significantly impacts how the message is received.
6. **Accountability**—Accountability involves taking ownership of one's actions and responsibilities. Setting goals can help you stay accountable and work to achieve something.

### Takeaway

While soft skills used to be viewed as nice to have in the workplace, such human skills are in demand more than ever. Employers aren't taking these skills for granted, as they can be critical for a successful career. Assess which soft skills you need to work on and create a development plan. If you're a remote worker, it may seem tougher to develop these skills, so proactively seek feedback to avoid any missed opportunities to hone them.

## Setting SMART Goals

Everyone has objectives they want to achieve, and taking the time to establish parameters around them can help you increase the odds of achieving them. Goal setting can help provide employees with clear direction and focus on what needs to be accomplished, serve as benchmarks for employee performance, motivate workers and align with organizational objectives. Working toward goals also allows employees to develop new skills, knowledge and capabilities, which fosters professional growth and advancement.

**Psychology professor Gail Matthews found that people are 42% more likely to achieve their goals just by writing them down.**

When documenting your goals, be sure they are "SMART"—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. The clearer and more achievable a goal is, the more likely you will be able to achieve it. Here is how the SMART framework applies to goal setting:

- **Specific**—A specific goal is simple and strategic. It's something you can easily conceptualize. Think about what needs to be accomplished, who's responsible for it and what steps must be taken to achieve it.
- **Measurable**—A measurable goal is quantified. You'll be able to see if you're making progress as you go and will know when you've reached the finish line.
- **Achievable**—An achievable goal is realistic and attainable. Think of it as a reality check. This step involves considering if the goal is something you can reasonably accomplish. It's OK if it's not; adjust, if possible, or have a discussion about potential roadblocks.
- **Relevant**—A relevant goal needs to make sense or be appropriate to you. You want your goal to truly matter to you, your team and the organization. Timing is equally important, so ensure this is the right time to tackle the goal.
- **Timely**—A timely (or time-bound) goal is accomplished within a specific time frame. You can adjust this period as needed and make new goals or deadlines after achieving the first one.

For example, a SMART goal for a customer service representative could be to improve customer satisfaction ratings by 10% within the next quarter by enhancing their communication skills, resolving customer complaints more efficiently, and monitoring customer feedback and satisfaction surveys with the ultimate goal of enhancing the company's reputation and fostering customer loyalty.

To begin setting goals, collaborate with your manager or supervisor to set goals aligned with organizational priorities and personal development needs. From there, you can apply the SMART criteria to the goals and, if needed, break down larger goals into smaller or more manageable milestones. It's also critical to track progress to maintain momentum and celebrate achievements. You may also need to review and adjust the goals due to changing circumstances, feedback or new priorities. Keep in mind that a SMART goal can be big or small; it just has to matter to you and your role or career aspirations.

By utilizing the SMART framework, you can effectively set and achieve meaningful goals that contribute to your professional development and success.