

# What They Should Have Taught You in School

## Professional skills you wish you had learned

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Not everybody approaches education with the same goal. High school and higher education serve different purposes for each student. For some pupils, school is a direct path to a job. For others, it is a chance to learn for the sake of personal growth. Visit any classroom and you'll encounter students with a variety of goals for their education.

Regardless of what you want school to be, most people seem to agree that an education should set you up with at least a basic set of skills. Not a universal set -- no one expects someone who studied nursing to have an identical skill set as someone who studied accounting. But when you have employers posting jobs that say a high school diploma or four-year degree is a requirement, you realize they expect you to have crossed a certain threshold. Still you seem to hear frustrated employers and employees wondering aloud, "Why didn't they teach this in school?"

From not knowing how to balance a checkbook to handling a tough boss, many schools don't teach their students how to deal with basic issues they will encounter in their career. We asked employees and employers what skills they wish were taught in schools to see what they thought were the most glaring omissions. Here are their responses:

### Communication skills

"Small talk. Probably the most important skill in business is how to engage people you barely know, how to hold your own in cocktail party and dinner conversation, and how to respond graciously to idiots, drunks and other problem personalities." - *Maureen Wall Bentley, vice president of brand strategy for Aartrijk*

"Reading between the lines in other people's words to find subtle indicators of dissatisfaction with what you're doing (or not doing)." - *Jeff Deutsch, life coach and presenter for A SPLINT*

"Public speaking. I was fortunate to have competed on a speech and debate team in high school, but most kids don't get that training -- and it's truly priceless. I recently tracked down my coach and thanked him." - *Bentley*

"One of the most important skills we have in business is the ability to truly listen -- in fact, the skill of active listening. Many times, when people are giving a presentation, [participating in a] Q&A or doing a media interview, they're listening with an intention to answer versus listening to fully understand and empathize with the person speaking. It's a critical life skill, and one very few people have mastered." - *Bronwyn Saglimbeni, public speaking and media coach*

### Personal development

"[How] to be OK to change what you are doing to pursue something you are [passionate] about ... even if it means working for yourself." - *Carrie Middlemiss, owner of Bella Cupcake Couture*

"Time management. I had no idea how to organize my time to prioritize what needed doing." - *William Duke, president of Duke Computer Solutions*

"Success. Schools do not discuss how to determine what success is for the individual. We leave everyone to figure out for themselves what they want, or just go for money." - *Duke*

"Independent problem solving -- how to get things done by yourself and use strategy, deductive reasoning and common sense to do it when you aren't well-versed in the area and stuck doing it on your own." - *Sabina Ptacin, partner and chief creative strategist for Red Branch Public Relations*

"Actual hands-on accounting skills, such as budgeting, reading financial reports, financial instruments and their use." - *Gary A. Powell, head of Financial Security Specialists*

"Your values may not be the organization's values. If your parents raised you with a strong 'universal' value set, you may be shocked that an organization's values focus primarily on their goals -- not yours or your parents." - *Kate Nasser, The People-Skills Coach*

"Knowing when to say no and just slow down -- my first few years all I did was work -- but now I know what offers and networking events to say no to, what projects to pass on and when to just call it a day. My work is better, my creative juices are stronger and more creative, and I'm a nicer person to be around at home." - *Ptacin*

### **Interacting with others**

"Relating to customers, superiors and peers. No matter how high you climb, you will always have all three to answer to." - *Deutsch*

"Gauging how important a particular issue is to someone." - *Deutsch*

"Tips on the best ways to ask for what you want and not to be afraid to do so." - *Middlemiss*

"Sales. No matter what you think, you'll be selling. Everyone's selling something; even if it's just themselves. Let's teach our kids how." - *Duke*

"That corporate meetings, like staff meetings where people are supposed to openly discuss changes to the organization, are not what they seem -- open places to discuss changes to the organization. Instead the concept of working around the office with smaller groups to gain buy in on projects is key before taking anything up the chain or to the larger group." - *Paul Hager, partner at Information Technology Professionals*

"Manual labor. Everyone should have a manual labor job at some point. Wait tables and wash dishes. Pump gas. Mow lawns. A little humility is good for you and might prevent you from being a jerk later in life." - *Duke*

"Everyone likes and benefits from a positive attitude and genuine praise." - *Nasser*