

Agnes Mxolisi: Soft Skills in the Workplace in Canada

A. Pre-listening

Agnes talks about the soft skills that helped her succeed. Soft skills help you talk effectively and convincingly with coworkers, clients and managers. You need both soft skills and technical skills to get a job, keep a job and get promoted.

Guessing, or predicting what you will hear helps you listen better.

A-1 What soft skills do you have that would help you in a Canadian job?

My Soft Skill	How It Could Help
May include: highly motivated, co-operative, team player, kind, good leader, good listener, easy going, dedicated, reliable, honest, etc.	They help make the company successful, they make the workplace more enjoyable, a better place to work, they gain the trust of their colleagues, etc.

A-2 What type of soft skills do you think Agnes Mxolisi will talk about? Write down three skills and how they might help people succeed in Canada.

Soft Skill	How It Helps
May include: co-operative, team player, kind, good leader, good listener, takes initiative, dedicated, reliable, honest, etc.	They help make the company successful, they make the workplace more enjoyable, a better place to work, they gain the trust of their colleagues, etc.

B. After the First Listening

Listening Tip: When listening in English, it helps to listen for the main ideas first.

1. Put a check mark beside the soft skills that you wrote down in **A-2** that were mentioned in the interview.
2. Write down the main ideas that you didn't guess but that Agnes talked about.

May include: being flexible, having an open mind, able to accept criticism, seek input, ask for advice.

3. How much did you understand of the recording?

- Almost nothing Less than 30% About 50% More than 70% Almost all

4. What did you do the second time that helped you listen better?
- I concentrated on the listening task.
 - I tried to see if my guesses were true.
 - I paid attention to key words.
 - I used what I knew about the topic to understand new words.
 - Other _____

C. After the Second Listening

1. Write down important details that you missed the first time:

May include: immigrants are having a hard time finding jobs, being flexible, supportive people, having an open mind, how I can improve, prove ourselves in the soft skills area, getting promoted is a challenge without soft skills.

D. Vocabulary

Knowing more words helps you listen better. The ten words in the boxes are from the interview; find the words in the text below and underline them. Try to guess what the words mean from context.

impacted	flexible	credit	capable	restraints
supportive	critical	technical	mentality	promoted

Soft Skills in the Workplace Interview

Interviewer: So I'd like to say a very special thank you to Agnes Mxolisi who has agreed to join us today and talk about her experience in the workplace in Canada and becoming a leader here, and the importance of not only community building but also soft skills and communication, so thank you.

Agnes: Thank you for having me.

Interviewer: So, can you tell us about your success in Canada and maybe how soft skills have impacted your level of success?

Agnes: Well, being **flexible**, **having an open mind** is important. **It breaks my heart** when I hear an immigrant, an internationally-trained professional say, “Well yeah Canadians are like this or like that.” “Well they prefer, you know, people that are born here,” or “Yeah I’m not getting that job because of where I’m coming from or because of my accent.” And I hear it often enough that I have to **give it credit**. **Capable** people that are coming here to make Canada their home and workplace, and they cannot get ahead because of these **restraints**. It hasn’t been my case, I have been very fortunate to find very **supportive** people. I may have come here with a higher level of English than other people, and that might have made my work easier, so I think soft skills are **critical**. The ability to look past just **technical** skills, to have an open mind, to be able to ask a person, you know, very honestly, “What do you think in this presentation I did, what did I do wrong, what can I improve on?” And I’m not sure if everybody comes prepared with that **mentality**. Because we are highly qualified, we still may need to prove ourselves not as much technically but in the soft skills area.

Interviewer: Yes, thank you very much, Agnes. And I think, you know, there are quite a few Canadians who could probably tell us stories about how getting **promoted** for them was challenging as well because they didn’t have the soft skills. So I think it’s a big part of Canadian workplace culture. Thanks for spending time with us today.

Agnes: Ok. Thank you.

Match the words in the boxes with the definitions listed below. The first one is done for you.

flexible	impact	credit	capable	restraints
critical	mentality	supportive	get promoted	technical

1. Qualified Adjective. Have the special skills or knowledge needed for a certain job.
2. **impact** (verb) Having a very strong effect on something or someone.
3. **critical** (adjective) Very important.
4. **flexible** (adjective) Willing to change or try new things.
5. **restraints** (noun) These limit, control, or stop something.
6. **mentality** (noun) A way of thinking about something.
7. **credit** (noun) Praise or recognition given to someone or something.

8. **supportive** (adjective) Helpful or encouraging.
9. **capable** (adjective) Skilled at doing something; able to do something well.
10. **promote** (verb) To get moved to a higher or more important position or rank.

D-1 Idioms

Idioms are groups of words that have special meanings. Match the meanings with the letter of their idiom.

Idioms:

- A. Having an open mind.
- B. Give something credit, give credit to something or someone
- C. Thank you for having me.
- D. It breaks my heart.

Meanings:

- 1. A polite expression given to a host who has invited you. C
- 2. To listen to and accept criticism and suggestions from another person. A
- 3. Feel great sadness for something. D
- 4. Give recognition to someone, or admit that something has been done B

Bonus Activity:

Go back to the interview text, find the four idioms listed above and circle them. **The idioms in the text are highlighted in aqua.**

D-2 Get Phrases

We often use **get** or **got** plus an adjective or a past participle when we are talking about work situations:

- Get ahead: I had to work hard to *get ahead* in my job.
- Get promoted: I took extra courses and then I *got promoted*.
- Get hired: I *got hired* because I had a degree and work experience.
- Get fired: I *got fired* because I came late to work everyday.

Which of the four examples are used in the text? Put a check in the boxes beside the **get** phrases that are used in the text.

D.3 Exercise

Use the words in the boxes to fill in the blanks in the paragraph below. You will not use all of the words.

flexible	come as a surprise	open mind	qualified
critical	get promoted	supportive	technical

Do you want to **get promoted** to a higher position in your company? Do you feel you are **qualified** for jobs, but never get past the interview? You might have very strong **technical** skills, but you may not have good soft skills. It may **come as a surprise** to learn that soft skills play a **critical** role in the Canadian workplace.

Employers want to hire professionals who have an **open mind**, are willing to change, and are **flexible**.

An employee who knows how to be **supportive** of co-workers and can deal with difficult challenges is very valuable.

E. Word Use

The words **thank you** and **soft skills** are used five times each in the interview. Although they are mentioned the same number of times, are they equally important? Yes No

Where are the words **soft skills** found most often?

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

Where are the words **thank you** found?

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

Why does Agnes use the words **soft skills** five times?

- It is the main idea of the interview.
- It is an important skill for newcomers.
- Agnes wants people to develop and value soft skills.
- All of the above

F. Implied Meaning

When you listen you have to listen to what is said and what is not said. Agnes mentioned what breaks her heart:

It breaks my heart when I hear an immigrant, an internationally-trained professional say, "Well yeah Canadians are like this or like that." "Well they prefer, you know, people that are born here," or "Yeah I'm not getting that job because of where I'm coming from or because of my accent."

F-1 Why is Agnes sad to hear these things?

Internationally trained professionals have many difficulties finding good jobs in Canada.

Or: Internationally trained professionals get discouraged and give up.

Or: Internationally trained workers have a hard time learning about the cultural differences.

F-2 Read the above statement again and answer true or false:

	True	False
People from other countries never get good jobs in Canada.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Some foreign-trained professionals do not think they have a chance in Canada.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internationally-trained professionals have unique challenges in the workforce.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agnes feels that certain soft skills are critical, or very important:

The ability to look past just technical skills, to have an open mind, to be able to ask a person, you know, very honestly, "What do you think in this presentation I did, what did I do wrong, what can I improve on?" And I'm not sure if everybody comes prepared with that mentality.

What does Agnes mean when she says *that mentality*?

- The ability to improve technical skills.
- The ability to review your own performance to become better, even if it is difficult.

The ability to communicate.

G. After Listening

Reflect on your listening experience. What did you do well? What surprised you? What will you do next time?



Agnes Mxolisi Communication Transcript

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Agnes: Ok. Thank you.