

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 communicate 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.

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

My Soft Skill

How It Could Help

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

B. AFTER THE FIRST LISTENING

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.

3. How much did you understand of the recording?

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

2. What did you do the second time that helped you listen better? Check all that apply.

- I concentrated harder on the listening task.
 I tried to see if my guesses were true.
 I paid attention to important words.
 I used what I knew about building community to understand new words.
 Other: _____

C. AFTER THE SECOND LISTENING

1. Write down important details that you did not hear the first time:

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. _____ (verb) Having a very strong effect on something or someone.
3. _____ (adjective) Very important.
4. _____ (adjective) Willing to change or try new things.
5. _____ (noun) These limit, control, or stop something.
6. _____ (noun) A way of thinking about something.
7. _____ (noun) Praise or recognition given to someone or something.
8. _____ (adjective) Helpful or encouraging.
9. _____ (adjective) Skilled at doing something; able to do something well.
10. _____ (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 below 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. _____
- 2. To listen to and accept criticism and suggestions from another person. _____
- 3. Feel great sadness for something. _____
- 4. Give recognition to someone, or admit that something has been done _____

Bonus Activity:

Go back to the interview text, find the four idioms listed above and circle them.

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. The text is on pages 3 and 4.

D-3 Exercise

Use the words in the boxes to fill in the blanks in the paragraph below.

FLEXIBLE	COME AS A SURPRISE	OPEN MIND	QUALIFIED
CRITICAL	GET PROMOTED	SUPPORTIVE	TECHNICAL

Do you want to _____ to a higher position in your company? Do you feel you are _____ for jobs, but never get past the interview? You might have very strong _____ skills, but you may not have good soft skills. It may _____ to learn that soft skills play a _____ role in the Canadian workplace. Employers want to hire professionals who have an _____, are willing to change, and are _____. An employee who knows how to be _____ 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?

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 type="checkbox"/>
Some foreign-trained professionals do not think they have a chance in Canada.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internationally-trained professionals have unique challenges in the workforce.	<input 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 look at 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?
