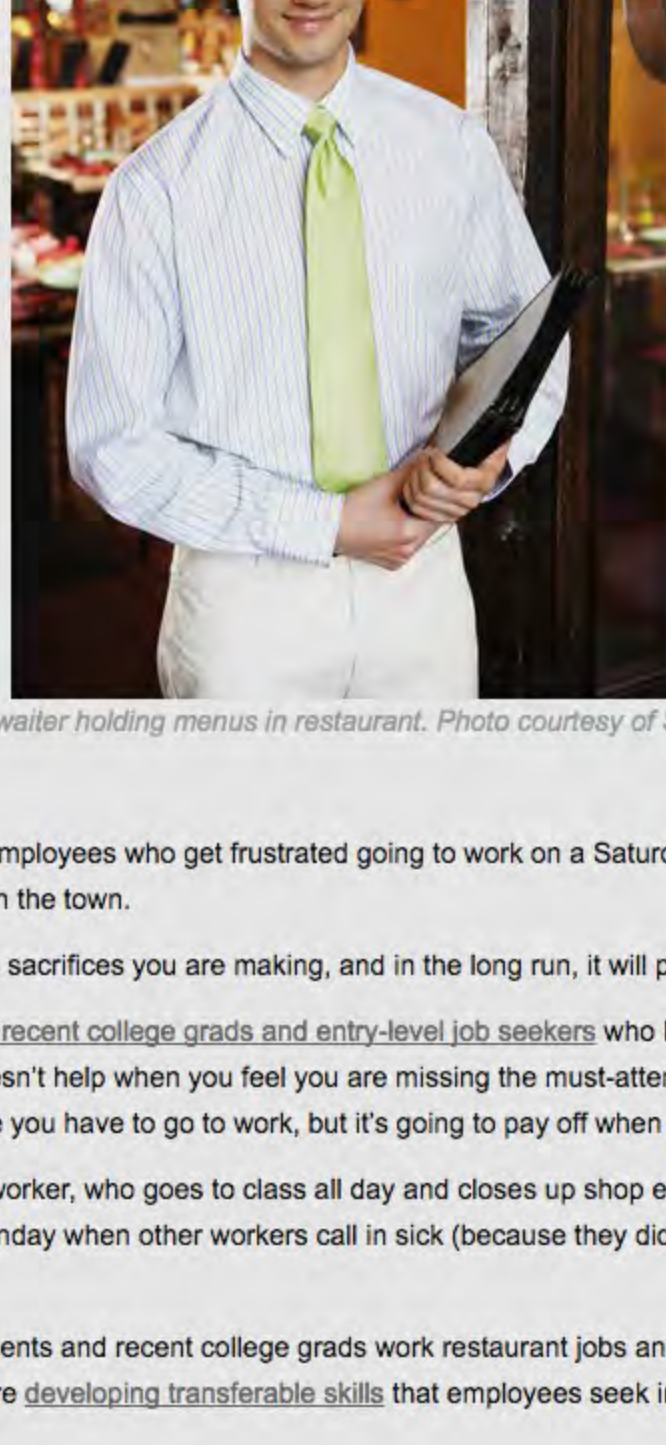


## Why employers covet soft skills developed working in the restaurant and retail industry

February 14, 2017 by [Matt Kourmie](#)



Portrait of waiter holding menus in restaurant. Photo courtesy of Shutterstock.

Note to those restaurant employees who get frustrated going to work on a Saturday night while friends are preparing for a night out on the town.

Employers understand the sacrifices you are making, and in the long run, it will pay off. Why?

Because employers covet recent college grads and entry-level job seekers who have restaurant industry experience. Sure, that doesn't help when you feel you are missing the must-attend social event of the year (you're really not) because you have to go to work, but it's going to pay off when applying for that first job.

Same goes for that retail worker, who goes to class all day and closes up shop every night, or who has to pull a double shift on a Sunday when other workers call in sick (because they did go to that social event the night before).

Thousands of college students and recent college grads work restaurant jobs and retail jobs, and whether they know it or not, they are developing transferable skills that employees seek in recent college grads and entry-level job seekers.

### Skills learned in the restaurant industry

"The main lesson I learned in working in the hospitality industry was the importance of customer service and teamwork," said [Kari Grilmer](#), Accounting/Finance Chair at [Rasmussen College](#). "Because of the nature of the work, it is impossible to accomplish goals without the help of the entire team. If even one person 'drops the ball' the entire system falls and the customer suffers."

Lunch and dinner rushes, the heat and chaos of the kitchen and the occasional broken dish – restaurant work can be thankless. But building rapport with your customers can impact more than just your tips.

"I spent much of my younger years in the restaurant business," says [Jason Zickerman](#), President and CEO at Alternative Board. "I wouldn't give that experience back because of what it taught me about how to succeed in business."

Zickerman and other business owners discussed this and more in the article [Business Pros Expose the Important Lessons They Learned From Their Very First Jobs](#).

Zickerman said he developed these additional soft skills working in the restaurant industry:

- Communication
- Customer service
- Attention to detail
- Interpersonal

Working in restaurants also taught Zickerman how to read body language and navigate personality types. Business professionals need to understand their customers, not just hear what they say, says Zickerman. And working to earn tips forces one to think beyond the job description and do whatever one can to create an incredible experience.

[Srajan Mishra](#), CEO at TSI International, remembers that first job as a cleaner in a fast food restaurant.

"I needed to interact with all kinds of people, even those who were extremely rude to me," says Mishra, adding that the expectation to respond graciously to everyone builds the ability to navigate tough situations with determination and a smile.

That job helped Mishra build active listening, customer service and communication skills. Mishra recalls being required to work long shifts doing physically demanding work, which helped him attain the drive and work ethic he uses to run his business today.

### Interpersonal communication skills

One of the most useful skills one can learn from waiting tables is learning to adjust your communication style to complement the communication of the various customers you serve, says [Linda Kurloff](#), a career coach and author of *The Charm of Confrontation: The Life-Changing Benefits of Being Frank*.

"That ability to adjust is called interpersonal communication," says Kurloff. "When you master the effectiveness of your interpersonal communication, it becomes your calling card and useful in any field where one has to deal with customers directly."

### Networking

[Danielle James](#) is a marketing specialist at a tech company, and a freelance writer and blogger. She previously worked as a bartender, and secured her first internship offer from a patron she met at the bar while working as a bartender. James credits bartending for teaching her how to problem solve – both from anticipating potential problems, and finding creative ways to solve those problems. She also learned how to work with a team, adjust communication style for each customer/individual, and how to prioritize tasks.

### Statistics don't lie: Employers covet candidates with retail experience

In 2015, the [National Retail Federation](#) commissioned a study with GfK, a market research firm, which surveyed hiring managers across industries about the value of having retail experience on a resume. The results overwhelmingly showed that hiring managers view retail industry experience positively, and the skills gained in retail as an asset for jobs in other industries. Whether you see retail as your first step or your dream career, there are invaluable skills, both technical and soft, to be learned by working a retail job. The study highlights the value of retail experience on a resume, and includes these findings:

- 71 percent of hiring managers say that retail provides its employees foundational skills and experience that are transferable to other industries
- For hiring managers, retail experience on a resume indicates to them that the candidate is friendly (76 percent), follows directions (72 percent), knows how to — and can — work with anyone (70 percent), is a hard worker (63 percent), works well under pressure (66 percent), can learn and pick up things quickly (65 percent) and takes initiative and is a self-starter (64 percent).
- Roughly two-thirds of hiring managers know that a job candidate with retail experience commands a number of skills, including a personable, respectful nature; ability to work with anyone; ability to take direction; composure; a willingness to step up; and ability to multitask. Candidates that list their retail experience and use former managers as references are more successful at getting jobs.

### Retail employees are versatile and can adapt to any situation

Employees of the service industry are well-equipped to handle the unknown, says [Dawn Crowder](#), owner of Carolina Clover Jewelry and Gifts, a Wake Forest, North Carolina-based retail store specializing in personalized jewelry and gifts.

*"Retail industry employees are well-versed in pulling double shifts with no notice, handling huge volumes of rushes that come with no notice, and being pushed into doing that task that no one wants to do, like servicing the bathrooms to taking out the trash," says Crowder.*

That helps develop drive, and a better work ethic, Crowder added. And, it helps them appreciate that first full-time professional job that much more, she says.

### Sales skills

[Erin Goodnow](#) is founder and CEO of [Going Ivy](#), a college admissions consulting group focused on helping students write their own admission ticket to their dream schools. Retail jobs help develop one skill that is transferable in any industry says Goodnow: The ability to sell.

"When a customer comes in looking for a sweater and walks out with three sweaters and a pair of pants – that's some good work," says Goodnow.

### Critical thinking and problem solving

[Andy Chan](#) is founder of [Prime Opt](#), a career coaching center that helps professionals and students with international backgrounds land a job in the United States. At Prime Opt, Chan and his career counselors always tell job seekers that communication skills, technical skills, and taking ownership of one's career and work are things that are universally applicable to all positions. And working in restaurants and the retail industry are some of the best places to learn these skills because one needs to actively communicate with people and be able to work within a team, to succeed. Restaurant and retail workers also develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, says Chan, because a manager will not always be around to provide instructions or make decisions.

### Why restaurant employees stand out to one employer

[Patrick West](#), CEO and Founder of [Be The Machine](#) a New York City-based experiential marketing agency that produces creative live events for clients such as Jeep, Foot Locker, AT&T, and CBS, actually looks for candidates who have experience working in restaurants or bars. Over the past 15 years West has interviewed over 300 recent college grads for positions in marketing, media, and advertising. He's also screened hundreds of potential part-time or contract staff, and hired employees from across the country to help produce live events.

*"Hard work is crucial to success in any job, or at least it should be," said West "And I don't know any college students working in restaurants while enrolled in school who don't work hard."*

In fact, more employers could benefit from the unique skill set of restaurant, or service industry workers, says West.

"I see far too many candidates who lack the understanding of what it takes to hustle to work, punch in, service patrons, earn a small wage, and do it all over again the next day," says West. "In my field, dealing with tricky or difficult crowd members or clients is not uncommon; waitresses, bartenders and hostesses know how to handle a difficult customer properly."

West says he fears too many big corporations are obsessed with white collar internships and business development programs that are only available to select students.

"Business owners and managers understand that a hard-working student with restaurant experience is valuable but often HR personnel and low-level staff don't recognize the value," says West.

### How to highlight restaurant and retail experience on a resume and in an interview

That being said, restaurant, or retail experience should not be the sole highlight of one's entry-level resume, says West. Instead, the skills learned in those industries should be supplemental to the skills learned through an internship, volunteering, or classroom/project based experience. Employers like candidates with diverse backgrounds beyond just what was accomplished in the classroom, or even an internship. So that is where that restaurant or retail industry experience can really stand out.

"A candidate who was a waitress on weekends while also taking a special entrepreneur class immediately got fast-tracked to the final round of candidates," said West.

The most effective way to showcase restaurant and retail experience is to highlight the soft skills learned in that industry, backed by an example of how one used that skill in their restaurant job, or retail job.

That's because soft skills are important skills that transfer to any industry.

### Soft skills can be what separates equal candidates

"The value of soft skill are often underrated by people going into the interview, yet are critical skills employers use to evaluate candidates," says [Denise Natishan](#), Senior Partner, [Cameron Smith & Associates](#), an executive search firm that specializes in building customer/supplier/retail teams for Walmart, Costco, Target and Walgreens, among others. "Many companies are evaluating the soft skills to determine long term success and fit within their organization. They feel those are the skills that cannot easily be taught."

Whether a job seeker knows it, an employer is not just evaluating your answers during an interview, they are also evaluating your body language, clarity, tone, enthusiasm, ability to make eye contact, likability, and much more. Just like a restaurant patron evaluates a server, and just like a customer does a retail sales associate.

"Emotional maturity and a positive attitude are critical indicators of long-term success," says Natishan. "Employers want to hire employees who have more than just the right hard skills necessary for a job."

Time management, communication, working in a team environment, problem solving and adaptability are among the key soft skills employers want. They want someone with a strong work ethic, positive attitude, and the ability to accept criticism and grow from it.

"These are skills easily obtained while working in retail and restaurants jobs," said Natishan.

### How to highlight restaurant/retail experience in an interview

But just listing these skills, and the fact one worked in the retail or restaurant industry on a resume or cover letter isn't enough to use that experience to your advantage. Instead, use the resume, or interview setting to show a success story, or proof of accomplishment, that proves to the employer that you have that important soft skill they covet.

For example, a student who wanted to show an example of how they developed communication skills could say this, says Natishan. "In my current part-time job at Retail Store XYZ, I have learned how to listen to customer needs and respond by asking appropriate questions to resolve any challenge they are having. I had a woman who was dissatisfied with our customer service when returning an item to the store. By asking appropriate questions, I was able to correct the problem and have a satisfied customer. In fact, this customer went on to give an online recommendation to our store that went viral."

### Employers can relate to retail and restaurant industry experience

Many managers, business owners, and HR professionals also worked their way through college by working in restaurant or retail jobs. Don't be surprised if they veer off topic and ask more about those experiences as another way to get to know your personality, how you handled conflict in those jobs, and/or feedback on what you learned that can be applied to the job you are applying for. It may create a connection between the interviewer and you as the candidate that can give you an opportunity others without restaurant and retail experience won't get. They want to learn about you, the person, and the worker. When a common connection develops, be prepared to talk about it – they are generally interested because they can relate to your experiences. And they want to hear examples of how you applied those transferable skills.

"Someone who worked in the customer service industry should have the skills necessary to interact well with their coworkers, peers, and potentially, clients," says [Trinda Freese](#), Public Relations and Internship Coordinator at [Amplify Relations](#), a full service advertising and public relations agency. "If I decide to bring them in for an interview, I want to interact with them to see how they put those skills into action."

Jobs in the restaurant industry, and jobs in retail, teach valuable soft skills employees covet. You may not realize it now, but you will once you start applying for jobs and interviewing. Follow these tips and strategies and use those skills and experiences to your advantage. It could very well be what sets you apart and helps you land the job.

Want more industry-related advice? Stay connected to College Recruiter by visiting our blog, and communicating with us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).

### Comments

0 comments

0 Comments

Sort by: Oldest



Add a comment...

Facebook Comments Plugin

Powered by [Facebook Comments](#)

### Related posts:

1. [Video] Why employers value recent college grads with foreign language skills

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | Tagged [Andy Chan](#), [Erin Goodnow](#), [Dawn Crowder](#), [Carolina Clover Jewelry and Gifts](#), [Danielle James](#), [marketing specialist](#), [Denise Natishan](#), [Cameron Smith & Associates](#), [entry-level job seekers](#), [Erin Goodnow](#), [Going Ivy](#), [Jason Zickerman](#), [Alternative Board](#), [job seekers](#), [jobs in the restaurant industry](#), [Linda Kurloff](#), [career coach](#), [Matt Kourmie](#), [Matt Kourmie](#), [College Recruiter](#), [college retail federation](#), [National Retail Federation retail resume survey](#), [Patrick West](#), [Be The Machine](#), [recent college grads](#), [restaurant industry resume](#), [restaurant jobs](#), [retail jobs](#), [retail jobs resume](#), [soft skills](#), [Srajan Mishra](#), [TSI International](#), [transferable skills](#), [Trinda Freese](#), [Amplify Relations](#)

### Top Entry Level Jobs

- » [New York Entry Level Jobs](#)
- » [Los Angeles Entry Level Jobs](#)
- » [Dallas Entry Level Jobs](#)
- » [Houston Entry Level Jobs](#)
- » [Chicago Entry Level Jobs](#)

### Popular Jobs for Recent Grads

- » [Jobs for Business Majors](#)
- » [Jobs for Psychology Majors](#)
- » [Jobs for Nursing Majors](#)
- » [Jobs for Biology Majors](#)
- » [Jobs for Education Majors](#)

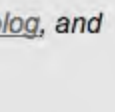
### Top Internships for Grads

- » [Accounting Majors](#)
- » [Marketing Majors](#)
- » [Computer Science Majors](#)
- » [Economics Majors](#)
- » [Psychology Majors](#)

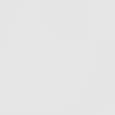
### Jobs in Growing Industries

- » [Healthcare Services](#)
- » [Physical Therapy](#)
- » [Language Translator](#)
- » [Biotechnology](#)
- » [VoIP Services](#)

### Recent Posts for Job Seekers

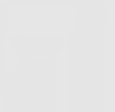


[Online jobs for students and other tips to balance school and work](#)

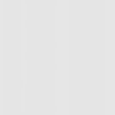


[Tips from EY campus recruiter to find jobs for new graduates](#)

### Recent Posts for Recruiters



[When talent industry ends in salary negotiation: Tips for recruiters](#)



[What if your interview invitation email wasn't an email?](#)

### About College Recruiter

At [College Recruiter](#), we believe that every student and recent grad deserves a great career. We believe in creating a great candidate and recruiter experience. Our interactive media solutions connect students and grads to great careers.

[f](#) Like us on Facebook

[t](#) Follow us on Twitter

[in](#) Follow us on LinkedIn

[v](#) Subscribe on YouTube