

# How to Use SKILLS to Further Your Career

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## Skills promise to be a great leveler, removing biases from hiring, learning, performance, and remuneration decisions.

By breaking work down into its most fundamental parts—the tasks that need to be done and the skills required to achieve them—employers hope to improve workplace equity, diversity, productivity, and retention.

According to Deloitte’s January 2023 article (“Navigating the End of Jobs”) on this skills-first approach, 41% of organizations have increased financial performance, 33% have increased retention, 26% have an enhanced ability to anticipate future disruptions, 26% have more agile workforces, and 26% are more innovative. As employees, understanding this shift is vital since the skills-first approach is gaining momentum, with 93% of leaders stating that moving away from the job construct will be important to their organization’s future success. If you get ahead of this transformation now, you will be well prepared when all employers use skills as the main way work is allocated and career opportunities are offered.

### HOW TO GET STARTED

Informing employers, whether present or future ones, about your skills can be relatively easy. Most of us will use a resume to introduce ourselves and our capabilities. Putting skills front and center within your CV is a simple, immediate way to future-proof it for the skills-first transformation. Highlight skills that are relevant to the role you want (and if you don’t know what these skills are, look to job descriptions or ask peers, managers, and mentors for advice).

It’s a good idea to put this “skills” section near the top of your resume, listing specific skills (such as Python, technical writing, or public speaking) and, if relevant, some indication of your level of expertise (such as completing a boot camp or building a website). Ideally, you don’t want this to be a long list of skills with little relevance or context. Focus on applicable skills for each role that you’re applying for and an example of how a skill

was applied or the level that you’re at. For example, if you are applying at a Paris-based company, you can put “French (conversational level)” among your relevant skills.

Be prepared to expand on your list of skills during an interview with examples of when you have used them and the results achieved. Focus on a clear ROI (return on investment) that will give an interviewer a good idea of what you could potentially achieve in a role. If you’re going for a promotion or lateral career move, the same approach applies. Tell them about how you have applied a skill, such as team management or emotional intelligence, and the results that you achieved through it.

### CAREER PROGRESSION BASED ON SKILLS

If you’re already in a role and are looking for new opportunities to grow and further your career, skills will also prove helpful in performance and progression discussions. Before such meetings, prepare evidence of any learning that you have done to build new skills or deepen existing ones, plus on-the-job experiences that back up your theoretical knowledge. This doesn’t necessarily mean tasks you’ve completed in your current role—you can highlight a stretch assignment, side project, or volunteer activities that you believe provided you with practical applications for your skills.

Compile your evidence in a skills portfolio, which is also known as a skills profile or skills passport in some organizations. This portfolio provides a single place for you to track your skills, and you can easily share it with your manager or department leader. It will follow you throughout your career, becoming more detailed with each learning experience and career step.

In a performance discussion, you can use your portfolio to highlight specific skills you have

built that are positioning you for more challenges and opportunities. Your manager might then offer you further learning resources to prepare you for your next career step, or you may have acquired enough new skills and experience to be promoted. Alternatively, if you discover in the course of your skills development that you are more interested in a different career route, you can build skills that are relevant to your new, aspirational career path. You can then leverage these new skills for a lateral move. This approach will also help employees who need to reskill due to automation eliminating their original role.

### CONTINUOUS UPSKILLING IS VITAL

Speaking of learning, it's essential that you cultivate a habit of lifelong learning. This will help you continuously build skills that can future-proof your career. If you are regularly learning new things, you will be better prepared for significant developments like the rise of generative AI (and all other forms of AI). Learning new skills and deepening your existing ones can also help you feel more confident amid an uncertain economic and technological backdrop. Even taking a couple of hours each week to develop new skills can add up to notable progression over a year.

### MANY LEARNING OPTIONS

If you're going to stick to something long-term, it needs to be enjoyable. Therefore, pick learning methods that suit your learning style and fit in with your other commitments. Luckily, there are numerous accessible and affordable learning methods available today. There are online learning platforms that offer industry-specific and skills-based courses, MOOCs, apprenticeships, micro-credentials, boot camps, and informal learning resources like podcasts, books, and videos. Having a mix of different learning resources keeps things interesting and varied so that learning doesn't feel like a chore.

It also allows you to match your learning content to your desired skill and required level. Leadership skills can be continually honed over time by listening regularly to expert advice via podcasts during your commute and by taking courses. Coding skills may require you to dedicate time to complete a boot camp. A set of skills needed to launch a new sales strategy may involve enrolling in an academy to learn alongside your colleagues.

These learning resources are a powerful way to refresh and sharpen your skills since they

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focus on one or two competencies at a time. This means you can build deep skills in a specific area such as coding or cybersecurity in a relatively short timeframe. Of course, these efforts come to nothing if you aren't tracking your learning and skill progression in a skills profile. If you are engaging in many different kinds of learning simultaneously, you need to make note of everything you are learning and how you are applying those skills in the real world so that you can talk about it with managers and colleagues to drive your career forward.

### **SHOW REAL-WORLD RELEVANCE**

Highlighting your skills via a resume or skills profile is half the equation. The other half involves showcasing your skills and proving to a hiring manager that you can perform them on the job. It's one thing to learn about the theories of public speaking, it's another to stand behind a podium and capture an audience's attention.

Experiential learning, in the form of stretch assignments, internal redeployments, side projects, volunteering, mentoring, and teaching others, can help provide this real-world element in your learning. It also gives you success stories to tell during an interview or performance discussion. Your employer might have an internal talent marketplace that integrates with your learning platform and other HR tools to bring your attention to relevant internal opportunities that you can be involved in. If not, don't be afraid to ask your colleagues and wider network for extra tasks that align with the skills you're building and the career step you want to take. You can also look for aligned volunteering opportunities. Sitting on a charity board, for example, can give you valuable strategic leadership experience that you can then apply in your day job.

### **THE ROLE OF YOUR NETWORK**

It's been mentioned several times, but your peers and mentors are going to be vital in your skills-based learning journey. Mentors, especially those in roles that you aspire to,



can be a valuable source of insight into the skills you should focus on building. They can also inspire you to advocate for yourself and your skills and to assess when you are ready to take a new career step. Three-quarters of senior leaders say that mentoring has been critical in their career development.

Likewise, your peers can help you identify your skill strengths and weaknesses and brainstorm different career opportunities. They can also recommend learning resources that worked well for them or share their knowledge and skills. More people actually prefer to learn from their peers and teammates than from any other learning source. Peer learning groups can also be a safe space to practice soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, feedback, and collaboration.

### WHERE SKILLS ARE GOING

We are still at the beginning of the adoption curve with the skills-first approach, but increasing numbers of organizations are using skills as a deciding factor in their people decisions. The simple truth is that traditional ways of hiring, upskilling, rewarding, paying, and assessing performance are no longer fit-

for-purpose in an ever-changing, AI- and technology-driven world. Skills gaps are hindering business growth, productivity, innovation, and transformation, and the C-suite is looking for any way to plug them. It makes sense, therefore, to look at skills themselves and see where they can be deployed within the organization to have the greatest impact. It's where the world is headed since the skills gap is only going to grow over the coming years.

You will encounter the skills-first approach at some point in your career. Prepare for it now by thinking about how you're building skills in your current role, seeking out new ways of developing skills, and evidencing this. When your employer or future organization wants to look at your potential and progression in a skills-based way, you will have a strong body of skills evidence to show them. AQ

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