

# ONLINE BONUS CHAPTER

## THE FIVE ESSENTIAL HUMAN SKILLS YOU'LL NEED TO SUCCEED IN THE WORKPLACE OF TOMORROW

In my book *Future Skills: The 20 Skills and Competencies Everyone Needs to Succeed in a Digital World*, I explore the skills (both digital and soft skills) that will be essential for workplace success.

Beyond the 20 skills, five common themes run throughout the book—five very human traits that, together, underpin each of the 20 future skills. I believe these five human traits will help readers leverage the essential future skills and thrive in a time of constant change.

These five human traits are:

1. Optimism
2. Humility
3. Self-belief
4. Resilience
5. Taking the initiative

Let's explore each one in turn, looking at why these human skills are so important and how you can improve in these areas.

## Optimism: Why Even Pessimists Must Learn to Look for the Positives

Optimism is vital for leveraging the 20 future skills because without it we risk being swamped by the wave of digital transformation that's coming our way. An optimistic mindset allows us to face this period of unprecedented transformation head on, confident in the belief that we can learn to surf this wave, and that no one need be left behind.

To be clear, optimism doesn't mean being happy all the time or ignoring the negative things in life. Optimists encounter the same hurdles and life challenges as pessimists; the difference lies in how they face those challenges. An optimist is able to see the positive potential outcome, rather than focusing on the negatives. Ultimately, they believe that things will come out right, despite any temporary roadblocks in their way. As Winston Churchill put it, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." When you think of it this way, it's easy to see how optimism breeds success.

You may think optimism is a binary thing—you're either an optimist or you're not. But anyone can foster a more positive mindset. Here are some useful pointers for doing just that:

- Keep a daily gratitude journal. Giving thanks for the good things in life is a scientifically proven way to boost optimism.<sup>1</sup> Why not start a gratitude journal and, at the end of each day, scribble down a few things that you're grateful for? These could be as small as trying an amazing new coffee blend or hearing birdsong in the morning.
- Keep company with optimists. Ever notice how, when you spend time with a certain friend, you find yourself mimicking their Negative Nelly attitude? It's because pessimism is contagious. But so is optimism, so spend time with those who lift you up rather than drag you down.
- Focus on what you want (as opposed to what you *don't* want) to happen. Visualization or daydreaming about what you want is an

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especially powerful way to spark positivity. But try to visualize specifics rather than generic “I want to be rich and successful” stuff. For example, if you visualize your dream “forever home,” you could imagine holding the keys in your hand for the first time and conjure those associated feelings of happiness and pride.

- Think about an obstacle you successfully overcame. Optimists know that roadblocks are temporary and can be overcome, so try to recall a previous challenge that you navigated. What strengths and qualities helped you succeed? What helped you adapt? (Read more about adaptability as a vital future skill in Chapter 12.)
- Let go of what you can’t control, and focus on what you can control. Let’s say you get injured and can’t run the half-marathon you’ve been training for all year. You can’t control the fact that you’re injured. It’s already happened. But you can control what you do next, such as focusing on your recovery, eating well, resting, and signing up for the next race.
- Work on your physical health. Healthy people are likely to have a more positive outlook than their less-healthy peers.<sup>2</sup> (Whether optimism makes people healthier, or good health makes people optimistic isn’t clear, but the link is certainly there.) You know what to do here: eat more nourishing foods, move more, get outside, drink less alcohol, and so on. (There’s more on looking after yourself and creating a better work–life balance in Chapter 20.)
- Spend less time reading the news. While it’s important to keep up with current events, it can easily spiral into doom-scrolling. Set boundaries for your news consumption; for example, avoid reading the news as soon as you wake up, or spend only 15 minutes a day scanning the main stories.

## Humility and the Need to Stay Teachable

Humility doesn’t mean thinking negatively of oneself, or being less ambitious than others. Rather, it’s about recognizing our weaknesses as well as

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our strengths, so that we can grow and improve. Basically, humility is the opposite of arrogance. It's the belief that we don't know it all.

This is so important in the changing workplace because skills will quickly grow stale and need refreshing. We must all become lifelong learners if we're to surf the wave of transformation. Humility keeps us teachable. (See Chapter 18 on curiosity and continual learning.) Humility also inspires trust, making it an especially important quality in leaders,<sup>3</sup> whether you're leading a project or working in a traditional management role. (Incidentally, leadership is also covered in the book, specifically why leadership skills will apply to a wider range of roles than ever before. See Chapter 15.)

Here are some practical ways you can live with more humility:

- Reflect on your strengths and weaknesses and invite constructive feedback from others. Remember that weaknesses point to personal development opportunities.
- Become an active listener. Arrogant people aren't really interested in what others have to say; they're just waiting to talk about themselves! Meanwhile, humble people are genuinely interested in learning from others, and so they listen intently. To become a more active listener, don't scroll on your phone while others are talking, avoid the temptation to interrupt, listen without judgment, and ask interested follow-up questions.
- 'Fess up when you get things wrong. Take responsibility and apologize to those affected.
- Show your appreciation for others. A kind word of thanks or a reciprocal action shows that you notice and value the contributions of others.
- If you lose out to someone else—on a promotion, for example—congratulate them sincerely on their success. There's plenty of success to go around and your time will come.

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- Build your confidence. It's a myth that humble people aren't confident in their abilities. In fact, it takes a lot of confidence to see your strengths and weaknesses for what they are. This brings me to the next vital human skill.

### Self-Belief: How Confidence Feeds a Humble, Curious Mindset

Of course, the importance of confidence isn't exactly a new revelation. Studies have long shown that confidence influences the *perception* of competence, meaning confident people are consistently seen to perform better, regardless of how well they actually perform.<sup>4</sup>

So why highlight confidence in this chapter? Because I believe those who have a strong self-belief will simply be better equipped to succeed in our changing workplaces. Not because they overinflate their ability—quite the opposite: because they're confident enough to admit they don't know everything. After all, humility and self-belief are two sides of the same coin. It takes confidence to stay humble and teachable. And it takes confidence to open yourself up to learning new things, whether it's the 20 future skills covered in the book, or another skill that matters to you (tap dancing, Spanish, whatever).

Here are a few ways to build your self-confidence:

- Reflect on your accomplishments. Remind yourself that you have the ability to overcome challenges, adapt, and learn new skills because *you've done it before*. Basically, focus on past successes rather than the things that didn't exactly go to plan.
- Stop comparing yourself to others. You bring your own unique set of skills and life experiences. Yes, you might not succeed every time or win every opportunity, but you show up every day with your own set of positive and valuable skills.

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- Look for ways to step outside of your comfort zone. It's the old "face your fear" tip. For example, if you're nervous about public speaking, you could practice that skill (with a friend or by signing up for an online course), then volunteer to present a project update at the next team meeting. Afterwards, reward your bravery, either with a mental pat on the back or a treat.
- Look after your physical and mental health. Self-care is a great way to boost self-confidence because it's a reminder that you matter. Even in our increasingly busy lives, it's important to carve out time for daily self-care, whether it's meditation, a quick walk, preparing a nourishing meal, chatting with a friend, or whatever.
- Cultivate a more optimistic mindset, using the tips from earlier in the chapter.

## Resilience, and the Ability to Thrive Amidst Changes and Challenges

Resilience is that all-important ability to cope with life's ups and downs, and bounce back when confronted with challenges. This is crucial in the workplace because it allows us to navigate obstacles, manage stress and conflict better, and, frankly, just adapt to changing circumstances. This ability to cope with adversity and calmly move forward underpins a whole host of vital workplace skills, including decision-making (Chapter 6), emotional intelligence (Chapter 7), creative thinking (Chapter 8), collaboration (Chapter 9), and even coping with widespread digital transformation (Chapter 1). With resilience, you can successfully navigate whatever changes may be coming in your job or industry.

To improve your own resilience:

- Reframe your thoughts. In times of adversity, resilient people are able to look for the positives and focus on what can be changed, rather than brooding on the negative aspects and things that can't

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be changed. Therefore, boosting your optimism is a key part of resilience.

- Look after your physical and mental wellness. I can't stress this tip enough, but in our increasingly busy world, looking after yourself, lowering stress, and maintaining a better work–life balance will help you feel calmer and more in control (see Chapter 20). Without this, it can be easy to tip into overwhelm.
- Build your own support network, inside and outside of work. Having people you can turn to—whether it's to offer fresh insight, or just to listen to you—can really help build resilience.
- Be kind to yourself. When faced with challenges, there's often a temptation to be hard on yourself, to think there's something wrong with you, or to believe you're the only one to feel daunted or scared. Instead, try to listen to your feelings with compassion rather than judgment. Remind yourself that everyone struggles sometimes. Talk to yourself as you would talk to a friend who was facing adversity.
- Practice mindfulness. Very often, when we feel worried or down, it's because we're focusing too hard on what has been or what might happen. Mindfulness—the ability to really tune into the here and now—is a great strategy for boosting resilience because it can help you acknowledge your feelings, ease anxiety, and lower stress.

## Taking the Initiative: Shaping Your Own Learning Journey

Frustratingly, many of the skills needed for workplace success—things like emotional intelligence, curiosity, adaptability—are ignored by traditional education institutions. This means it's up to us, as individuals, to take the initiative and embark on our own personal development journey.

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As Victor Hugo said, “Initiative is doing the right thing without having to be told.” In this way, initiative is closely linked to resilience, since resilient people look for positive ways through adversity, and take the necessary action. And in the end, only actions will make the difference. I mean, we can talk about the rapid pace of change until we’re blue in the face, but only actions will equip us with the skills needed to thrive amidst such change.

Here are some small steps that will help you show more initiative:

- Look for extra responsibilities. From mentoring others to volunteering for cross-department initiatives, there are lots of ways you can go above and beyond your current job description.
- If there’s an area where you really excel, why not volunteer to train others on it? Or if you attend a training course, you could offer to do a recap session for those who didn’t attend.
- When you see colleagues struggling, offer to help.
- Make a personal development plan. Think about the changes that may affect your job or industry over the next five years (digitization, market challenges, etc.) and then make a list of skills and attributes that might help you navigate these changes. Your employer may be willing to invest in training, but if not, there’s a wealth of free or affordable learning tools out there, including online courses, audiobooks, YouTube videos, and podcasts.
- Ask for feedback. When looking at learning opportunities, ask your colleagues and boss for feedback on your performance. This might highlight areas for improvement that weren’t obvious to you.
- Polish up your critical thinking and decision-making skills. Initiative is all about thinking for yourself, but this requires the ability to think objectively, maintain an open mind, analyze the evidence, and then come to your own conclusion. (Read more about critical thinking and decision-making—and why they matter more than ever—in Chapters 5 and 6.)



## Final Thoughts

If you have read (or are going to read) the *Future Skills* book, I want you to come away with an exciting vision of the future of work, a future in which work is more human, more meaningful and more fulfilling. It's a far cry from the gloomy “machines are coming for our jobs” narrative. Yes, many jobs will evolve amidst the wave of digital transformation. Perhaps your own job will change dramatically. Maybe your next job hasn't even been invented yet. But far from making humans in the workplace obsolete, I believe it will make our human qualities—things like optimism, humility, self-belief, resilience, and initiative—all the more valuable. As such, the organizations of the future will value our very humanness, instead of expecting people to behave like machines. The so-called “soft” skills highlighted in this chapter and in the rest of the book will become hard currency indeed.

## Tell Me Your Thoughts

I'd love to hear what you think about these future skills. It would be amazing if you could write an online review! And please do ask questions, share your experiences, or get in touch if you need help preparing your organization for the digital transformation.

You can connect with me via:

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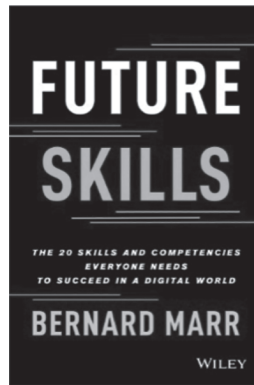
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*Future Skills: The 20 Skills and Competencies Everyone Needs to Succeed in a Digital World* is written for anyone who wants to surf the wave of transformation and take charge of their personal development in a rapidly changing world.

## Notes

1. Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12585811/>
2. Optimism and your health; Harvard Health Publishing; <https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/optimism-and-your-health>
3. The best leaders are humble leaders; HBR; <https://hbr.org/2014/05/the-best-leaders-are-humble-leaders>
4. To seem more competent, be more confident; HBR; <https://hbr.org/2019/03/to-seem-more-competent-be-more-confident>