



Korn Ferry Futurestep Survey: Learning Agility Top Attribute Companies Look for in College Grads, Yet Executives Say It's a Top Skills Gap

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"Personal Referral" Still a Top Reason to Contact a Candidate

LOS ANGELES--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Apr. 13, 2016-- An executive survey released today by the Futurestep division of Korn Ferry (NYSE:KFY), the preeminent global people and organizational advisory firm, reveals the key skills and attributes business executives are seeking when recruiting college graduates.

When asked what is the top attribute they look for, the largest percentage of respondents (43 percent) listed learning agility, defined as "the ability to learn from experiences and apply those learnings to new roles." Unfortunately, learning agility virtually tied (30 percent) with business acumen (31 percent) as the largest skills gap among college recruits.

"The pace of today's global, always connected business environment is frenetic," said Vivienne Dykstra, Futurestep Business Development Director EMEA and global SME for the Graduate Practice. "Organizations need employees who can keep up, change and innovate as circumstances evolve. The best hiring and development initiatives have a focus on learning agility."

When asked what is the most pressing diversity goal for college recruiting efforts, the vast majority of respondents (71 percent) said "diversity of thought."

"Diversity of thought is a key goal of all diversity initiatives and is most effectively achieved by recruiting people who have a wide range of backgrounds and experiences," said Dykstra.

When considering other specific diversity priorities, respondents ranked, in order: gender, ethnicity, veteran status and sexual orientation.

The study also found the majority of college recruiting programs are designed with an eye to the future, as 63 percent of respondents say the programs are focused on developing the next generation of leaders. Eighteen percent of respondents said their programs were designed to build business/corporate/sales capabilities, and 14 percent said they were focused on filling immediate operational requirements.

In other findings, as the colloquial saying goes, "it's not what you know, but who you know." Twenty-six percent of executives stated that a personal referral provides the most incentive to make initial contact with a candidate. That was exceeded only by "previous examples of leadership and problem solving," which accounted for 34 percent of responses.

Finally, the survey found that after deciding that a college candidate is not the right fit for a prospective position, less than a third of respondents (29 percent) say their company has a "keep warm" strategy for future opportunities, and less than one quarter (22 percent) add recruits to their long-term applicant tracking system.

"Not keeping track of applicants is a huge missed opportunity," said Dykstra. "A college grad may not yet be ready for a particular role, but keeping an ongoing dialogue open for when the ideal position is available will ensure that a candidate will choose your organization over a competitor."

About the survey

There were 1,753 responses to the global survey, which took place from March 7 through March 29, 2016. Full results* are as follows:

What is the top attribute you look for when hiring a college student?

- Grades 0 percent
- Learning agility 43 percent
- Previous Experience 1 percent
- Drive / Passion 27 percent
- Fit with our culture 17 percent
- Motivation 12 percent

What are the key skill gaps in college recruits?

- Leadership 16 percent
- Learning agility 30 percent
- Communication 11 percent
- Drive and motivation 10 percent
- Technical skills 3 percent
- Business acumen 31 percent

What are you doing to engage college candidates?

- On-campus information sessions 25 percent

-- In-person networking / social events	39 percent
-- Online / Social events	3 percent
-- Online talent communities	7 percent
-- Social media (LinkedIn, Twitter)	25 percent
-- Host conferences	1 percent

What is the most pressing diversity goal for your college recruiting efforts?

-- Diversity of thought	71 percent
-- Gender	12 percent
-- Ethnicity	11 percent
-- Sexual Orientation	2 percent
-- Veteran/ Disability status	5 percent

What do you assess your college candidates for?

-- Cognitive ability (Numerical, Verbal, Abstract reasoning)	22 percent
-- Technical Capability	8 percent
-- Leadership potential	36 percent
-- Cultural fit	24 percent

My organization's college hiring program is designed to...

-- Support our immediate operational requirements	14 percent
-- Develop our next generation leaders	63 percent
-- Bring in new technical capabilities	5 percent
-- Build our business/corporate/sales capabilities	18 percent

What is the best method of initial interviewing/vetting candidates when it comes to college recruiting?

-- Video interviewing	20 percent
-- On-campus group interview	47 percent
-- E-mail	2 percent
-- Phone	12 percent
-- Networking / Social events	16 percent
-- Conferences	3 percent

What would most incentivize you to make initial contact with a candidate when college recruiting?

-- A referral from someone you know	26 percent
-- Their persistence / enthusiasm	21 percent
-- Video resume	0 percent
-- Online (e.g. LinkedIn) CV / resume	6 percent
-- Social media activity	1 percent
-- Previous work experience at the organization	13 percent
-- Examples that highlight leadership, drive for excellence	34 percent

What happens when you decide a college candidate is not a right fit for the role for which you are recruiting?

-- We send an email thanking for their interest	11 percent
-- We encourage them to apply for future opportunities with us	34 percent
-- We invite them to continue to interact with our brand via social media	4 percent
-- We create a "keep warm" strategy for future opportunities	29 percent
-- We add them to our longer-term applicant tracking system	22 percent

What is the top reason to stay in contact with college candidates ... even those who were not the right fit for a particular role?

-- To protect our employer brand	1 percent
-- For future opportunities where they may be a good candidate	75 percent
-- For the possibility that years down the road they may become a good client	16 percent
-- So that they refer their friends to apply to our company	8 percent

Editor's Note:

Korn Ferry Hay Group will host a webinar to explore identifying and developing early talent. [Join us on Wednesday 20th April](#)

About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is the preeminent global people and organizational advisory firm. We help leaders, organizations and societies succeed by releasing the full power and potential of people. Our nearly 7,000 colleagues deliver services through Korn Ferry and our Hay Group and Futurestep divisions. Visit

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More information on Futurestep can be found at www.futurestep.com.

*Due to rounding, some totals may not equal 100

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