

# Employability Skills, a Must In Every Educational Institution

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India has carved a niche for itself in the education sector. Our country has produced some eminent personalities from various disciplines. Some illustrious academicians have passed out of IIM, IIT, MBA, Engineering, Medicine, Law colleges. The likes of Satya Nadella and Sundar Pichai are now the Big Boss of Microsoft and Google respectively.

Hordes of companies come to various colleges as part of campus recruitment. Thus begins the journey of Engineers, Management Graduates, Law Students and students from other discipline. It is but natural for students who get placed to be elated. But getting an offer is not the end of the world. Other than the job profile, salary, company they are going to join, students need to know many other things so as to be prepared, when the joining day arrives. What about the ones who keep applying for various roles without luck or finally manage to after many unsuccessful tries? The process of 'Campus to Corporate' is something that needs to get started as soon as students start attending classes. It is high time, our curriculum also had subjects like, Soft Skills, Employability Skills, Practical knowledge based on the streams chosen by students. Theory no doubt sets the platform, but it needs to be backed up with practicals wherever applicable. Case Studies, group activities, learnings based on industry scenarios will supplement what is taught in the classroom in addition to the learnings from the text books.

I feel that the process of educational institutes grooming students for the Big Day (students landing up a job while still in college) is long overdue. My take is based on my journey from Campus to Corporate to Teaching/Training. For the records, I worked in the Information Technology sector for over two decades. Since the last 4+ years, I am teaching Management & IT related subjects in various institutes in addition to conducting corporate trainings. Like many, I've also hired freshers out of college. Many of them either had dummy projects mentioned on their CV or had projects that were substandard in nature.

Here are some of my wish-list that bigwigs in academia can start considering...

1. Classes: Case studies, assignments, presentations, surprise tests, exams, guest lectures forms the backbone of syllabus, trimester/semester completion. While this is good stuff and there isn't much scope for any add-ons, I would like to propose just one change. Replace individual 'Assignments' with 'Group Assignments' or 'Group Activity'. Anything that is NOT a work of one student, copied by the rest of his/her class students. This year in one of the colleges where I taught, I had students create videos based on topics in their syllabus. My message to students was – "How easily we get videos from the internet? We are all fortunate to get every possible information that we seek from the net. Since the videos and contents are easily available, we do not appreciate the dedication, sweat, hard and smart work that goes behind the scenes. It is time, you made videos and post it on the net for others to watch. As expected, some of the students were apprehensive, while some were excited. With deliberations and discussions, those who had stage fear and those who were also confident speakers, but wanted to further improve their communication and presentation skills accepted the challenge. By their own admission, video creation was something students had never done in the past. The end result was sweet, rewarding. In the bargain, students learnt how to speak, how to face the camera, effort it takes to make a great video, software used to edit the video, not to mention the camaraderie since this was a group activity.
2. Career Counselling: Ask a student pursuing his/her specialization if s/he has made the right choice and I bet a substantial percentage of students would say – 'I don't know/I am not sure'. They choose a particular specialization because of their coterie of friends, or just because they do not like other specializations. Every student needs to understand their strengths and limitations. What works for a student may not work for another. It is not a footwear that can be discarded once it starts to worn out. It is about your career, about your bread & butter! Career counselling sessions if conducted by experts can clarify many doubts of students and guide them about the stream to choose, job opportunities in such streams.
3. Workshops by industry experts: There is nothing like having a workshop based on the student's specialization. The workshop could also be based on a topic that is trending. So for instance, in B-Schools, workshop topics may include, HR Analytics, Digital Marketing, Financial Planning, B2B Marketing, Social Media Branding, Artificial Intelligence, Project Management, Supply Chain Management, and Business Analysis/Analytics. If conducted well, workshop would give a boost a student's CV. Further if the student is able to explain the workshop topic well, s/he would have caught the attention of the interviewers.

4. Internship: OK, so finally a student gets a chance to get a feel of what corporate life is all about during his internship. But many students are unprepared and are not aware of the “Do’s and Don’ts” during Summer Internship Program (SIP). A clear understanding of objectives, what is expected of them, scrutiny by employer, mistakes to avoid in internship report etc can drastically help. Following the internship, students have to present what they did and this is their chance to impress the panel members. A job well done during internship may boost the confidence of the student during the presentation. This further sets up a win-win situation for both parties during campus interviews. Once all the presentations are done, a workshop on ‘How to make effective presentation?’ can further help students during campus recruitment.
5. Campus Recruitment: GD/PI/Aptitude test are typically the focus when companies visit colleges to hire the brightest and the best. While some colleges do have guest lectures and sessions on CV preparation and some practice sessions on Group Discussion (GD), the preparation must start sooner. GD should be ongoing, for every GD presents a different challenge. Besides, what is a hot topic today can become obsolete in the next quarter or so. Many students are oblivious to current affairs and hence are not able to perform well in a GD. But there are also others who may know the topic well, but are unable to speak with conviction because of lack of Soft Skills. Likewise, what does it take to crack a Personal Interview (PI)? Before we talk about PI, the million dollar question is, “Is the student’s CV well-constructed? Does the CV has what it takes to appeal/impress the hiring manager? After all CV serves as a marketing tool and it takes just 30 seconds or sometimes even less for a candidate to get rejected. Since majority of the students do not have work experience, the focus during PI is on communication/presentation skills, SIP, projects done and overall contents of CV. Unconvincing answer to a simple warm-up question like, ‘Tell me something about yourself’ can bring curtains to the candidate’s fate. Mock GD/PIs sessions as part of Soft Skills session would definitely increase the confidence level of students.
6. Campus to Corporate: This is an extension to the above topic, Campus Recruitment. What should students know before they get started on their job? What transformation should they make from Campus to Corporate? What should students be wary of during the initial probation period? Why it is not a good idea to quit the company after serving for a brief stint? These are just a few questions that students are better off preparing.

The obvious question is – How do you accommodate the above topics during regular college hours? Well such sessions/workshops needs to be conducted on Saturdays based on the availability of industry experts. College hours can also be extended on any of the weekdays. Some sessions can also be conducted online. Last but not the least, topics that are not complicated need not be taught in details. After all, you expect students to do self-study in professional courses.