

SECTION 4

SKILLS: YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

SUMMARY:

Strengths-based approaches to success are becoming wildly popular. Marcus Buckingham solidified the concept with his StrengthsFinder assessment and book. Indigo also advocates a strengths-based approach to student success. However, Indigo also integrates the innate strengths of Behaviors (DISC) and Motivators with 23 soft skills that are critical in the world of work. In academia, there are many terms for these skills - school specific measures, non-cognitive skills, non-academic skills, and competencies.

Indigo tends to use the term “21st Century Skills” or “soft skills.” The rapidly changing corporate landscape puts emphasis on skills that are not normally taught within the framework of traditional education. Companies are seeking candidates who have both hard skills and soft skills, focusing less and less on an applicant’s field of study and GPA. Technology companies like Google and Tesla are leading the way in evaluating applicants on attributes beyond their academic record.

The good news is that skills are just strengths you can learn. While some skills may come more naturally to you, it is possible to learn any skill. Keep in mind, you can only develop soft skills through practice and experience. They cannot be developed purely intellectually. That is why it is so important to engage in meaningful extracurricular activities that provide opportunities to practice skills. You likely don’t have a lot of work experience yet, so your top skills may be most reflective of the natural talents that you were born with, so it’s recommended that you start there.



INDIGO 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

Analytical Problem Solving
Conflict Management
Continuous Learning
Creativity/Innovation
Decision Making
Diplomacy/Tact
Empathy
Flexibility
Futuristic Thinking
Goal Orientation
Interpersonal Skills
Leadership
Management
Mentoring/Coaching
Negotiation
People Advocacy
Personal Responsibility
Persuasion
Planning/Organizing
Presenting
Teamwork
Time and Priority Management
Written Communication



HISTORY OF SKILLS

The DNA Personal Soft Skills Indicator was created by Bill J. Bonnstetter, founder of Target Training International, Indigo's technology partner. This survey was the foundational piece for TTI's 2012 Edison Award nomination for innovation. Two of Bonnstetter's greatest research passions are education and serial entrepreneurship, and the DNA survey was born from his desire to develop better tools for research in these areas.

FOCUS ON YOUR TOP SKILLS

The Indigo Report's skills page lists 23 skills that are important in the world of work. The skills are ranked in order of your most developed skill to your least developed skill relative to adult population norms.

Strengths-based research shows us that the key to success is utilizing your strengths while minimizing your weaknesses. Plus, you have greater growth potential in areas where you already have natural talent. When looking at the skills list, think of the skills at the top as the ones that come more naturally to you, thus requiring less energy on your part.

Think about how and where you are currently using your top skills. The following hypothetical scenarios are examples of how someone might use their skills:

If a student has Written Communication as one of his top skills, he may excel in creative writing. Perhaps the student is a poet or enjoys writing encouraging notes to family members.

If Management is a top skill, a student is probably good at delegating roles for group projects. She may express genuine joy in being able to navigate a team through a challenge.

If Persuasion is a top skill, a student might be proud of a time he convinced someone else to acknowledge and accept his point of view. He may enjoy mock trial or a corporate sales role.

Chances are, there is a **passion** contained in your top skills. Often these skills are also connected to your Motivators and DISC styles. Once you tap into that passion, you can seek out situations that allow you to apply your skills in a fulfilling way.

WHY TOP SKILLS MATTER

Your brain has the most connection points in regions where you are most skilled. Therefore it is easier to get better at things you are already good at compared to areas where you have no experience. That's why Indigo believes in starting from your strengths and pursuing career paths that are aligned with your natural inclinations and gifts.

YOUR TOP SKILLS AND THE 80/20 PRINCIPLE

When you focus on your top skills you are employing a century-old principle called the “Pareto Principle,” otherwise known as the 80/20 Rule. Pareto initially showed that approximately 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. The rule was subsequently applied to various social and business case studies.

Author Richard Koch showed that 80% of sales come from 20% of clients, or put another way, 80% of business results come from 20% of efforts. Focus on your “right” 20% to increase your potential for success. Your unique strengths combined with the top 20% of your skills are likely to lead to faster and better results, so focus there first.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR BOTTOM SKILLS?

Think of the skills at the bottom of your list as requiring more energy. There are several possible reasons why these skills require more energy from you:

1. You don't have a lot of experience using this skill yet, so it hasn't had a chance to develop.
2. You dislike performing this skill (even if you are good at it). *Note: If this is the case for you, avoid a job role where you have to use skills you dislike on a regular basis.*
3. You are genuinely not good at that skill, which is totally OK. You don't have to be good at every skill to be successful in life. Self-awareness in areas where you aren't as strong allows you to choose colleagues who are strong in areas where you need a little more assistance.

Because you can grow the skills you focus on, it's recommended that you focus on your top skills and try to find work that aligns with them. In fact, you can put these skills right on your resume, with examples of how you have previously used these skills to add value. There may be skills ranked low on your list that you can learn to do well with more experience and training. The only reason a bottom skill is relevant is *if it is hindering you in some way*. For example, if a student has Presenting as one of her bottom skills, and she is in a public speaking class, it is probably causing her stress and it makes sense to practice that skill to pass the class.

If the bottom skills are *not* hindering your life in any significant way, move on.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE A FEW SKILLS

If your graph shows very few (or zero) well-developed skills, this does *not* mean you have no skills! This portion of the test measures what *you believe to be* your skills. If you are overly critical or hard on yourself you probably rated yourself lower than you are in reality. Here are a few tips if you find yourself in this situation:

1. Even though you may not have many well-developed skills, the top skills are still extremely important to focus on and those strengths can be used to develop other skills.
2. Find a close friend, positive adult, or manager at work. Talk through your skills list with them. Ask them to give you examples of where they see you performing specific skills well and then make an effort to notice yourself practicing skills in those situations.
3. Look through the skills definitions below and watch some of the skills videos on indigoskills.com. Think about which skills you most want to practice or those which you suspect you might already be better at than you think!

Additionally, keep in mind that your scores are being compared to an adult average. It takes most people a lifetime to develop these skills, and most students are just starting out. The point is to focus on developing the skills that come most naturally to you, and not to beat yourself up where you perceive a gap.

If you have mostly Well Developed Skills and are under the age of 21, you might be overly confident in your ability to do everything well. It's extremely rare to have had a chance to develop most of the skills with so little work experience. Consider meeting with a trusted adult, mentor, manager or friend (who will tell you the truth) and ask them which skills they think you might be over-confident on and why. This will give you a clearer picture of yourself and your skills.

SKILLS DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

The next section describes each skill measured by the Indigo Assessment in alphabetical order. Remember to have your Indigo report handy to reference skills you want to explore more.

Working adult averages are from November 2015.

ANALYTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING (4.7 avg.): Analyzing, diagnosing, and resolving problems.

- Utilizes logic and systematic processes to analyze and solve problems.
- Defines the causes, effects, impact, and scope of problems.
- Evaluates the potential impact of possible solutions and selects the best one.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT (5.2 avg.): Addressing and resolving conflicts for positive outcomes.

- Readily identifies and addresses issues, concerns, or conflicts.
- Listens to understand an issue from different perspectives.
- Tries to settle differences fairly.

We find that students who score high in Conflict Management generally have a lot of practice in their families or friend groups. If this is true for you, think about your personal experiences and how you can use your practice navigating difficult situations in a positive way at school or work.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING (6.1 avg.): Taking initiative in learning new concepts and methods.

- Demonstrates curiosity and enthusiasm for learning.
- Actively interested in new technologies, processes, and methods.
- Spends considerable effort on learning.
- Identifies uses for knowledge.

Many times Continuous Learning aligns with a high Theoretical Motivator. If you rank high in Continuous Learning with a low Theoretical score, this tends to be an even more remarkable skill that is worth exploring.

CREATIVITY/INNOVATION (4.8 avg.): Ability to formulate new approaches, ideas, concepts and methods.

- Expresses non-traditional perspectives and/or novel approaches.
- Encourages and promotes innovation.
- Develops and tests new ideas to explain or solve issues.
- Imagines new or revolutionary concepts.

Typically, teacher and student populations score below adult averages in creativity. This may be one of the unfortunate side effects of standardized testing. If you rank high, find positive outlets for your creativity and never let anyone try to shut that skill down!

DECISION MAKING (4.0 avg.): Utilizing effective processes to make decisions.

- Can make tough decisions in a timely manner.
- Creates a rationale for making decisions.
- Willing to correct wrong decisions when necessary.
- Defends rationale for decisions when necessary.

Many high-achieving students score low on decision making and tend to have significant stress around the college and career process. If that is the case, it is even more important for you to have deep self-awareness. Do not let other people's opinions sway your decisions. Know yourself and make decisions that move you more toward your true self, no matter what might be expected of you. Remember, just make small decisions and commit to those. You don't have to plan your entire future, just make the next small step, evaluate how it goes, then make another decision and take another small step. "Inch by Inch it's a cinch, mile by mile it takes a while."

DIPLOMACY & TACT (5.9 avg.): Effectively handling difficult or sensitive situations concerning others.

- Maintains good relationships with others through fair treatment and respect.
- Respects diversity in race, national origin, religion, gender, lifestyle, age, and disability.

EMPATHY (3.6 avg.): Identifying with and caring about others.

- Demonstrates genuine concern for others.
- Is sensitive to the emotions people experience.
- Tries to understand the real needs, concerns, and feelings of others.
- Advocates for the interests, needs, and wants of others.

Empathy is a very interesting skill. Many students who are natural empathes rank low on “empathy”. They are shocked and dismayed when they see a score that is opposite from their core being. It’s possible their ability to “feel other people” has generally been painful for them or drains them of the energy they need to take care of themselves.

FLEXIBILITY (4.5 avg.): Ability to adapt to changes.

- Responds promptly to shifts in direction, priorities, and schedules.
- Effective at juggling multiple priorities and tasks.
- Adapts personal style to work with different people.
- Maintains productivity during transitions, even in the midst of chaos.

Students who have high flexibility skills and rank high in Steadiness on the DISC scale tend to do better in school and at work. If you are high S and score low in flexibility, you should check out the flexibility video and make steps to improve in this area.

FUTURISTIC THINKING (2.8 avg.): Imagining, envisioning or predicting what has not yet been realized.

- Demonstrates an ability to connect the dots and see the big-picture.
- Recognizes, supports, or even champions progressive ideas.
- Envisions possibilities others may not.

If you rank high on futuristic thinking, ask yourself what are you thinking about or imagining for your own future. Making a future vision board or mind map will likely be a valuable way to clarify the future you are envisioning and how to get there.

BET ON YOUR
STRENGTHS
AND SKILLS



STOP
WASTING
TIME ON YOUR
WEAKNESSES



GOAL ORIENTATION (6.8 avg.): Focusing efforts on meeting a goal, mission or objective.

- Establishes goals that are relevant, realistic, and attainable.
- Identifies and implements required plans and milestones to achieve specific business goals.
- Stays on target to complete goals regardless of obstacles or adverse circumstances.

Whether you rank high or low in goal achievement, practice goal setting. The simple act of writing a goal down (even if you never look at it) makes it 90% more likely to come true. Low scorers should start with smaller, easy win goals and practice this often. High scorers should set more challenging, directed goals that push their boundaries.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS (6.8 avg.): Effectively communicating, building rapport, and relating well to all kinds of people.

- Demonstrates sincere interest in others.
- Treats all people with respect, courtesy, and consideration.
- Develops and maintains relationships with many different kinds of people regardless of cultural differences.

This is one of the most widely varying skills, with many students scoring below 2 and many above 8. It doesn't have anything to do with reading people or liking people, it's all about knowing what to do with others in a variety of sticky situations. Interpersonal skills are easily taught but take lots of practice and high quality instruction.

LEADERSHIP (6.1 avg.): Achieving extraordinary results through people.

- Inspires others with compelling visions.
- Takes risks for the sake of principles, values, or mission.
- Demonstrates optimism and positive expectations of others.
- Delegates appropriate responsibilities and authority, & demonstrates loyalty to constituents.

Students who score high on leadership are often getting practice outside the classroom. If this is the case for you, ask yourself, "How do I identify as a leader and what kind of leader do I see myself becoming?"

MANAGEMENT (5.7 avg.): Achieving excellent results through effective use of resources, processes, and people.

- Comfortable making decisions that affect other people.
- Delegates tasks and roles appropriately.

Students typically do not score high on management due to the fact that it isn't generally applicable to their roles. If you do rank high, think about how you play the role of "manager" in your friend group, extracurricular activities, or at work. Management is an extremely valuable skill in the working world that you can capitalize on to get a better job.

MENTORING/COACHING (6.8 avg.): Guiding and supporting the growth of others.

- Identifies developmental needs. Encourages initiative and improvement.
- Provides opportunities for training.
- Trains, coaches, and mentors others to develop.

Students who score high here generally counsel or advise their friends. If this is true for you, think about how this might translate to real job skills employers are looking for.

NEGOTIATION (3.8 avg.): Ability to bargain effectively and facilitate agreements.

- Listens to identify and understand what each party wants.
- Determines what each party is willing to accept in an agreement.
- Develops the terms for an agreement.
- Ensures each party understands the terms of agreement.

Since this is such a business specific skill, it's rare to see negotiation ranked high for students. If you rank high, ask yourself, "Who do I negotiate with? My parents? Friends? Teachers? How do I want to leverage my negotiation skills in the world of work?"

PEOPLE ADVOCACY (6.3 avg.): Understanding, defending, and supporting other people's needs and expectations.

- Places a high value on customers and their issues.
- Anticipates customer needs and develops solutions
- Meets commitments made to customers

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (5.5 avg.): Taking initiative and responsibility for personal actions.

- Accepts personal responsibility for the consequences of personal actions.
- Applies lessons learned from past failures toward achieving future successes.

PERSUASION (5.5 avg.): Ability to convince others to change the way they think, believe, or act.

- Builds trust and credibility before attempting to promote something.
- Uses logic and reason to develop arguments that challenge current assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior.
- Identifies and addresses the barriers that prevent people from agreeing.

Persuasion skills generally correlate with high "Dominance" on the DISC scale. If you possess a low "D" score and a high Persuasion score, it's worth exploring how you developed this skill because you probably have a very unique and powerful way of persuading.

PLANNING/ORGANIZING (4.8 avg.): Using orderly procedures to meet objectives.

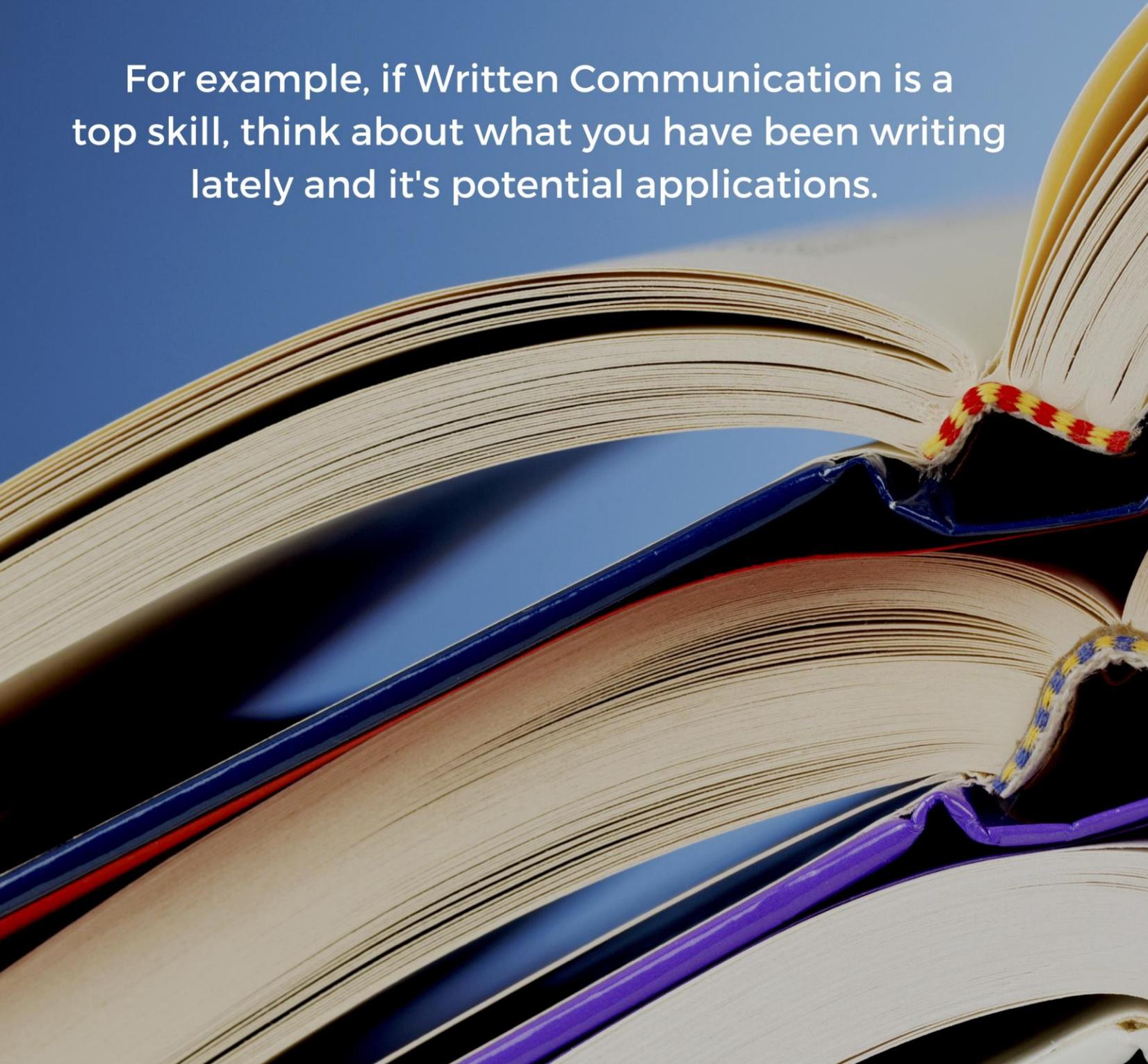
- Works effectively within established time frames and priorities.
- Prioritizes tasks for highest productivity.
- Makes adjustments to plan as needed.

With certain skills, you may know "how" to perform a skill but don't like doing it. For example, planning and organizing could be someone's last skill but they're actually quite skilled at this task. However, they dislike the patience and detail orientation required to do such tasks, so their scores come out very low.

Indigo Tip

Understanding your top skills is a great way to get to know your strengths and begin to develop them effectively.

For example, if Written Communication is a top skill, think about what you have been writing lately and it's potential applications.



PRESENTING (6.1 avg.): Communicating effectively to groups.

- Presents information in ways that makes complex concepts clear.
- Projects authenticity, confidence, conviction, and passion.
- Engages the heart and mind of the audience.
- Communicates in ways that enlighten, educate, challenge, and persuade the audience to think, believe, or behave in a specific way.

Presenting is one of the easiest skills to develop in an academic setting. To get better at presenting, take courses that require presentations or join a local Toastmasters group, which specializes in training people in this skill.

TEAMWORK (6.3 avg.): Working effectively and productively with others.

- Meets agreed-upon deadlines for team assignments and commitments.
- Supports team decisions.
- Behaves in a manner consistent with team values and mission.
- Provides constructive feedback to team and its members.

TIME AND PRIORITY MANAGEMENT (4.4 avg.): Ability to manage time and priorities, maintaining self-control.

- Prioritizes activities as necessary to meet goals.
- Keeps working toward goals without direct supervision (self-directed learner).

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION (5.4 avg.): Writing clearly and getting thoughts across effectively.

- Writes in ways that make abstract concepts clear.
- Succinctly presents viewpoints and arguments.
- Achieves communication objectives by organizing information in logical sequences that lead readers to come to natural conclusions.
- Adjusts writing style to specific audiences as needed.

*Students scoring high in “**Written Communication**” generally love to write and do it as a hobby. If you rank high here, find opportunities to apply your writing to valuable work applications. It’s unlikely you will be writing essays at work (unless you become a professor), but you could be writing blog posts, training materials, grants, video scripts, etc. Explore different types of writing that will allow you to write and collect a paycheck!*

SOFT SKILLS ON THE RISE



OF EMPLOYERS
THINK SOFT SKILLS
ARE AS VALUABLE
AS HARD SKILLS.



OF EMPLOYERS
THINK SOFT SKILLS
ARE MORE
IMPORTANT.



Skills Overview

Indigo's 23 "21st Century Skills"

Analytical Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Continuous Learning, Creativity/Innovation, Decision Making, Diplomacy/Tact, Empathy, Flexibility, Futuristic Thinking, Goal Orientation, Interpersonal Skills, Leadership, Management, Mentoring/Coaching, Negotiation, People Advocacy, Personal Responsibility, Persuasion, Planning/Organizing, Presenting, Teamwork, Time and Priority Management, Written Communication

Reading the Skills Page on your Report

- Take note of your top skills.
- Look at Motivators and Behaviors: do your top skills tie in with these?
- Look at low skills: don't focus here unless you have a compelling reason to improve a bottom skill.

Key Tips

- Focus on your top skills.
- Understand that skills can be improved over time.
- Having lots of skills is not necessarily better than having a few strongly developed skills leveraged appropriately.
- Choose a job and role where your duties allow you to use your top skills frequently.

