

College planner: Students: Learn These Skills Now to AI-proof Your Future Career!

Bonnie Kleffman, M.Ed, GCDF, Special to Lake Travis View

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Remember back in the dark ages of 2014, when a degree in computer science or computer engineering was a guarantee of cutting-edge job prospects in the modern world? Nobody would have predicted that less than ten years in the future, the AI/Chat GPT phenomenon would forever change the employment landscape of virtually every career on the planet. Whether you think AI is a frightening dystopia or a revolutionary enhancement to efficiency, we cannot undo what is evolving to be the new future of the workplace.



For college-bound students, choosing a major and career may seem more precarious than ever. They are probably wondering: How do I choose wisely so that I end up on the winning side of this technological revolution? While I cannot be sure (yet!) how to answer that question, I can guarantee at least part of the solution lies in cultivating skills that work alongside AI and are foundational in any profession: soft skills. I am talking about the higher-level interpersonal and thinking skills that are unique to genuine human connection: networking, discernment, nuanced communication and problem solving skills.

And although these may take a lifetime to perfect, students as young as high school can stand out in any situation if they begin to master these. Summer is a great time to focus and practice. Here are some suggestions for students:

Build Your Network!

Most students think networking is an exercise in collecting. Social media contacts, friends, adults from whom you may ask for something - these are, indeed, part of your 'network'. Yet building a true network is about much more than collecting contact information, it is about building relationships based on real-life conversation and sharing advice, thoughts and ideas. Students, when cultivating relationships with professional contacts or others, focus on curiosity about the other person's life, work and professional experiences.

Summer is a wonderful time to reach out to adults you know with sincere curiosity. Whether it be a friend's parent who has a job you are wondering about, a teacher with an unusual background, or a supervisor at your part time job, practice being trustworthy, asking meaningful questions, and genuinely listening and responding.

Informational interviews are great platforms in which to practice this, especially because they encourage students to get outside of their comfort zones and speak to new people.

Hone Your Communication Skills!

Communication is not simply raising your hand in class and asking a question once each semester - it is a skill that takes a lifetime to master. Soft skills such as good eye contact, confident posture, a firm handshake and smooth elevator speech are things that no ChatBot can replace. These are often lacking in the age of texting and short-form video scrolling, and it takes a conscious effort at first to really hone these skills.

Being that person who can break down a problem into the sum of its parts, or present ideas to a group in a compelling and interesting way is an advanced skill that the GPT will never master. As well, mediating disagreements in a productive way is an advanced form of tact that requires listening, speaking and synthesizing a multitude of information at once. These are human skills, and ones that are not cultivated while staring at a screen. Remember this and make time to consider and improve upon your skill level here.

Believe it or not, students who read for pleasure are much more adept at communication skills. Summer is a great time to create a book list or even begin a book club to discuss what you read. If communication skills are difficult, this is a great place to start.

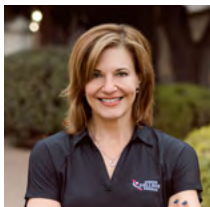
Focus on the Transferrable

Think of a few traits or skills that you can take with you whether you are taking orders at the local burger place or managing a board of directors for a Fortune 500 company. I am talking about things like a customer service mindset, the ability to take and give directions that make sense, creative problem solving skills and the ability to lead others. While these may prove difficult to master, they can easily be practiced at a summer job or internship!

Remaining poised under pressure falls within this category, too, and to learn it well may require reflecting on past experiences and identifying ways you can improve on your reactions to situations. This is an excellent leadership skill, as is appropriate self-advocacy and accepting and owning one's mistakes.

One of the very BEST venues to practice all of these skills is, you guessed it, the summer job! And while AI could probably replace scooping ice cream or tearing movie tickets, it hasn't yet proven cost effective to do so. Teens, this is your call to action for summer employment! Colleges are universally impressed with students who are responsible enough to have and keep paid employment. This demonstrates responsibility, willingness to work hard, and that the student is more likely to have the aforementioned soft skills such as communication and time management.

One thing is abundantly clear - we will never outpace the speed at which AI is changing the world. Yet, students can position themselves well by practicing the human skills that no AI can ever replace. My prediction is that these soft skills will become ever more important in the workplace of the future.



Bonnie Kleffman is a certified career development facilitator and college consultant director with Access College America, a college admissions planning agency based in Austin. Learn more at [AccessCollegeAmerica.org](https://www.AccessCollegeAmerica.org).

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