You’d better be a “people person”—adept at personal interactions in an increasingly serviced-based economy—if you want to stay employable and excel in the workplace over the next five years. Of course, keeping up with technology is also imperative, and we should all strive to understand new processes and systems in our chosen fields. Mastering these five other key “soft skills” may be most important of all, experts say. Developing these traits can help everyone—regardless of age, sex, profession or level of experience—compete long-term in a highly complex and quickly evolving employment marketplace.

**Skill 1: Collaboration**  The ability to contribute as a valued team member has become paramount. This trend will continue, especially in the high-tech workplace, where individuals often collaborate in small, closely-knit groups striving toward a common goal under tight deadline pressure.

Experts say this attitude is also crucial to reaping maximum benefits in a workplace setting. Simply put, by helping others, we help ourselves. “The goal of win/win—whether you and your employer, you and a customer, or you and a colleague—is the best way to achieve long-term success,” says Jane Cranston, executive career coach and management consultant.

**Skill 2: Customer Service**  Professionals from the C-suite to IT and shipping increasingly find themselves providing services to other members of the enterprise and dealing with consumers on a regular basis.

“The value added will increasingly come from customer service. This is especially true given the coming boom in elder care and healthcare as the baby boomers age,” says job expert and UCLA professor Chris Tilly. “By the same token, as routine work gets computerized and robotized away, problem-solving and trouble-shooting will remain something that humans are particularly good at.”

In the social-media age, the definition of “customer service” has expanded to include marketing and up-selling, Tilly says. Employees at all levels are increasingly expected to “represent” the company and add value to the brand by fostering goodwill with the general public. (Rudeness and ineptitude, after all, can be called out on Twitter and Facebook in real time, and employees could suffer the consequences.)

**Skill 3: Negotiation**  Negotiation skills come into play almost across the board, internally and externally, and increase our value as team members. Mastering such skills allows us to help coordinate departmental workflow, procure office supplies and technology and calm customers who email or call demanding refunds, fixes or detailed assistance setting up products or scheduling services.

“Our jobs are more and more about buying, renting and licensing services that aren’t physical or tethered to hard costs. That means that no matter what industry you’re in five years from now, your ability to negotiate great prices and terms will be vital,” says David Griner, Vice President of Digital Content. He adds: “Right now, we think of negotiation as a skill that’s only useful for salespeople and corporate execs who close big deals. But digital services are going to be the office supplies of the future, and each American worker will need to know how to haggle.”

In addition, finely honed negotiation skills are useful to jobholders because they “may need to renegotiate their arrangements precisely because of the rapid change in the workplace,” says UCLA’s Tilly. This is a gig economy. Treat yourself as an entrepreneur even if you have a desk job, experts say.
Skill 4: Adaptability  “Technological and global change mean that the nature of work and the mix of jobs will continue to change rapidly—indeed the pace of change is likely to increase. Therefore, the ability to retool one’s skill base will become increasingly critical,” says Tilly.

These traits “will be extremely important, as full-time jobs will be a thing of the past; think more projects rather then long-term job security,” says Kathi Elster, KSquared Enterprises, co-author of Working with You Is Killing Me.

Skill 5: Initiative  The new focus on collaboration and customer service doesn’t exclude showing initiative. Crafting well-thought-out proposals and seeing them through to fruition in a politically astute way adds value. It’s always been important, but with the current “jobless recovery,” it’s more so than ever: Because five years hence, jobs that did not require that skill won’t be coming back, experts say. See also: How To Be Seen At The Right Level (http://workreimagined.aarp.org/find-a-job/how-to-be-seen-at-the-right-level/)

“You don’t need permission to come up with a proposal, to do research on your own,” says Bassam Tarazi, a life coach and author of The Accountability Effect. “If you can show your higher-ups that you can provide value outside of what they asked, you will be invaluable.”

Elster adds that tenacity is also vital in a project-driven employment landscape where “each of us has to be job seeking all the time.”

Match these skills with what you need for this class, and write those skills on the lines as reminders.