



Written by [David Kelly](#) on August 3, 2023

Lack of Hands-on Learning Skills Impacting Job Opportunities for Young People

The long-term effects of the pandemic are becoming quite apparent, with young people beginning their chosen careers lacking hands-on skills that are essential in the workplace. Remote learning offered in schools and universities during the pandemic not only removed students from the classroom, but kept them from experiencing necessary opportunities to build life skills.

This has led to employers needing to not only spend time and money on finding quality candidates, but then assist the new hires in garnering the required skills to perform basic job duties.



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A *Wall Street Journal* article [shared](#) an example of how remote learning during the pandemic has affected workplaces around the country, noting:

Roman Devengenzo was consulting for a robotics company in Silicon Valley last fall when he asked a newly minted mechanical engineer to design a small aluminum part that could be fabricated on a lathe—a skill normally mastered in the first or second year of college.

“How do I do that?” asked the young man.

So Devengenzo, an engineer who has built technology for NASA and Google, and who charges consulting clients a minimum of \$300 an hour, spent the next three hours teaching Lathework 101. “You learn by doing,” he said. “These kids in school during the pandemic, all they’ve done is work on computers.”

Devengenzo is right; learning by doing in a hands-on situation has been lost in today’s digital world and since the onset of remote learning. Indeed’s [Career Guide](#) explained hands-on skills as “abilities acquired through active engagement and practical learning rather than the typical classroom lectures or books.” The employment website added that “people can enforce these skills by practicing what they’re learning immediately. This is an influential and integral part of gaining other vital skills as a skilled laborer, as developing hands-on skills can help you increase your focus, attention and engagement.”

The lack of in-classroom experiences leading to hands-on learning opportunities, along with years of remote learning during the pandemic, has led to employers lowering their hiring requirements for potential new employees. According to the *Journal*, “It is one reason professional service jobs are going unfilled and goods aren’t making it to market. It also helps explain why national productivity has fallen for the past five quarters, the longest contraction since at least 1948, according to the U.S. Labor Department.”



They added:

Talent First, a business-led workforce-development organization in Grand Rapids, Mich., is encouraging employers to stop trying to hire based on skill. Instead, hiring managers should look for a willingness to learn, said President Kevin Stotts.

“Employers are saying, ‘We’re just trying to find some people who could fog the mirror,’ ” Stotts said.

Another post-pandemic issue affecting the workplace in America is having young applicants who barely managed to complete their education successfully, even with pandemic-era lowered standards.

“Janet Godwin, chief executive of ACT, the nonprofit organization which administers the college admission test of the same name, said more high-school graduates today lack the fundamental academic skills needed for college and the workplace, with low-performing students facing the steepest declines,” wrote the *Journal*.

The years of isolation that many young people experienced during the pandemic is also affecting the workplace, as young employees don’t possess life skills or workplace etiquette, and in many cases lack social skills, thinking skills, and emotional skills. Developing those life skills would assist in their creativity, problem solving, time management, self-esteem, and healthy relationships in the workplace.

The *Journal* shared these recent examples of less-than-desirable behavior by young employees:

Last week a teenager working the fry station kept wandering off. “He just kept walking away to talk to his friends at the counter,” [John Ball Zoo kitchen supervisor Ivan] Schury said. “I spend a lot of time making sure people stay on task.”

Charity Fields, 19 years old, works in the gift shop and says she is frequently surprised by the lack of motivation of her younger co-workers. A few days ago, a 16-year-old fellow sales associate sat in a chair reading a book while customers shopped.

“I told her we weren’t really supposed to do that,” Fields said. The girl got up, stood near the cash register, leaned on the counter and continued to read.

The struggles of both employers and employees in the post-pandemic workplace are real, as most of us have witnessed or experienced first-hand. No one knows what the future may hold, as the workplace is still evolving and young people for the most part are now back in the classroom. Only time will tell if the long-term effects of the pandemic will eventually fade away or, sadly, become our new normal.



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