



AFSUG®
African SAP User Group

Work Readiness

What Employers Expect

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Who am I?

People scientist by profession. Storyteller, writer and citizen by heart.



Industrial & Organisational Psychologist
Work scientist



Children's storyteller
On TikTok



Writer



Active citizen



Avid reader



Tree hugger



What do you bring to the workplace?

At my first job I was asked this question. I answered:

“Hard work.”

The reply:

“That's expected.”



What employers are actually looking for

63%

of employers say skills gaps are a major barrier to transforming their business by 2030

~90%

of employers look for problem-solving ability on graduate CVs; ~80% for teamwork

35 pts

gap between how graduates and employers rate graduates' leadership skills

Graduates rate themselves higher than employers do (gap, percentage points)



The South African reality

12.2% graduate unemployment

62.2% youth (15–24) unemployment

Your degree is a real advantage. But many strong candidates have the same degree.

Sources: WEF Future of Jobs 2025; NACE Job Outlook 2025; NACE 2024 perception gap; Stats SA QLFS Q2 2025

Know the business

1

What do we sell?

Products, services — and which ones make the most money

2

Who buys it, and why?

The customer, the problem we solve, who else they could buy from

3

How do we sell it?

Direct, retail, online, partners — what a sale actually looks like

4

How do we make money?

Revenue, cost, margin and cash. Busy is not the same as profitable

5

Why does my work matter?

Cost down, quality up, speed up, risk down, customers happier



"The business didn't hire an engineer. It hired a problem-solver."

The basics: professional hygiene factors

They won't make you stand out. But they stop you from standing out for the wrong reasons.

1 Arrive on time

On time means five minutes early, settled and ready. Online: join a minute early, camera and mic tested.

Lateness says your time matters more than theirs.

2 Look professional

Neat, clean and right for the setting.

People judge competence and trust from a face in as little as 100 milliseconds.

3 Be productive

Busy isn't productive. Protect focus time and finish things.

Workers are interrupted roughly every 2 minutes; 48% say work feels chaotic.

Also basic: Do what you said, when you said • Close the loop • Reply in reasonable time — even if it's “I'll come back to you by Thursday”

Sources: Herzberg two-factor theory; Willis & Todorov (2006); Microsoft Work Trend Index 2025

Respect other people's time

Remember arriving at a lecture hall — or being halfway there on a taxi or bus — only to find the lecture was cancelled?

That's how colleagues feel when you cancel late.

PM

End of the day

Look at tomorrow's calendar. If something needs to move, move it now — not five minutes before.

AM

Start of the day

Check it again. What changed overnight? What needs adjusting?

If you must cancel: do it early, say why and offer another time. **Finish on time.**

It shows respect and courtesy — and keeps the organisation productive.



Stakeholder communication

THE MYTH

“Professionalism means keeping your head down, keeping quiet and doing your job.”

THE REALITY

Good work nobody knows about is — for your career — work that didn't happen.

20M

LinkedIn users studied over five years: weaker ties — acquaintances, not close friends — led to more job moves.

Know your stakeholders

Manage upward: no surprises

Lead with the point

Build relationships before you need them

Source: MIT / Science (2022), LinkedIn weak-ties study



Presentation: how you show up

*“Dress for the job you want,
not the job you have.”*



Take it from whence it comes: a mine, a start-up and a bank all expect different things.

When in doubt, go one level smarter

Watch what people two levels up wear on big days

On video, background and lighting are part of your outfit

In five experiments, formal clothes made people feel more powerful and think more big-picture.

Source: Slepian et al. (2015), Social Psychological and Personality Science

Presenting ideas

- 1 Start with the “so what”
- 2 Know your audience
- 3 One message per slide
- 4 Rehearse out loud and time it
- 5 Prepare for the hardest questions

Meeting hygiene

Every meeting is a small job interview you didn't know you were in.

23 hrs a week executives spend in meetings

Before

- Know why you're there — or ask
- Read the pre-reads
- Prepare one useful contribution

During

- Phone face down, notifications off
- Speak at least once — a good question counts
- Note actions and owners
- Don't repeat points just to be heard

After

- Do your actions and confirm
- Offer to send the summary — whoever writes the notes shapes the outcome

Running it? Clear purpose, an agenda, the right people, start and end on time — finish with decisions, owners and dates.

Sources: HBR (2017) Stop the Meeting Madness; Microsoft Work Trend Index 2025

Working on global and diverse teams

39%

more likely to outperform: firms with the most women on exec teams vs the fewest

12

official languages. South Africans already work across difference every day — name it in interviews

Culture shows up in how people...

communicate

give feedback

persuade

lead

decide

build trust

disagree

treat time

Ask, don't assume: “How do you prefer to get feedback?”

Write clearly — no slang or local idioms

Mind the clock — time zones and public holidays

Confirm in writing, and invite quiet voices in by name

Sources: McKinsey (2023) *Diversity Matters Even More*; Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map* (HBR 2014)



Never stop learning

Learn what makes your job easier today

Excel, Power BI, company systems, AI tools, even keyboard shortcuts

Learn what takes you to your next level

Leadership, finance for non-financial managers, project management, commercial skills

Use your company's learning platform — and block learning time in your calendar.

That habit alone sets you apart.

A practice I use regularly: find your gaps before someone else does

1 Find your next job

Search LinkedIn for the spec of the role you want next



2 Compare it with AI

Give an AI tool your CV and the spec; ask it to find your gaps



3 Close the gaps

A course, a project, a stretch assignment or a conversation



4 Repeat

Every few months — you grow, and job specs change

Caution: remove your ID number, address and phone number before uploading your CV. At work, use only company-approved AI tools.

Things nobody tells you

1

Volunteer for the unglamorous work

Take the notes, fix the broken spreadsheet. It's how people learn your name.

2

Be kind to everyone

Security, reception, cleaners and PAs see everything — and people talk.

3

Keep a “brag document”

Write down wins, feedback and impact every week. You will forget.

4

Solve your manager's problem

Ask: “What's keeping you up at night?” Then help with that.

5

“I don't know — but I'll find out by Thursday”

It builds more trust than bluffing. Then find out by Thursday.

6

Find a sponsor, not just a mentor

A mentor advises you. A sponsor says your name in rooms you're not in.

The greatest work is on yourself

Beyond the job, the degree and the title, you are a human being first.

Keep working on who you are.

1

Know who you are

Your values, strengths, blind spots and what triggers you. Most people believe they are self-aware; truly self-aware people are rare.

2

Build your character

Integrity, humility, consistency. Who you are when nobody is watching is who you are.

3

Use feedback to grow

Ask for it. Listen without defending. Say thank you. Act on it. Feedback is a gift, even when it stings.



The value checklist



I know how my organisation makes money



I present myself for the job I want



I get the basics right, every day



I make meetings better



I respect other people's time



I work well with people unlike me



I speak up and people know my work



I'm always learning, and I know my gaps





What value do I bring?

Beyond hard work. Write down your answer before your next interview — or your first day. Questions? Drop them in the question box.

**Connect.
Create.
Collaborate.**

Recommended reading

Know the business

What the CEO Wants You to Know Ram Charan

Financial Intelligence Berman & Knight

Range David Epstein

People and relationships

How to Win Friends and Influence People Dale Carnegie

Give and Take Adam Grant

Crucial Conversations Patterson et al.

Presenting your ideas

The Pyramid Principle Barbara Minto

Talk Like TED Carmine Gallo

Habits and focus

Atomic Habits James Clear

Deep Work Cal Newport

Teams and feedback

The Culture Map Erin Meyer

Radical Candor Kim Scott

Growth

Mindset Carol Dweck

So Good They Can't Ignore You Cal Newport

Start here: Carnegie • Charan • Atomic Habits • Mindset • So Good They Can't Ignore You

Thank You



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