Executives to new grads - Shape up!

Most senior managers are unimpressed with the entry-level job applicants they're seeing, reports a new survey.

By Anne Fisher, copyright Fortune

Note to recent college grads and the Class of 2012: You may not be as ready for the working world as you think you are. At least, that's the opinion of about 500 senior managers and C-suite executives in a study by Global Strategy Group, on behalf of worldwide architectural firm Woods Bagot.

In all, a 65% majority of business leaders say young people applying for jobs at their companies right out of college are only "somewhat" prepared for success in business, with 40% of C-suite executives saying they are "not prepared at all." Not only that, but even those who get hired anyway may not rise very far. Almost half (47%) of C-suite executives believe that fewer than one-quarter (21%) of new grads have the skills they'll need to advance past entry-level jobs.

And what skills might those be? The most sought-after are problem-solving (49% ranked it No. 1), collaboration (43%), and critical thinking (36%). Also in demand is the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively in writing (31%). Technology and social media skills came in at rock bottom on the list, valued highly by only a tiny 5% minority of senior managers. The kicker: According to the poll, new grads fall far short of the mark in every one of these areas -- except tech savvy, the least desired.

Jeffrey Holmes, principal at Woods Bagot, notes "an interesting disconnect": "Despite a widespread impression that social media make people better at communicating and collaborating, that's apparently not the case." Why not? "Being adept at using social media is like 'show and tell.' It's mostly one-way communication, with less emphasis on taking a flood of information and turning it into useful knowledge," Holmes says.

"Companies need people who can synthesize information and apply it to business problems. I see this even at our own firm," he adds. "There's less room for new hires who don't have that ability. Technical skill is not enough."

The poll results reflect a relatively new, much loftier standard for entry-level hires. Not so long ago, newly minted bachelor's degree holders joined companies with the understanding that complex skills like problem-solving and critical thinking were largely to be learned on the job, and would develop over time.

"Now, companies want young people who walk in the door with these abilities," Holmes
notes. "The pace of business has accelerated to the point where expectations are much higher now."

And whose fault is it if most college grads haven't got what it takes to get ahead? The executives surveyed overwhelmingly believe that academia has failed to keep up with the breakneck pace of change in the business world: More than three-quarters (77%) blame educators for new grads' lack of readiness.

Source: http://management.fortune.cnn.com/2012/02/01/executives-to-new-grads-shape-up/