flexQuest script

Welcome to FlexQuest, a gameful learning approach to help students practice and develop so-called "soft skills" as part of an internship program.

Soft skills are interpersonal and self-management skills long regarded as critical to personal success: skills such as communication and teamwork, goal-setting and time management. Technical skills such as coding, hardware and network ops, or engineering are needed for today's tech career — but will likely change within five to ten years.

'Soft skills'? I think they're HARD skills."
"They're hard to learn."
"They're hard because they're probably the most important skills."

These are persistent capabilities that can guide you through present and future challenges. Soft skills are critical to helping people adapt, change, and grow to meet not just today's challenges but the challenges of the future. Those who have mastered soft skills will be able to thrive in the workplace of the future.

These superpowers are so universal that they will never grow old or outdated. They are **future proof** because these are the skills that have a shelf life of forever. Though your technical knowledge may be supplanted by newer developments, your soft skills superpowers are forever future proof.

Soft skills can be hard to define and measure.
So people ask: can you really *teach* soft skills like creativity?
The real question is can someone *learn* these soft skills — and the answer is yes. If we create an environment for *learning* experiences rather than trying to *teach* these skills in a more formal sense.

Futurist and games guru Jane McGonigal suggests that games offer the best approach to solve big problems and encourage personal growth. Why games? Games create a sense of **optimistic urgency** — a desire to act immediately to tackle an obstacle combined with the belief that we have a reasonable hope of success. Gamers always believe that an **epic win** is possible, and that it's always worth trying, and trying **now**. Games also promote cooperation and imbue the effort to achieve with epic meaning.

Based on gameful design principles outlined by Jane McGonigle flexQuest challenges interns to pursue an epic win of their personal choosing by completing tasks and activities related to soft skills, while battling their own personal bad guys be it procrastination, perfectionism or creative block.

Along the way they will identify and access allies — those individuals that can support them and pus them further in pursuit of that epic win. They will also find and use power-ups to build resilience. Power-ups can be anything from taking a quick walk around the block to drinking a glass of water to writing a quick email or text expressing gratitude. All boost resilience in their own way.

By providing information and examples as well as challenging individuals to stretch their own capabilities, we can encourage and reward exploration of these superpowers. Simple rubrics will allow for self-assessment as well as soliciting external feedback from others

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I personally have been teaching some of these skills off and on for over 35 years. Thirty years ago at a Regional Conference of the International Television Association, I moderated a panel of video and high tech employers who told the college students that they were more interested in whether prospective employees could think creatively, communicate effective, work in a team, and continue lifelong learning in their field. Twenty years ago, I helped design Dewey Winburne's legacy project, EnterTech, where half of the focus was on soft skills, including (look it up). From Dell Computers to USAA to special education teachers' training, most of my learning projects have involved some soft-skills training.

**"They ought to be called 'hard skills' "— SXSW Edu speaker said of soft skills. Most (65%) employers consider soft skills more important in hiring than hard skills, such as coding or network OPS or media production. This is not new: this "trend" has been documented for over 30 years with no signs of less urgency for soft skills training.

With a gameful approach a la Jane McGonigal, *flexQuest* offers a soft-skills curriculum for student interns and others interested in challenging themselves to learn and practice these critical employability skills.

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For the quest we have adapted a list from LinkedIn of the most critical in-demand soft skills to derive the following five core skills:
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Self-management
- Creativity
- Adaptability