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# Using Soft Skills to Make Your Hard Skills Shine

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There's always room for improvement. Two-Minute Reads are a free tool you and your organization can use just for that reason.

To get, and keep, a job you typically need a repertoire of technical skills. Dentists need to know how to fill cavities. Secretaries need to type 100+ words per minute. Accountants need to be certified.

Beyond the technical skills, though, which dentist do you go to? The one who is pleasant and takes time to answer your questions, or the one who treats you like a number in a long line of numbered mouths?

Which secretary do you retain when times are lean? The one whose attitude is positive and upbeat, and who is always willing to help, or the one who is inflexible and has a hard time admitting mistakes?

Likewise, think about accountants. The one who has a great work ethic and encourages his colleagues is the one who will, most likely, excel in his position and organization.

In these situations, and all the others like them, it's the soft skills that matter.

While your technical skills may get your foot in the door, your people skills are what open most of the doors to come.

Your work ethic, your attitude, your communication skills, your emotional intelligence and a whole host of other personal attributes are the soft skills that are crucial for career success.

With these soft skills you can excel as a leader. Problem solving, delegating, motivating, and team building are all much easier if you have good soft skills. Knowing how to get along with people—and displaying a positive attitude—are crucial for success.

The problem is, the importance of these soft skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills. For some reason, organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job. They tend to assume that everyone knows and understands the importance of being on time, taking initiative, being friendly, and producing high quality work.

Assuming that soft skills are universal leads to much frustration. That's why it's so important to focus as much on soft skills training and development as you do on traditional hard skills.

## **The Soft Skills Gap— Do You Have One?**

When your workforce has lots of technical skills but an absence of soft skills, you have a soft skills gap. Soft skills are what accompany the hard skills, and help your organization use its technical expertise to full advantage.

- If you're really good at getting clients, and not so good at retaining them, chances are you have a soft skills gap.
- If you have lots of staff turnover and have to keep retraining people, chances are you have a soft skills gap.
- When you have lots of managers but no real leaders, that's a soft skills gap.

In fact, whenever you are unable to capitalize on the wealth of knowledge, experience and proficiency within your team, then you should be assessing the level of communication and interpersonal skills that are present in your organization.

The workplace has evolved an interpersonal dynamic that can't be ignored. The acts of listening, presenting ideas, resolving conflict, and fostering an open and honest work environment all come down to knowing how to build and maintain relationships with people. It's those relationships that allow people to participate fully in team projects, show appreciation for others, and enlist support for their projects.

It's important for you to recognize the vital role soft skills play within your team and not only work on developing them within yourself, but encourage their development throughout the organization. Areas to examine and evaluate include:

- Personal accountability
- The degree of collaboration
- Interpersonal negotiation skills
- Conflict resolution
- People's adaptability and flexibility
- The clarity of communications
- Creative thinking
- Inclusion
- Coaching and mentoring

The more of these things you see around you, the better people's soft skills are likely to be within your organization. These all have a significant impact on the attitude a person brings to interactions with clients, customers, colleagues, supervisors, and other stakeholders. The more positive someone's attitude is, the better that person's relationships will be. That's what fosters great team performance, and leads people to contribute strongly to the organization's vision and strategy.

Traditionally, people don't receive adequate soft skills training, either during vocational instruction or as part of on-the-job training.

### **Key Points:**

Soft skills are increasingly becoming the hard skills of today's work force. It's just not enough to be highly trained in technical skills, without developing the softer, interpersonal and relationship-building skills that help people to communicate and collaborate effectively.

These people skills are more critical than ever as organizations struggle to find meaningful ways to remain competitive and be productive.

Teamwork, leadership, and communication are underpinned by soft skills development.

Since each is an essential element for organizational and personal success, developing these skills is very important and does matter... a lot!

### **Questions to ponder:**

1. How can developing soft skills help you develop your career as a leader?
2. What soft skills would be useful for you?

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