



Soft Skills

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I. INTRODUCTION

Soft skills play a vital role for professional success; they help one to excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge. Soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person's "EQ" (Emotional Intelligence Quotient), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills complement hard skills (part of a person's IQ), which are the occupational requirements of a job and many other activities.

It has been suggested that in a number of professions soft skills may be more important over the long term than occupational skills. The legal profession is one example where the ability to deal with people effectively and politely, more than their mere occupational skills, can determine the professional success of a lawyer.

Soft skills are behavioral competencies. Also known as interpersonal skills, or people skills, they include proficiencies such as communication skills, conflict resolution and negotiation, personal effectiveness, creative problem solving, strategic thinking, team building, influencing skills and selling skills, to name a few.

II. SOME OF SOFT SKILLS ARE AS FOLLOWS

- Personal qualities
- Responsibility
- Self-esteem
- Sociability
- Self-management
- Integrity / honesty

III. SOME WAYS TO IMPROVE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS ARE

- Think positively, and enter the mindset to work well with others and maintain good relationship.
- Do not criticize others or yourself
- Be patient
- Learn to listen, expert recommend listening 80% of the time and only talking 20%
- Be sensitive to others, this includes not gossiping.
- Have a sense of humor appropriate to your situation. Many people benefit from a good joke.
- Treat others and their experience with respect.
- Praise and compliment people when they deserve it.
- When someone is telling a story doesn't interrupt or try to upstage him with a story of your own.
- Smile- even when you don't feel like smiling.
- Be cheerful and try to make others smile.
- Look for solutions.
- When someone compliments you, don't disagree or boast about it simply say thank-you with a smile and move on.
- Don't complain.
- When you're unhappy, try your best to act happy anyway. You will end up feeling better and so will the people around you, your mood is contagious.
- Fake it till you make it. If you're not naturally confident or happy, fake it until you generally possess the desired characteristics.



- Learn to appreciate, be helpful and not de-motivate your team members. Work as a team, not as an individual. This will achieve better results.
- Treat your team member and colleagues as friends and not as strangers or subordinates.

IV. TRY THESE 10 HELPFUL TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

1. **Smile:** Few people want to be around someone who is always down in the dumps. Do your best to be friendly and up beat with your co-workers? Maintain a positive, cheerful attitude about work and about life. Smile often. The positive energy you radiate will draw others to you.
2. **Be appreciative:** Find one positive thing about everyone you work with and let them hear it. Be generous with praise and kind words of encouragement. Say thank you when someone helps you. Make colleagues feel welcome when they call or stop by your office. If you let others know that they are appreciated, they'll want to give you their best.
3. **Pay attention to others:** Observe what's going on in other people's lives. Acknowledge their happy milestones, and express concern and sympathy for difficult situations such as an illness or death. Make eye contact and address people by their first names. Ask others for their opinions.
4. **Practice active listening:** To actively listen is to demonstrate that you intend to hear and understand another's point of view. It means restating, in your own words, that you understood their meaning and they know that your responses are more than lip service. Your co-workers will appreciate knowing that you really do listen to what they have to say.
5. **Bring people together:** Create an environment that encourages others to work together. Treat everyone equally, and don't play favorites. Avoid talking about others behind their backs. Follow up on others people's suggestions or requests. When you make a statement or announcement, check to see that you have been understood. If folks see you as someone solid and fair, they will grow to trust you.
6. **Resolve conflicts:** Take a step beyond simply bringing people together and someone who resolves conflicts when they arise. Learn how to be an effective mediator. If co-workers bicker over personal or professional disagreements, arrange to sit down with both parties and help sort out their differences. By taking on such a leadership role, you will garner respect and admiration from those around you.
7. **Communicate clearly:** Pay close attention to both what you say and how you say it. A clear and effective communicator avoids misunderstandings with co-workers, colleagues, and associates. Verbal eloquence projects an image of intelligence and maturity, no matter what your age. If you tend to blurt out anything that comes to mind, people won't put much weight on your words or opinions.
8. **Humor them:** Don't be afraid to be funny or clever. Most people are drawn to a person that can make them laugh. Use your sense of humor as an effective tool to lower barriers and gain people's affections.
9. **See it from their side:** Empathy means being able to put you in someone else's shoes and understand how they feel. Try to view situations and responses from another person's perspective. This can be accomplished through staying in touch with your own emotions; those who are cut off from their own feelings are often unable to empathize with others.
10. **Don't complain:** There is nothing worse than a chronic complainer or whiner. If you simply have to vent about something, save it for your diary. If you must verbalize your grievances, vent to your personal friends and family, and keep it short. Spare those around you, or else you'll get a bad reputation.

V. INTERPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Activity: Using "I" messages

This activity helps learners learn to give criticism, explain a Education problem, make a suggestion, or express an opinion without being offensive to the other person.

Learning Objective

Adult learners will understand the importance of "I" messages, identify their feelings, and express their feelings in difficult situation in a non-threatening manner.

Activity Description



I have had learners who have quit their jobs because they could not get along with the boss. They did not understand how to explain a problem or express an opinion without offending the other party.

1. Ask learners how many times they have wanted “tell someone off” but just let the situation pass because they knew a confrontation would occur.
2. Encourage learners to share some of these situations with the class. Have the class share different approaches that could have been used and discuss the possible outcomes.
3. Explain that it is better to express how you feel about an issue rather to criticize the other party. Demonstrate verbal examples of “I” messages. Such examples might include “I’m really feeling upset about this,” instead of, “you really make me mad.”
4. Using Handout 1, have the learners change the “you” messages to “I” messages.
5. This activity was done in a families First class of approximately 5 -10 learners.
6. Using Handout 2 (or a sheet that you have made containing examples of conflict situations) discusses appropriate and inappropriate responses to conflict situations. Leave part of the appropriate responses blank for the learners to fill in on their own responses. Make sure there are several “you” messages which are incorrect and “I” messages which are correct, so that the learners can compare.
7. Write negative feeling words that show a wide range of emotions such as “scared” or “angry” on the board. This example can guide the learners in determining the correct words to use in their messages.
8. Ask learners to create a list of responses to situations they have experienced or are likely to experience with their children, classmates, or co-workers.
9. In the next hour, have learners pair up and practice what they have learned by role-playing the different responses.
10. As an added emphasis, have learners practice using “I” messages describing how things could be changed. This goes beyond expressing feelings. For example, if a co-worker tells you that you are doing something wrong, you could reply, “although I don’t agree, I appreciate your point of view.” They, for the second part of the “I” statement, you could say, “I wish we could see eye-to-eye more often.”

Assessment:

The learner will be able to write the correct “I” message conveying both the feeling and the desired change when given a conflict situation from the workplace.

Practitioner Reflection:

The learners had a much easier time dealing with the parent-child situations than with the workplace situations. I believe this is because they feel more comfortable dealing with problems with which they have had more experience.

VI. TEAMWORK: KEY ELEMENTS

1. **Commitment:** Commitment happens when the team members see themselves as belonging to the team instead of as individuals acting on their own initiative. Also, commitment is evident when the team members are committed to the team goals over and above their own personal goals over and above their own personal goals.
2. **Trust:** When team members have faith that each member will honor their commitments, support each other, share and maintain confidences, and act in a responsible manner, trust is nurtured and exhibited.
3. **Purpose:** It is important for teams to understand how they fit into the overall organizational picture of a business. And, equally important, team members must know their individual roles, feel a sense of pride and ownership of the project and recognize that their contribution can make a difference.
4. **Communication:** Strong teams are those that exercise effective communicating among members, as well as between group members and those outside the team. Members must be able to handle conflict, practice effective group decision-making and work toward smooth day-to-day interactions.
5. **Involvement:** Team members each have an integral part on the team. Their contributions are respected and solicited, and they establish a real consensus before committing the team to action. Though differences in opinion are bound to occur, team members must feel a partnership with each other and respect those differences.
6. **Process:** Effective teams possess proficient use of problem solving skills, the ability to plan, attend regular meetings, compete with meeting agendas and minutes of the meetings, and use protocol to deal with problems.

VII. TASK ROLES

1. Team Initiator

- Starts the discussion
- Introduces new topic or issue
- Gets team moving



2. **Seeker of Information**
 - Asks others in the team to clarify or share information
3. **Giver of Information**
 - Shares knowledge with the team
 - Offers facts, opinions, and relative experiences
4. **Challenger**
 - Questions the team's thinking to generate higher quality results
 - Plays devil's advocate
 - Asks "what if" questions
 - Thinks critically about input and urges team to consider different point of view
5. **Coordinator**
 - Helps to clarify group ideas and suggestions
 - Makes connections which can advance the problem solving process
6. **Evaluator**
 - Compares team's work to standards for the purpose of producing the best possible results.
7. **Completion Advocate**
 - Reminds group about unfinished business and the need for follow up
8. **Summery**
 - Summarizes what has been decided or accomplished at the meeting
9. **Secretary**
 - Takes notes and records ideas and decisions of the team.
10. **Time-Keeper**
 - Keeps team on task in terms of time available and tasks remaining
11. **Task Master**
 - Reminds team when the discussion has gone off task.
 - Refocuses the Team to the task at hand
12. **Procedure Development**
 - Develops procedure or methods of accomplishing the task.