
Effective Communication and Soft Skills: Wake Up Alarms

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‘Personality is to man what perfume is to flower.’

---Charles Schwab

Success is a journey without destination. It is a great motivating factor, but it can do us really good only if we can measure our own value and employ a yardstick to gauge our merit. Talent is about nourishing our skills and honing the underlying skills. In today's working scenario, where employers and employees are expecting high and survival of the fittest is the norm; instilling soft skills while sharpening hard skill has become imperative. With the ever changing rules for success in business, people are still looking for a magical formula that can make a remarkable difference in the growth of an organization. One may be naturally blessed with flair at technology and computers. But management views reveal that it is ultimately our soft skills that gear our performance at work place in a global world today.

No one can deny the fact that to get the desired success in career we require a blend of hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are the technical skills generally taught in the class rooms or laboratories i.e. through formal education. But they tend to build up simply the eligibility criteria to get a job. Job seekers with the same level of education and experience tend to have roughly the same level of hard skills. Soft skills are acquired, experienced and often practiced. They can neither be easily taught nor be developed by merely reading text books. They are the cluster of personality traits which influences the behavior of an individual.

Soft Skill is a term of recent origin. However, the corporate leaders have talked much about the term in the last decade and interestingly it has not yet been able to make a place in most dictionaries. It would be appropriate to call soft skills as people skill incorporating EQ and IQ that help us behave in a socially and professionally acceptable manner and make us adaptable in any environment with our congenial behavior. It may include effective communication, analytical thinking, leadership quality, creativity, accountability, interpersonal abilities, diplomacy, flexibility, problem- solving ability, adaptability and reliability. The training for

soft skills is an important part of human resource program. The soft skills training material is designed and focused with special importance to give a person more individuality.

Hard skills and soft skills can be considered to be two sides of the same coin –one without the other is of no impact. Hard skills can be learnt and measured to an established degree - through some conventional methods whereas soft skills can be critical in showcasing one's hard skills. Gandhi ji said **“Achievement is possible only when emotions run ahead of reason.”** It was his ability to communicate, motivate and ignite emotion among Indians which finally won freedom for us.

Hard skills can get a person an interview but soft skill will get that person a job. This article churns out various ways of utilizing English as a language of communication, identifying the soft skills and selling them in interviews. It highlights the gap between campus and corporate and methods of bridging this gap.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: AN INTEGRAL PART OF UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM AND CORPORATE REQUIREMENT

Globalization and the liberalization of Indian economy and the progression of University education changed the perception concerning English as a language. It reinforced the urge to acquire the basic skills to learn and comprehend English. In a country like ours where multilingualism is a unique national character; English was perceived and picked up as a language which could open up the doors of immense prospects and opportunities for youth. The assimilation of four skills LSRW (listening, speaking, reading and writing) which form a complete quadrangle of language proficiency meets the specific requirement of the present time workplace. It is noteworthy that many universities have incorporated English language in their curriculum. Academicians today have started using their competence of English literature to teach English language. They have accepted the fact that the ultimate objective of teaching and learning literature is to enable the students is to communicate effectively and express themselves. The linguistic and communicative competence of a teacher helps a student getting exposed to the elasticity of the language and reinforcing language skills in a better way. Thus, major emphasis should be laid on the study of words, idioms, syntax, grammar and pronunciation through innovative ways to trigger unmotivated readers and add wings to their imagination.

SOFT SKILLS: TO GET A JOB, DO A JOB AND KEEP A JOB

Communication in modern times has become language plus soft skill. Language is the medium to communicate our ideas, thoughts and emotions. English is the most common language in the global education scenario. Job interviews without exception are carried in English. But being well conversant in English is no more the deciding factor for the jobs which in past simply required English speaking people. The personality of a job seeker is adjudged not merely by virtue of his IQ (Intelligence Quotient) but also on the basis of his EQ (Emotional Quotient). In their effort to prepare for the job interview, the job seekers prepare their Resume and job application. This is the first step towards exhibiting the communication skill (language + soft skill) to the prospective employer. While hunting for a job, focus on the skill that interests your prospective employer should be the prime concern of the Resume. Required personality traits accompanied with the core technical skill enhance the chances of selection for the applied post if they are effectively demonstrated in the Resume.

Strong work ethic implies to self motivation towards work done. Setting the priority task, using the time on job wisely, working well under pressure and coordinating with the team are some of the most common soft skills employers are looking and will be assessing an employee for. It is important to note: The cost to replace an employee who leaves is , conservatively , 30% of their annual salary .For those with skills in high demand , the cost can rise to a frightening 1.5 times the annual salary to replace them. (American Management Association)

Despite the fact mentioned above, employee retention program are for loyal and motivated employees who add value to a company and help them strengthen the competence, not the underperformers or unwilling personnel. On the one hand, corporations are minutely preparing the retention programs; **‘hire slowly and fire quickly’** is the practice followed by HR Managers to keep on filtering the workforce.

SOFT SKILLS : A TOOL FOR PROMOTION

Success at workplace does not only depend on your efficacy and smooth articulation of the daily activities but also on your politeness and diplomacy in carrying those activities which only ensure that your performance is not mistaken for your potential. The traditional performance review system now merely amounts to annual appraisals, prepared just before a night they are due. Performance appraisals are no longer viewed as just a once-a-year event. Competitive Rewards Structure, Behavior Based Career Development Plan, Knowledge Transfer Strategy, Development Assessment are some of the features that distinguish a performance management program from the traditional review process. Corporations and individuals have now started to realize that soft skills are important as this is the nucleus and core constituent for securing sustainable growth. One should always remember that 'it is the attitude, not the aptitude that determines the altitude.

Fortunately, most graduate schools have started to teach Managerial Communication and Technical English. While courses such as Business Writing, Office Management and Public Speaking are offered, a course entitled, "The Effective Art of Listening to Your Customer", "Practice Compassion" are still trying to make their place in course curriculum. We live in a society that measures success through quantifiable metrics. The present evaluation system will fetch you good grades once you know the course stuff or simply mug it up, but will not enhance your grade for being able to deal with a real life difficult situation, showing compassion, or solving an unexpected problem on or off the campus. Yet most appreciation which comes to your credit are related to the use of soft skills than with your actual knowledge about a particular situation. As a customer we always appreciate "a greeting at the welcome desk" "willingness of the staff to help and assist at every step" and the fact that "she listened to my complaint and suggested fair solution." The use of these skills is what elevates your organization above the competition and sets you apart in the crowd making your presence visible.

In one of my workshop of AIMA, I came across a case of two individuals; George and James, working in the same company at equivalent level. George was a Management Graduate from a very reputed college and James was a simple post-graduate with no extraordinary degree but a very good track record in his company for giving perfection in his work.

James was promoted to Technical Project Manager at his consulting company. George and others wondered why James had risen to this level of management as his educational level was lower than others in the firm and his degree wasn't in an area that pertained to consulting. Though his ability to be positive in all situations and to naturally motivate people could not be placed in his resume, it proved to be his greatest strength and paved a way to success. He was quick to smile, generous in praising people, saw the positive side of every project and was consistently happy. These were his strengths - his natural attributes. They made up the sum of who James was. These soft skills are just as important as what James knew and others never thought them worth cultivating.

The challenge nowadays is to introduce a program that will allow the leaders to bridge the gap. We need to identify and capitalize fast on their soft-skills competencies. Soft skills are important and always have been. Under pressure of setting the target and hitting the target we have laid them aside and opted to emphasize too much on expertise and credentials.

Competing only with the quality of a product is no more result oriented. Success of an organization depends much on how well the people are used. Soft skills are especially required in the jobs where job requirements are defined in terms of expected outcomes and the process to achieve the outcomes may vary. These may, sometimes, be intangible yet may become trademark for a company for professionalism and excellent customer service many times. They provide differentiation between all the cookie-cutter look-alikes and play a vital role in customer loyalty. The essence of any business is the people. Making soft-skills development a priority brings entire team to a new level because it focuses directly on them. By allowing the human aspect of the employees to shine through, is indirectly encouraging them to do what comes naturally to them. These important skills need special notice while evaluating areas of improvement for a team. Finding a way to incorporate soft skills into the leadership development programs can give immediate results.

So it is high time to focus on soft-skills training as a tool to improve performance, leadership potential, and bottom line organizational success. While doing so following points deserve special mention:

1. **Be slow but steady** –It’s better to move slowly and steadily instead of getting a lecture about soft skill with a large number of people in a room. Being a part of an informative and entertaining workshop can work better than a formal lecture method. Such programs should also be designed to enhance other members of the team to develop interpersonal skills simultaneously.
2. **People Involvement** - Involve as many as you can on the decision to create a program, what to include within the program, and how to maintain the program. Engage them, give them the possibility to make changes with your training curriculum, do a pilot program with key people, and use the pilot program as an introduction to the group.
3. **Expert Advice** - Coaches and Organizational Consultants are experts in building rapport and establishing the right culture for these initiatives. With the right culture and the appropriate training, managers can continue the task of training and cultivating good relationships.
4. **Recognize Individual Achievement** - There is so much talk about teamwork today that we forget to emphasize how important it is to praise individual achievement as well. From time to time praise your stars. Recognizing personal contributions to the team is an excellent morale booster. This method can help in converting scars into stars.
5. **Distinguish between Individual and Collective Soft-Skill** - All people are not the same, so their soft skills and strengths are not the same either. Once you know who you have on your team, leverage their strengths and differences. Actually these are the facts that will help distinguish you and your organization from the competition. Illustrate how they can leverage each other's strengths inside the team to develop a new group "identity."

Soft Skills are, however, one of the most wrongly referred words since there is a general impression among many as interpreting those skills which are ‘soft’ because of its name. Though it is called ‘Soft’ skill yet it is hard to inculcate them within a short span of time. It somehow relates to our upbringing and company we tend to have most of the time, however can be developed at any stage with proper concern, adequate exposure and focused

training. Soft Skills can help in enhancing good internal communication which maintains a sense of ownership and a shared vision in the organization.

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