

Soft Skills : The Ladder to Success in the Corporate World

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Soft skills have become the key differentiate or for hiring managers when they are faced with the dilemma of choosing between two seemingly equal candidates. This change has come after due deliberation and analysis of cases where a new hire fizzles out merely because of the lack of soft skills. In the present paper the aim is to define and explain crucial soft skills at workplace and the role they play in corporate success. The paper researches at length the people skills, social and communication skills, leadership qualities and delves deep into the need to gauge the emotional quotient of employees which enables them to interact efficiently and perform exceptionally. Once the soft skills become integral to your personality it helps you navigate comfortably in the organization and complement your hard skills leading to maximization of output. Soft skills are unquantifiable professional attributes which allure hiring managers who look for this elusive skill set. Talent with right soft skills is scarce. The paper is an attempt to explore ways and means to ensure these skill sets are identified and embedded in one's personal.

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1. Introduction

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru in the Convocation Address delivered at the University of Pune on 27th January, 1955 had said :

“I would have English as an associate, additional language which can be used not because of facilities, but because I do not wish the people of non-Hindi areas to feel that certain doors of advancement are closed to them. So I would have it as an alternative language as long as people of India require it”.

The aim of education is modification of human skills and behaviour in a way that it becomes an agent for positive development. It fosters creative thinking and helps the learners to groom personally and professionally. It is not a mere bombardment of ideas and information but a medium to initiate life building and character making skills through proper assimilation of the ideas and information. Knowledge may be acquired from across disciplines; but if we are unable to put it to use in real life situations it is of little use. For this what one needs are skills in team work, time management, interaction skills, and leadership qualities. These are considered essential to career enhancement strategies vital for survival in the multi-cultural work environment in modern times. These soft skills, also called people skills are the key to success and achievement in the corporate world. As crucial as these skills are for management, the fact remains that soft skills can neither be mastered overnight nor can be obtained in a giant leap. It calls for sustained hard work, teaching, learning and training in a systematic way. It has been rightly remarked that good teaching is more than just communication. It is a social skill that trains the learner to be more adept at the personal and professional front and contributes substantially to the development of personality and shows astonishing results in one's career.

2. Communication Skills : Fundamental Social Survival Skills

The universal fact remains that man is a social animal by nature and is born to communicate with the people who come in contact with him/her. The need to interact, reach out, share, care and communicate is fundamental for survival and absence of the same makes one nervous, jittery and lonely. These brings us to the 'why' and 'how' of communication. 'Why' we communicate is answered

simply because we communicate mainly to share information, to persuade someone about something or merely to entertain. Strange as it may sound, the variety and diverse nature of communication happening across the globe can be easily categorized into these three purposes i.e., we communicate to inform, persuade or entertain. A simple example illustrates this point. Let us assume you are with a group of friends discussing a recently released movie. A friend who has seen the movie and dislikes it, shares her view and review dissuading you to visit the movie hall; So, she is simply performing the role of informing you. At the end of the conversation, you want to treat your friends with some homemade pasta and urge your mother to cook some i.e., you persuade her. Alongside, you search on the TV to catch on some comic series thereby entertaining yourself i.e., communication is playing the role of entertainment and recreation.

The 'how' of communication entails the understating of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication implies the exchanges of thoughts and ideas using words. Verbal communication may be in either spoken or written formats because the fundamental premise in both types of communication is the use of *verbum* which is the latin term for words. Words impart language to communication and form the building block of any society. They help build relationships, help make friends, resolve queries, give an opportunity to offer clarifications and facilitate understanding. Hence, communicating successfully and positively is the pivot around which your personal and professional life revolves and evolves. Competence in communication is a much sought-after skill and prevents you from being labeled as a 'geek' who might be a genius at social media platform but an utter disaster when faced with real life situations.

In order to master good communication skills, it is a good idea to plan conversations. It facilitates ready-made ideas in mind to accelerate communication in the right direction. To begin planning your conversation you make choose simple, casual and general topics because they make you comfortable and are also effective. Topics like weather, food, shopping, travel destination, books preference help to keep the conversation going and offer a kind of launch pad. Another important trick to be a good communicator is to be a good listener. It is important not to zone out or get distracted when another person is talking. Patient hearing paves the way for

interaction because it reflects your level of engagement and interest. It is a good practice to pay attention to others. Ask them about their lives, hobbies, their areas of interest, addressing them by their names - these are all tricks that give a personal touch to communication and makes the other person interested in you. Similarly, even before making an official telephonic call, it is good to jot down your questions, doubts and concerns. It keeps the conversation aligned in the right direction and communication keeps ticking instead of getting deviated. Politeness and appreciation go a long way in making you a good conversationalist. Also, be mindful, when in a group, to let the conversation be balanced. At times just your presence communicates; so, sit back and let others do the talking and your nod, and right body language can communicate more than words. Never be intimidated by what others say and feel. Your confidence and conviction should help you stride to the desired goal post. Building a strong word bank also helps strengthen communication. To develop an active, working vocabulary, you may choose to keep a vocabulary notebook where you jot down words, their usage, spellings, pronunciation. You may design your own color coding to make learning easy. Internet is replete with vocabulary enhancement sties like Hangaroo, wordl brain, scrabble.com, visu words.com etc. which are free for download on your mobile or tablet and tremendously help to boost vocabulary levels. It is also important to synergize yourself and make use of words creatively. It is important to broaden your vision and not limit the use of newly acquired vocabulary for essays and classrooms but in day to day life and real life conditions.

In addition to verbal communication, basic etiquettes like humility, clarity and friendliness go a long way in making you a good and effective communicator.

Non-verbal communication constitutes an equally vital component in soft skills. Verbal communication would be dry and ineffective as a skill if it was not augmented by gestures and facial expressions. In fact, good correct para language can compensate for an entire vocabulary, so it is important to focus on non-verbal indications. In fact, verbal constitutes only 7% of understanding whereas 93% of the meaning comes from non - verbal cues. In 1967, Albert Mehrabian came up with a study that asserted that interpretation of a message is verbal 7%, vocal 38% and visual 55%.

Sweating and fretting in stressful situations, sign of relief and relaxation when you come out of such situations missing eye contact when lying are all indicators of non- verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication can be gauged on seven distinct parameters grouped as KOPPACT syndrome :

K stands for kinesics i.e., posture and gestures

O stands for outer facial expressions and eye contact

P Stands for paralanguage i.e., tone, accent and pitch

P stands for Proxemics i.e., space and distancing

A Stands for artifacts i.e., dress and accessories

C stands for chronemics i.e., time and its management

T stands for touch

To put it simply non-verbal communication defines your personality your level of confidence, and competence and it also charts your path to success.

3. Emotional Intelligence : Much underrated but essential Soft Skill crucial for Success in the Corporate World

A click at Indiaspend.com brutally takes us to ugly figures from 2015 which reveal that almost 8934 students committed suicide due to parental stress, failure in examination or love, as trivial a thing a loss of mobile phone or simply because of obesity or inability to buy an I-phone. It is also worth considering that Tamil Nadu boasts of the best roads but highest recorded accident statistics. Most of these accidents are attributed to road rage and aggressive anger leading to over speeding, rash driving and mindless desire to overtake at the cost of life. The high-tech world has minimized social interactions and drastically affected the emotional status leading to a lot of behavioral changes and feeling of isolation. Even in social gatherings people are glued to their mobiles in fact the age-old diction of Shakespeare where he said "show me your friends and I will show you who you are" become irrelevant in today world because we hardly have friends. The irony is that you may have a long list of friends on social media platforms most of whom you might have never met. This is indeed food for thought even though it might be insightful and surprising.

William Stern and Alfred Binet way back in 1920's developed assessment that could gauge the IQ or the intelligence Quotient of individuals. While most people fall in the range of 85-115 just about 2.5 percent score over 130 and these tests are usually determinants of success in job. The question is about what success means to different people- is it happiness, money, health, spiritual well-being? Ironically, in the World Happiness Report Finland is the happiest nation followed by Norway and Denmark and Indian is dismally at 133rd position making us an unhappy nation. This report clearly contradicts success and happiness relationship. Happiness, in fact, means loving what you do, being passionate about your profession - as Einstein said "love your work; work your love". This is what we call emotional intelligence EI or emotional quotient EQ.

It reflects your ability to understand emotions of self and peers at work place and to ensure that all our efforts and energies are channelized to positively achieve success. All knowledge in technology, science, management and reasoning is of waste if emotions are not mastered deftly. The exponential rise in suicides is a clear reflection of lack of emotional maturity. Even the road rage, domestic violence, impulsive behavior outbursts may be attributed to emotional instability. Impatience is the buzzword in youngsters leading to high levels of irritation, frustration, anger and violence. All these emotions together, cloud our judgement and we become slaves of our emotions and lose our power of reasoning. Such emotional jeopardy and hijacking leads to poor productivity at workplace.

It's time to recognize our emotional baggage and work on the shortcomings to carve a place in the progressive corporate world. The ladder of emotional intelligence calls for a step-by-step approach to be followed. The first step is self-awareness i.e., recognition that a problem exists and the need to address it. It calls for a graded progress of self and others i.e., from self to selfless. It implies that in order to achieve emotional intelligence we need to let go our ego keeping an emo diary offers an outlet to suppressed emotions and works wonders in healing. Next important step in the ladder is self-regulation. Once the triggers are identified, positive regulation is crucial because emotional management leads to a congenial working environment and an emotionally imbalanced person creates an aura of stress. Hence emotional restraint in both happiness, and sadness is a must. Adaptability to situations around you also helps to regulate emotional disturbance. Besides these, matching expectations to one's

caliber, handling one project at a time and letting go approach instead of internalizing small matters can help to address the problem of emotional dysfunction.

Social intelligence reflects the ability to determine the mood, behavior and emotions of others and ways in which one can use this knowledge to strengthen bonds and relationships. Daniel Goleman rightly remarks, “empathy is our social radar”. It requires being able to read another’s emotions at a higher level, it entails sensing and responding to a person’s unspoken concerns or feelings. At the highest levels empathy is understanding the issues that lie behind others feelings”.

4. Functional and Interpersonal Skills : The Key to Synergizing Relationships

Functional skills are those that generate emotional awareness about the feelings of others thereby facilitating communication. Emotional awareness of your own feelings and those of others are important determinants of a harmonious workplace environment. Similarly, empathy, which is the ability to understand and relate to the feelings of others encourages good communication and helps to strengthen the bonds of trust. Along with empathy, our instincts also tend to send important signals which one can use to advantage in synergizing relationships. Synergy in this context implies enhancing output of two people or more, beyond their individual capacities through better emotional understanding. The aim of developing interpersonal skills is to identify skill sets of individuals in a group and transform them from ordinary workers to extra ordinary performers. A true leader is one who is capable of getting a group of people with diverse talents to work together in a positive environment where there is collective effort at problem solving, minimum blame game is at work and output is maximized. This is what synergy aims at.

Like interpersonal skills, social skills are the skills that we use to communicate with each other during our interactions. Our verbal, non-verbal ones, gestures and appearance also communicate volumes about our personality. Maintaining eye contact, appropriate body language, flexibility, co-operation, acceptance of difference of opinion without being defensive, positivity are all social skills that pave the way for good communication.

Leadership has been rightly defined as the ability to get extraordinary achievement from ordinary people. Leadership skills, too, like other soft skills, calls for a lot of planning, organizing, communication persuasion and negotiation. Goals have to be chalked out and means have to be devised to reach the goal post. The problem solving, decision making and conflict resolution skills have to be chiseled. What differentiates a leader from the others in the group is his / her attitude. The lion may not be the heaviest, tallest, smartest of all creatures - yet it is the king of the jungle only because its attitude conquers all.

5. Conclusion

Soft skills are attributes that an individual is either gifted with or learns over a period of time through sustained practice. These skills influence the way we work and interact with others. These are usually transferable skills like communication, team work management, decision making which enables an employee to make himself/herself comfortable in a workplace. Soft skills are an essential element for organizational and personal progression and ensure that the hard or core skills inherent in an individual are not suppressed. The problem is that these skills, have been undervalued and there is comparatively less training to none for these skills as compared to hard skills. However, the scenario is changing and organizations are fast realizing that these are universal skills crucial to success.

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