



## SOFT SKILLS: A KEY TO PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*Soft skills are personal attributes that drive an individual's interactions, increase job performance and brighten their career prospects. De-motivation, insubordination, unpredictable behaviour, deception, conflicts and dis-trust are generally the output from the absence of soft skills and values. Soft skills are learned behaviours which require training and focussed application in that particular area. Soft skills will enable performers with a strong conceptual and practical framework to build, develop and manage teams at workplaces. They play an important role in the development of the people's overall personality, thereby enhancing their career prospects (Mangala 2010). For effective performance in the workplace, companies need their employees to have not only technical knowledge, analytical skills, but the skills to deal with the external world of clients, customers, vendors, the government and public and to work in a collaborative manner with their colleagues. Soft skills make up that we are, generally encompassing our attitudes, habits and how we interact with other people. They are much less tangible than hard or technical skills. These skills can't be learnt by enrolling in a training program. However, they can be acquired through educational, work and life experiences.*

**Key Words:** *Interactions, Behaviours, Technical Knowledge, Training, Acquired.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Undeniably, soft skills have drawn the attention of people in all sectors in modern times as it was never before. Soft skills are the positive traits expected in a good and sincere person and have to be developed as a habit. It is generally believed that all the positive aspects of a man and the values he respect will fall within the ambit of the term soft skills. It is accepted as intelligence which is reflected by the manner in which a person expresses his feelings in the most appropriate and effective way. It tells how one should act and react in particular situations and with selected persons. To be more precise, it is a study about how you behave and interact with the people around you.

These skills are transferable skills, so they can be used in different types of jobs altogether. They are personal qualities and attitudes that can help you to work better comparatively and make a positive contribution towards the organisations, where we are employed. However, it doesn't mean that technical skills and knowledge aren't important. But it is the fact that technical skills can be taught easily than soft skills comparatively.

Educational degrees are important, but the development of soft skills is more social than technical. These are a crucial part of fostering a dynamic workforce and are always in high demand.

Everybody gains skills from past jobs, responsibilities, life experiences, daily occurring events and interests. We may even have hidden skills and when they are identified can be added to our resume and help us to become a better contender (By Med Hunters, 2010)

## SOFT SKILLS VERSUS HARD SKILLS

There are hard skills and there are soft skills. Hard skills are specific, can be taught. Hard skills are the minimum skills necessary to perform a job. It is seen that most people with the same level of education and experience should have roughly the same level of hard skills. Hard skills would include knowledge, machine operation, computer procedures, safety standards, financial systems, technical analysis, and sales administration. Unlike soft skills, hard skills are typically easy to observe, quantify, and measure.

Soft skills are more important than hard skills. They are must for a person to be a good human being and to succeed in his professional life. The position we hold in a Society depends on our social skills that facilitates interpersonal behaviour. Our qualification or status will not contribute anything if we do not interact positively with others. A person who has a smile on his face and is helpful will always gain more respect than a person who is harsh and



dominant.

It is said that hard skills may earn you an interview but it is your soft skills that will get you the job. CEOs and HR Managers of many companies are suggesting that companies may perform better if they hire people with good soft skills and then train them to develop their hard skills in their area of specialization.

Soft skills are often intangible and are not easily taught. Soft skills is related to a collection of personal, positive attributes and competencies that enhance your relationships, job performance, and value to the market. Soft skills include your ability to listen well, communicate effectively, be positive, handle conflict, accept responsibility, show respect, build trust, work well with others, manage time effectively, accept criticism, work under pressure, be likable, and demonstrate good manners. They tend to be more of a function of personality characteristics such as communication, motivation, sociability and work ethic. Some soft skills include leadership, creativity, ambition, accountability, ability to teach, interpersonal abilities and reliability. In the competitive selection process, most employers use soft skills to differentiate one candidate from another. Job seekers can gain a competitive advantage over other candidates by gaining a firm understanding of their own soft skills and then by clearly defining those skills to potential employers.

## **IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS**

Soft skills are considered as time management, communication skills, interaction skills, interpersonal skills, the ability to work, the co-operation, the feeling of sympathy and belongingness with others, and so on. A more complex definition of soft skills is “*a range of abilities including work ethics, courtesy, teamwork, self-discipline and self-confidence, professional presence, language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, communication skills, ability to accept and learn from criticism, ability to handle client relationships, networking, creativity, ability to motivate yourself and lead others, time management, leadership and interpersonal skills*”.

The relative importance of each skill is associated with its profession. In the IT Services industry, communication skills (particularly listening skills), business communication skills, problem solving skills and team skills are considered crucial and complex to understand. In organized retail, the main required skills are communication skills, selling skills, advertising and distribution skills, customer service skills. This also holds true for the financial services sector too.



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## **SOME SKILLS WHICH ARE MUST FOR PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE:**

**1. Meaningful Communication:** This is the most common entry on person specifications for job vacancies; skilled communicators get attention of their colleagues easily. The subordinates also listen and understand instructions and put their point across them without getting angry or annoyed. In addition, they can change their style of communication as per demanded by their job time to time. This can be invaluable in many situations, i.e. from handling conflict to trying to persuade a customer of the benefits of buying your product. If one has got good communication skills you should be able develop constructive working relationships with colleagues and be able to learn from constructive criticism. Communication skills involve active listening, presentation and excellent writing capabilities.

**2. Decision Making:** It helps in better decision making as soft skills save your energy which otherwise could have been wasted in anger and envy. Therefore, it helps in gathering the important facts, seeking advice, looking at the big picture, considering alternatives, being aware of repercussions will always help in making a good decision.

**3. Commitment towards work:** Employers want people who are dependable, reliable, realistic, enthusiastic and enjoy hard work. Employees that are committed need very little supervision or motivation to do their best and get the job done.

**4. Flexibility in actions:** We live in frequently changing times in the workplace, so if one is adaptable and flexible, only then he will be able to change with the times. It's a great asset if you are able to step outside your comfort zone and try your hand at something you haven't done before. Employers like people who are positive, upbeat and have a 'can-do' attitude.

**5. Time management:** When deadlines are approaching, good time management is about prioritising the most important tasks, and then deciding which actions will produce the maximum output with the minimum effort, so that task can be accomplished well in time.

**6. Leadership skills:** A good leader is the one who inspires others and get the things done in his own way. They look for people who lead constantly look to improve, motivate themselves are having a positive outlook and they know very well as when to follow instructions and when to show initiative.

**8. Team player:** A good team player has the team goals clear in their mind and works with others to achieve them. They are open and honest, and offer constructive suggestions and listen to others.



**9. Accept and undertake responsibility:** Employers are on the lookout for people who take pride in their work. They are confident enough to bring out the results. They also respect people who can hold their hands up when things go wrong. Generally, everyone makes mistakes but it is more important than how you react on those mistakes and how you learn from them that counts.

**10. Work under pressure:** In work, performance is must and it is also the fact that some people perform better when they are in stress. This approach sometimes helps us to perform beyond our expectations.

**11. Computer and technical literacy:** Almost all jobs require basic competency in computer software, if computer skills are relevant to your field, then you should add a "Technical Skills" or section to your resume. It will help better to move ahead in life with promotion.

**12. Interpersonal skills:** The ability to work in teams, involvement with people and manage conflict is a valuable asset in the workplace. This skill is important to move forward. Personal accomplishments are important but how you can work well with others is important and accountable also.

**15. Project management skills:** Organization, planning and effectively implementing and evaluating the projects and tasks is highly effective skill to have. Nowadays, many companies aren't hiring project managers because they expect all of their employees to possess certain skills.

**16. Problem-solving skills:** The ability to use creativity, reasoning, past experience, information and available resources to resolve issues is attractive because it saves everyone at the organization valuable time.

**18. Strong work ethic:** Employers are looking for employees that take initiative, are reliable and can do the job right the first time. Managers don't have the time or resources to babysit, so this is a skill that is expected from all employees. Don't make the hiring manager second-guess by sending a resume with typos, errors and over-exaggerated work experience.

**19. Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence is usually something that is revealed through actual interactions with the hiring manager, but you can hint that you have it with a strategic resume that addresses areas where your experience and skills are lacking relative to the job requirements.

**20. Bring your soft skills noticed:** Sometimes, in Interviews, think of concrete and interesting examples of when you've used these skills in your work or personal life and



mention them also. For Example, how you have used to manage your time along with family, working under pressure, being creative and communicating well. Likewise with your school, college or university work, you'll have used many of these skills.

**21. Networking Skills:** The bigger and stronger the network helps to get things done more easily (e.g., find a job, get advice, find business partners, find customers, etc...)

## **SELF MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

Self-Management Skills address how you perceive yourself and others, manage your emotions, and react to adverse situations. They help us to succeed in professional and personal life. These skills are Growth mindset, Self-awareness, Emotion regulation, Self-Confidence, Stress management , Resilience, Skills to forgive and forget, Persistence and Perseverance, Patience and Perceptiveness.

## **SOFT SKILLS AT THE WORK PLACE**

It is generally believed that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get and keep the job. It's no longer enough to be an expert in a field of knowledge. Competition is high and it will be your soft skills that make you stand out in crowd. More and more companies have recognized that in order to gain a competitive advantage, they need to make sure their people know how to handle themselves at work and how to relate with their customers and peers. Soft skills are important not only in the obvious positions that deal with customers. But, they are important for every person in an organization. Look at the people at the top in your profession and ask yourself, "Is it their *hard skills* or *soft skills* that got them to the top?" If you define their salary structure and designation, you will quickly realize that the people at the top of the pay scale are those who excel in their soft skills.

### **How to identify own's soft skill?**

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. For this, one should identify different attributes such as Personal accountability, the degree of collaboration, Interpersonal negotiation skills, conflict, People's adaptability, flexibility, the clarity of Communication, Creative thinking and inclusion. These all skills have a significant impact on the attitude a person brings to interactions with clients, customers, colleagues, supervisors, and other stakeholders. The more positive is the attitude, the better will be the relationships. That's what fosters great team performance, and leads people to contribute strongly to the organization's vision and strategy.



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## **BUILDING SOFT SKILLS**

The time you spend developing your soft skills will never be wasted. Even if you change careers five times, the soft skills you learn today can always be used to set you apart in whatever you do with your life. If you want to learn some soft skills, these are the starting points that you must follow in your life.

**1. Prioritise the thing that you should do:.** You know many of the things you should be doing to develop better relationships, increase your productivity and be more responsible. So do them by prioritising for them.

**2. Observe others frequently and deeply:** Sometimes you come across many people who impress you. When you are drawn to someone, ask yourself the reason. If you received excellent service from someone, think about what this person did that impressed you. There is a lot that you can learn by watching others.

**3. Updating and Awareness:** Positive change begins with awareness. So be aware about the surroundings. Add all those events in your communication and people will consider you the person with intellect. That is the key towards the professional excellence.

**4. Become a student of personal and professional success.** If you have a genuine desire to improve your soft skills, start consuming content on the subject. Be a student to learn the things and never stop learning as every new day comes with a challenge.

**5. Be intentional every day.** Every day make efforts to achieve your goals ethically and realistically. Success doesn't come naturally. You have to make an investment of long hours on it. Getting better won't come without effort. While some of the things will come naturally to you, others will require an intentional effort.

The great thing about building your soft skills is that you can acquire them on your own. Then, background, gender or education, developing your soft skills will become irrelevant and these skills will make you stand out from the crowd in whatever you choose to do.

### **Soft Skills Have Broad Application**

Developing interpersonal skills affects personal and professional life for example,

- You will attract like-minded people into your life.
- You will gain people's respect and admiration.
- Your example will teach others how they can be more successful.
- You will feel that you have more control of your life.
- Your relationship with your spouse, children, and friends will deepen.



In addition to the long list of ways your life will be enhanced, you will be making this world a better place. Never underestimate the impact can your positive example have on people's lives, both directly and indirectly. Soft skills are the keystones to success. 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. There are some areas to examine and evaluate are Creative thinking, Personal accountability, the clarity of communications, the degree of collaboration with boss and colleagues, Inclusion and Coaching, mentoring, negotiation skills, Conflict resolution, People's adaptability and flexibility within the organization.

### **CONCLUSION:**

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. 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. 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. Most important you should be clear and intentional about what you want, keep aware of what is going on around you and inside you, have empathy for one another, appreciate your and other's performance, know your limits and stretch beyond them.



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