

## Soft skills: A certain path to success

MUKUND B. GUND\* AND NEELIMA R. NEMADE

Department of Communication Skills, Shivajirao S. Jondhale College of Engineering, Sonarpada, Dombivali (E),  
THANE (M.S.) INDIA

**Key words :** Soft skills, Interpersonal, Negotiation and etiquettes

Today we have demands everywhere for a successful professional. Companies are looking forward to professionals having all kinds of skills to succeed. While hard skills and technical skills form a major core, soft skills are essentially needed to make effective contribution. Now keeping this in mind teaching schemes at Boards, Universities, Colleges, and Schools have started giving importance to group presentations, projects, group discussions, public speaking and mock interviews which involve a lot of opportunities to acquire soft skills. To improve one's personal as well as professional effectiveness one has to master soft skills. These soft skills are vital for our professional progress. Employees at all levels work in an environment in which technical knowledge alone may not be sufficient to create value for the customers. Companies in India are rising faster and faster to meet their expansion needs. At the same time, they are not getting the candidates possessing the necessary managerial skills to lead teams and handle projects efficiently. Companies in the sections like BPO, IPO, Pharmaceuticals and management have found that their employees need soft skills to work effectively.

Few years back technical knowledge was supposed to be the major factor contributing to the success of an individual but currently soft skills are turning the tables. Soft skills are a set of skills necessary for a person to succeed in one's work area. Proficiency in technical and hard skills is a basic prerequisite to succeed in one's chosen professional area but at the same time to improve ones' career prospects and to enhance one's personality as a whole one needs soft skills. The umbrella term "Soft Skills" cover abilities such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, team skills, negotiation skills, team management, business etiquettes etc. Soft skills play a significant role in one's success in life particularly in one's profession. They help one to excel in the work place and their importance can not be denied in this age of information and knowledge, soft skills in the highly competitive corporate world will help one to achieve success. Organizers, particularly those who frequently come in contact with customers face to face, are generally

more prosperous if they train their staff to use these soft skills effectively. Soft skills have become absolutely essential for the success of the organizations and the individuals. It is essential to be technically sound but one should have the personality traits, social graces, understanding optimism and impeccable english for effective communication.

### *What are soft skills?*

Soft skills by nature involve working with others. In the initial years of one's career, one's technical abilities are important to get good assignments. It is the soft skills that matter when it comes to growing in an organization. Soft skills are also known by varied names such as Generic skills, Life skills, People skills, and Survival skills. These skills can be acquired by constant practice. Corporate houses have started to take up the task of grooming employees in soft skills. We work through our marketable skills, teamwork and self-motivation to get the things done. Healthy lifestyle choices, stress management, disease prevention and personal safety are our prime concerns for better living. Self-esteem, self-responsibility, character, managing feelings and self-discipline must be practiced without fail for our well-being. In a nutshell, the essence of life skills is to share well, care well and fare well. There was a time, not long ago, when soft skills including communication were thought of as poor cousins of the hard skills. While investing considerable time and resources to acquire the hard skills, bright students ignored the soft skills. It was thought that once you mastered the hard skills, slowly soft skills would follow without any special effort. Teachers and parents often endorsed this lop-sided view of social and technical skills. In the globalized world, 'techies' are discovering the harsh reality that technical skills without soft ones would make them knowledge workers, not managers or leaders. Hard skills may be perishable and machine-replaceable. Those who cannot communicate will lose out; they get much less credit for their achievements than they deserve.

\* Author for correspondence.

**Attributes regarded as soft skills:**

When we think of success we tend to think about contributors and soft skills is one of them. To stride the path to success at the workplace one needs to acquire, train one in the soft skills. The following attributes have helped us to understand the concept of soft skills.

**Emotional intelligence:**

Emotional intelligence is new way to understand and assess people's behaviors, management styles, attitudes and interpersonal skills. All of us have met people who are academically brilliant and yet are socially and interpersonally inept. And we know that despite possessing a high IQ rating success does not automatically follow. Basically EI embraces two aspects

- Understanding yourself, your goals, intentions, responses behaviour and all
- Understanding others and their feelings.

Also it includes self control, zeal persistence and the ability to motivate oneself. EI is a mutability determining how well we can use whatever other skills we have including raw intellect. EI is learning ways to handle anxieties anger and sadness. It is psychological process.

People with well developed emotional skills are more likely to be content and effective and tend to be extremely successful in their lives. If you are able to understand the feelings of people in front of you and then react to them accordingly imagining yourself in their place that is being empathetic or emotionally intelligent. If you are able to sort out the problems and find solutions in such way that feeling of both can be understood and cared by each other. This capacity is emotional intelligence.

The following two emotional competencies have always contributed more to success than technical skills

**Social competencies:**

These competencies determine how we handle relationship, intuition, empathy and our awareness of others feelings and concerns. In social competency we can include understanding people development, leadership skills, conflict resolution and influencing others.

**Personal competencies:**

These competencies determine how we manage ourselves. In personal competencies following points can be included:

Emotional awareness: recognizing one's emotions and their effect and impact on others.

Accurate self assessment: knowing one's strengths and limits

*Self confidence:* sureness about one's self worth

and capabilities.

*Self regulation:* managing one's internal states, impulses and recourses. Self control and adaptability are needed to regulate one self.

If a person tries to be assertive, empathetic, positive, patient and concerned that is nothing but being emotionally intelligent.

**Communication skills:**

Human beings need to communicate with each other to live in society. When a message is sent out it becomes communication only when it is understood, acknowledged reacted to or replied to by the receiving party. For a person in the commercial world it is very important to know how to communicate effectively to achieve success. The businessmen must know how to communicate with out loss of time with his customers and other businessmen. Managers and supervisors must be able to communicate their orders and instructions in a clear manner to their subordinates. Their ability to communicate ideas to others effectively is an absolutely essential requirement for those who wish to be successful, communication skills could be the deciding factor in determining whether or not you on the path of a success. Both oral and written communication skills of certain standard are required to be developed so as to achieve professional success.

An effective communication can persuade people and get things done. Communication skills have become the key to success in every organization. It is a well established fact that effective communication is made possible with the help of language. No matter what your area of responsibility or the type of organization for which you work, you will, sooner or later, be expected to give presentation or speech. You may be asked to task to colleagues, clients, suppliers or the general public. Regardless whom you are talking to, the subject matter or the duration of your presentation and your ability to effectively communicate with your audience and engage them directly reflects on your company and you. As career progresses presentation skills become even more important because, at entry level, executives may require mostly technical skills but as they rise in management, they are required to rely less on technical training and more on their ability to tell their ideas and plans to next level of management. Speaking effectively and powerfully is a skill that is really worth learning. Successful and inspiring speakers are remembered not only because they were eloquent, humorous, or had a good style, but primarily and principally because their message and ideas caused a change in their audience's actions, attitudes, lives or made the purpose clear to them.

As written communication skills are important to reinforce professional and business relations in order to succeed in today's competitive environment. We need effective writing skills to be successful. An effective writing skill occupies a very important place in the scientific and technological world. A student or professional of business science, technology, and industry has to learn effective writing skills to write technical reports, papers, user manual, letters and memos, proposals and instructions. Their primary interests lie in technical areas; it appears that most science and engineering students pursue their technical subjects without extra writing courses; practicing engineers and scientists work on technical projects. It might therefore seem that writing as well as communication is superfluous to technical education. In fact this is not the case. Scientists and engineers may be technically brilliant and creative, but unless they can convince co-workers, clients, and supervisors of their worth, their technical skills will be unnoticed, unappreciated, and unutilized. In other words, if technical people cannot communicate to others what they are doing and why it is important, it is they and their excellent technical skills that will be superfluous.

#### ***Team skills:***

Teams Skills, as we all know, has become a very important part of corporate work culture today. Forming the right kind of team, creating the right chemistry to work and creating the working atmosphere are an important part of getting the desired results. However team skills have become so popular in today's organizations that they deserve special attention. Team is especially to get individual together and to motivate them. A team performance includes both individual results and what we call collective work product. A collective work product is what two or more members must work on together; it reflects the joint real contribution of team members. Team members necessarily have differences in terms of knowledge, skills and experience. With these differences, in fact, it is difficult to manage the team task. At the same time it is also necessary that these differential factors are combined and integrated as one. Team members have to trust one another while at the same time remain vigilant. There has to be the right balance between trust and scrutiny. While trust in this context is very important for the collective functioning of the team, constant testing and assessment of other's opinions is also important.

The effectiveness of teams may be measured based on the extent to which the team achieves its objectives and performs on behalf of the overall organization. For teams to be more effective they must overcome some of

the problems and dysfunctions. Effectiveness include creating the right environment where support, commitment, reward, systems, communication systems and physical space all in to allow the team to work in a productive atmosphere. Effective team skills establish sense of partnership and allow members to see the team as unit and as an attractive work arrangement. Today's world is driven by innovation leading to constant change and success of an organization depends on its teams. Thus it has become almost compulsory to train the people in team skills to be successful.

#### ***Team management:***

A team is any group of people organized to work together interdependently and cooperatively to meet the needs of their customers by accomplishing a purpose and goals. Successful project teams just don't happen. They have to be thought of, Planned and built through effective leadership and commitment. Project managers have to iron out differences among the team members. They have to get the best out of the members so that the team is dynamic in view of continuous developments in the project.

Project management involves the following functions – Forecasting, Planning, Organizing, Directing, Coordinating, Motivating, Controlling, and Communicating. It is obvious that lot of soft skills prove beneficial in managing teams successfully.

The most essential Ten Basic Soft Skills for outstanding Leadership or Team Management are Integrity, Vision/strategy, Communication, Relationships, Persuasion, Adaptability, Teamwork, Coaching and Development, Decision-making and Planning. If the employees posses, or are trained to acquire these soft skills, the organizations may achieve the optimum standard.

#### ***Interpersonal skills:***

Interpersonal skills are critical for people in organizations as their primary job responsibilities include hiring, supervising, mentoring and retaining employees. Interpersonal skills are related to understand and manage one's own feelings, actions, and those of others in social contacts. In organizations a person with good interpersonal skills will be able to interact effectively with his/her supervisors, subordinates and peers. In various job situations like giving directions, motivating, and decision making etc. interpersonal skills play an important role. Some of the essential interpersonal skills required by people to succeed are given below:

*Self awareness:*

People/ one should have a clear awareness about his or the strength or weaknesses. This can serve as the preliminary steps for them get success.

*Self control :*

One should be aware of whether they are able to maintain adequate control on themselves. There may be times when they feel they are losing control over themselves in such cases, it is important of them to realize that it is time to improve their interpersonal and leadership abilities.

*Acknowledging the interests of subordinates:*

It is necessary that one should understand the view point and interest of subordinates in various organizational situations. This will enable them to identify if any conflict of interest exists between them and the subordinates and to handle the situation effectively in case it does exist.

*Negotiation skills:*

Negotiation is one of the commonest activities we do almost every day in our lives. We sort out differences with people; we talk, discuss and try to get what we want; we bargain not only in shops, but also with people around us in many subtle ways and settle small details. Generally we negotiate for price, discount, delivery, payment term, extras, follow up, timing, schedules, guarantees, place, options, service, etc. In organizations of today, with the increased need for collaboration and cooperation, negotiation has become a must for managers and for all people who are on decision- making positions. Although all of us pick up negotiation skills part of our growing up, it is also necessary to consciously learn and nurture it as a desirable skill like other important skills. "Negotiation is a process in which two or more parties exchange goods or services and attempt to agree upon the exchange rate for them." Negotiation occurs when there is no system- no fixed or established set of rules or procedures- for resolving the conflict or when the parties prefer to work outside of the system to invent their own solution. E.g. - If we keep a rented book too long, the library will charge us a fee, but we might be able to negotiate that fee if we have a good excuse as to why the book is being returned late.

Sometimes people fail to negotiate because they do not recognize that they are in a negotiating situation. By choosing options other than negotiation they may fail to identify a good opportunity and not achieve their goal or may not manage their problems as smoothly as they like to. People may also recognize the need for Negotiation

but do poorly because they misunderstand the process and do not have good negotiation skills. Interdependent goals are an important aspect of negotiation skills. The structure of the inter dependence between different negotiating parties determine the range of possible outcomes of the negotiation and suggests the appropriate strategies and tactics that the negotiator should use.

One should master these skills to be successful in the personal and professional life. One needs to understand thoroughly the negotiation process. Negotiating in a way means you are able achieve desired out comes and still maintain successful ongoing relationships with other. Influencing positively will help you achieve more of what you want and build relationship based on openness, trust understanding and mutual respect. It may be with an employer, family member or business etc. We all negotiate for many things each day like higher salary, better service or solving a dispute with a co-worker or family member. Negotiation is a process, not an event. There are predictable steps preparations, creating the climate, identifying interests, and selecting outcomes that you will go through in any negotiation.

With practice, you will gain skill at facilitating each step of the process. As your skill increases, you'll discover that negotiating can be fun.

Know who you're negotiating with, before you begin. What's his or her reputation as a negotiator? Win / Win model or Win / Lose model? Does the person want to negotiate with you, dread (fear) the negotiation, or is this a neutral situation It s not enough to know what you want out of negotiation. You also need to anticipate what the other party wants (double think). The smart negotiator also tries to anticipate what the other party thinks you want (triple think).

Let us first look in those basic principles that hold well in all negotiable situations.

- Negotiation is entirely a voluntary activity. Either of the parties can refuse to negotiate at any time.
- Whatever be the topic and kind of negotiation, the outcome is largely dependent on the values, attitudes, personal beliefs and emotions of the people at the table.
- Negotiation starts because at least one or both the parties feel dissatisfied with the present situation. They want to change and they believe that a mutually agreeable solution is possible.
- A successful negotiation is not always a win-lose situation. It is both parties being satisfied with the result.
- Timing is an extremely important factor in negotiation. Coming up with the right proposal at the right time invariably decides the success of the negotiation

activity.

After studying the negotiation process, professionals will be able to do well in their jobs.

### ***Time management:***

Time is a very precious resource. It cannot be stored. It can only be spent. The way people spend their time determines their success. Time management is not about working faster or working longer, it is about spending time based on priorities. It ensures that time is spent on activities that are important and not on time wasting or unimportant activities. It helps an individual to perform activities effectively and efficiently. Effective time management plays a vital role in improving the productivity of an organization. Time management has become all the more important because of the rapid technological advances that have taken place while the improvements in technological are providing access to information at a faster pace, helping in faster decision making they are putting added pressure on people in the form of tougher deadlines and targets. As one has the same amount of time to deal with all these responsibilities, they have to learn to be effective in managing time. Perhaps it is the most powerful strategy for having more time and getting important things done to avoid things that waste your time.

“Offloading means purging no critical tasks from your schedule so you can work with focus on thins that are high on your priority list.

The following tips can help one to manage his/ her time

- Eliminate bad habits that waste time
- Avoid distractions
- Make and use standard operating procedures
- Adjust your schedule to your energy levels.
- Maintain peak energy during the day.
- Don't be a perfectionist
- Stay focused
- Do work you enjoy.
- Etiquettes:

Etiquette is a code that governs the expectations of social behaviour within a society, social class or group, which is usually unwritten. Etiquettes usually reflect formulae of conduct in which society or tradition has its base. There are no rules and regulations. They are a voluntary system of behaviour. They have evolved from basic decency. Etiquettes have to do with good manners and making other people feel comfortable by the way we behave. There are a number of things you can do in your personal and professional life to turn things in your favour.

Some of these etiquettes can be given as follows.

- Personal etiquettes
- Business etiquettes
- Social etiquettes
- Interview etiquettes
- Telephone etiquettes

### ***Conclusion:***

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 lot of other personal traits are the soft skills that are crucial for career success. The various paradigms in the organizations like project management, Knowledge management, Integrated product teams (IPT), Concurrent engineering, Quality systems and processes, Global project teams, Rapid changes in business and technology, and Innovation / Productivity improvement require the soft skills like personal accountability, the degree of collaboration, Interpersonal negotiation skills, Conflict resolution skills, People's adaptability and flexibility, the clarity of communications, attention to details, assertiveness, integrity, Business etiquettes, cultural sensitivity, and stress (self ) management skills. 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 – is crucial for success of organizations. 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 to know how to behave on the job. It's important to recognize the fundamental role soft skills play within a team and not only work on developing and encouraging them throughout the organization. Areas to examine and evaluate include: Creative thinking, Inclusion, Coaching and mentoring. The more of these things in an organization, the better people's soft skills are likely to be within it. 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. If the employees demonstrate Soft Skills while working as teams, it promotes great team performance, and leads people to contribute strongly to the organization's vision and policy.

**REFERENCES**

**Alex, K** ( ). Soft Skil (S. Chand, Publication)

**Daniel Goleman** ( ). Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ?

**Robert W. Bly** ( ). Time Management: Make Every Second Count

---

*Accepted : November, 2009*