

Work hard on your soft skills

Mastering them will help in your personal growth and career progression

WHEN it comes to job performance, personal growth and career progression, hard skills are important. However, it is a person's soft skills that sets him apart and make the most important difference.

Hard skills are typically technical and functional in nature. They are specific, and usually related to the job, its products, processes and the organisation. They focus on explicit activities with objective outcomes that are clearly visible and measurable.

Because these skills are specific, not all transfer well to other environments. A change of job therefore usually requires the learning of a new set of practices and processes. But their tangible nature means that it is relatively straightforward to learn them.

Soft skills relate more to personal qualities, inner feelings, and outer expressions. They are picked up unconsciously from birth, modelled by friends, family and social situations. They focus on interactions and relationships, are more subjective in nature and difficult to spot and quantify.

Soft skills are highly transferable to new environments, and usable within any job, company, industry or country. Examples of soft skills include communication, networking and presentation skills, influencing,

decision-making, coaching and leadership skills.

They are highly valuable skills for an individual to acquire for improved job performance, personal growth and career development.

However, acquiring new soft skills may feel difficult, as it often requires letting go of old habits – that is the really hard part.

Acquiring soft skills helps you deliver a desired competitive edge. They are strongly related to emotional intelligence or EQ.

Salovey & Mayer, and then Daniel Goleman, highlighted the concept of EQ during the mid-1990s.

EQ draws heavily on a person's soft skills. It is an amalgam of cognitive ability, emotional competences and social skill sets. It is an intensely powerful concept, because relevant emotional and social skills and competences can be labelled and then learnt. Dr Goleman's concept sets out four key areas – two personal and two interpersonal.

1 SELF-AWARENESS

This is the starting line, though many people don't reach this point as they pay little attention to their surroundings.

Self-awareness relies on tuning into how the environment makes you feel. It means tapping into your intuition, and listening to your inner conversations – your "self-talk".

It relies on you making an accurate self-assessment of the interactions between you and your environment and then having the confidence to take action.

2 SELF-MANAGEMENT

Action begins with ownership. It requires a belief in your ability to make a difference; to be self-efficacious. Self-management calls on you to take charge of your situation. It means acknowledging your feelings and thoughts, providing a series of options, making decisions and taking action.

It is about seizing the initiative to put yourself back in control of your own situation in positive ways. It means trusting yourself to do the right thing, which in turn, will achieve the right personal and business outcomes.

3 SOCIAL AWARENESS

Understanding begins with empathy. It requires a re-tuning of personal



Acquiring soft skills help you develop a competitive edge, make you a team player and enable you to perform your job better.

motivations, to allow a person to draw strength and do right by others too.

Social awareness calls on you to not just place yourself in the other person's shoes, it also demands that you take steps along the path they take, no matter how different it may seem from your own.

It requires building deep-seated, long-lasting relationships founded upon trust, respect and honesty. It means being attuned to differing perspectives and investing time to truly

appreciate the perspectives from another person's viewpoint.

4 RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Leadership calls for teamwork. It requires influence and an unequivocal commitment to develop others in positive ways.

Relationship management calls on you to reach out to others, build bridges and cement bonds in deeply enmeshed networks of relationships.

It recognises that relationships are built around value, influence and persuasion, as well as positive and clear communication with others.

It requires recognition that you cannot do it all alone; others are important too. It means being a committed team player who harnesses cooperation and collaboration for the collective good of the business.

Career progression

Tapping into the softer side houses real benefits for job performance, personal growth and career development.

First, soft skills are the glue upon which relationships are built, which in today's team-based yet globally dispersed world helps you perform tasks to the best of your ability.

Next, where IQ makes little perceived discernible difference among peers, soft skills set people apart, allowing others to notice your contributions and personal growth.

Finally, career development is about connections, and your ability to make and maintain good connections will provide opportunities for career development over time.

So, choose to become more emotionally intelligent by embracing transferable soft skills, and see how they can work for you.

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