

Scaling the Corporate Ladder - the Soft-skilled Way

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Can you interact positively with others? Do you impress people into your communication skills? Development of soft skills is crucial to a successful career.

"Nearly 25% time to cover the syllabus should be spent on professional skill development to improve employability."

— Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

There is no denying the fact that the requirements for professional success change rapidly and constantly. Till recently, subject knowledge and technical expertise were the cardinal criteria for employability. Soft skills were virtually sidetracked or even relegated to the back space. But times have changed, and people are now alive to the crucial importance of communication skills, corporate etiquette and leadership skills in facing a job interview or group discussion confidently. The oft-ignored soft skills have emerged, of late, as a decisive tool that could make or break one's career prospects.

It is axiomatic that notwithstanding their knowledge in academic subjects, a majority of students are deficient in soft skills that advance their profession and enhance performance. Owing to budgetary constraints, most companies are currently shying away from training fresh recruits. Hence the centrality of the acquisition of soft skills.

'Soft skills' is a sociological term related to a person's attributes like emotional intelligence, social graces, communication and cognition. These competencies complement hard skills which are the occupational requirements of a job. Also referred to as



interpersonal skills or people skills, they encompass proficiencies like communication skills, professionalism, social etiquette, negotiation skills, problem solving, personal effectiveness, audience awareness, strategic thinking, team building, salesmanship, tactfulness, urbanity and adjustability. Other professional skills such as personal awareness, information management, familiarity with the pertinent terminology and grasp of the global business scene also come under the same rubric. The expression, thus, covers all the behavioural facets of individual character that determine his productive social interaction.

Flying Licence

Sylla (later Lady Dinshaw Petit) was the first woman in India to get a flying licence in India. She was J.R.D. Tata's elder sister. Her younger sister Mrs. Rodabeh Sawhney got the licence after her.

Soft skills can be broadly defined as the ability to communicate effectively in both written and oral forms, as well as the flair to interact with others positively. The ability to communicate includes speaking knowledgeably, listening attentively, reading intelligently and writing succinctly. As Anthony Robbins puts it, "The way we communicate with others and ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives."

A well-groomed Personality

Attributes like punctuality, goal management, team skills and listening skills are regarded as the hallmark of a well-groomed personality. The list also includes body language, interpersonal skills stress management and voice modulation. Today's knowledge-based economy demands of its employees qualities that enhance organizational and leadership skills leading up to productive team results.

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It is to be stressed contextually that in today's competitive corporate world, if a job seeker fails to demonstrate strong inherent values like self-discipline, motivation and reliability, all his ambition is likely to come to naught. It is incontestable that a higher IQ or technical talents alone won't fill the bill.

'Employability' is the oft-chanted mantra in the corporate universe of our time. Employability skills refer to the basic skills that are indispensable to the effective performance of a task. They are indeed rated higher than job-specific accomplishments. Surveys by FICCI and NASSCOM indicate that only in the neighbourhood of 25%

of graduates are employable. Therefore, it is imperative that only adequate employability skills can bridge the wide chasm between the campus and the corporate.

Effectiveness in crisis management, team work and self-motivation also heaves one up the corporate ladder. By crisis management is meant managing a critical situation in a workplace. When diverse problems confront you, weigh them up, analyse them, and arrive at amicable solutions.

Sharing Information

Team work is what stimulates organizations to succeed in business. Information has to be shared, advice taken, feedback implemented and rapport with everyone developed. Be humorous and honestly frank. Greeting others by name, pumping hands and magic words like 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'please' can work wonders.

Motivation is the driving force in life. Self-motivated people accept responsibility for their actions and develop a positive and professionally constructive mindset. It is neither leadership nor lure of lucre that should impel you. Motivation shall indeed be a philosophy of your life. "Trust in God and have faith in thyself", says the Mahabharata.

Technical skills or 'hard skills' can be acquired from conferences, workshops, books or periodicals. But soft skills can be internalized only through keen observation and practice. Students should begin specialized training in soft skills at least when they go half way through their schooling. They should strive to refine their finesse in communication, business correspondence, presentation, team building, leadership, interviews, time management and stress management, continually and strenuously. Areas to be included in this scheme of training comprise skills related to, career excellence skills, professional thinking skills, analytical mindset and business acumen. Fortified with these accomplishments the youth of today can address every professional challenge with poise and elan. ■

Growth in Higher Education

In 1947, India had only 18 universities, 500 colleges, 230,000 students and less than 24,000 teachers. By 2004, this grew to 345 universities, 16,000 colleges, 95 lakh students and 4.35 lakh teachers.

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