

*What
are
these
things
called*

SOFT SKILLS?

**John K.
WHITEHEAD**
MA, PCC, CEC



What are these things called **SOFT SKILLS?**

by

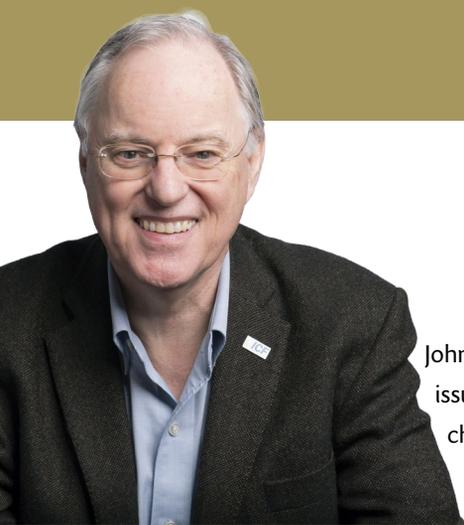
John K. Whitehead, MA, PCC, CEC

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About

John K. Whitehead, MA, PCC, CEC

John's "WHY" comes from his personal experience and exploration of leadership issues. It is, simply put, that "Increased self-awareness leads to transformational change." John has seen clients make significant shifts in behaviour as they explore and deepen their self-understanding. Raising self-awareness makes them better leaders and allows them to lead exceptional organizations.

Clients consistently tell John that learning about themselves, understanding their behaviour in various situations and then learning to modify those behaviours — either to enhance positive outcomes or minimize negative ones — is the most significant thing they have learned. As one client stated, "...adept at working through both professional and personal challenges, [John] was able to guide me through many personal 'stuck' points, creating clarity and 'aha' moments."

Professional Experience

John Whitehead is an experienced leader, facilitator and certified coach with over 40 years of senior leadership and management experience. John started his sales career at 16 years of age selling Fuller Brush door-to-door. At 18, John became the youngest store manager Kinney Shoes of Canada had ever appointed. Over the years John has experienced various sales management experiences from retail to direct sales, selling both tangible and intangibles.

John has held senior operational positions with national organizations achieving significant recognition for his results. Along with his coaching practice John is currently an Adjunct Professor at the Faculty of Management, University of British Columbia, Okanagan, and travels internationally including Europe and the Middle East facilitating leadership workshops. John describes himself as a continuous learner, motivated to learn more so that he can better help others achieve their goals.

John's clients have included senior and emerging leaders in various industries including major utilities, mining, sports, Hi-Tech, entertainment, fitness, construction, retail and direct sales

along with coaching other coaches and training professionals.

Qualifications & Accreditations

John holds a master's degree in Leadership from Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada and along with various certifications in management and leadership is a:

- ▶ Certified Coach by Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching
- ▶ Professional Certified Coach, credentialed by the International Coaching Federation
- ▶ Certified Executive Coach, certification from Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada
- ▶ Certified LPI360 & Leadership Challenge Coach (Kouzes & Posner, Wiley)
- ▶ Certified Global Leader of the Future 360 Assessment (Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching)
- ▶ Certified Instructor and trainer in SOCIAL STYLES™ & Versatility, interpersonal communications model

PREFACE

OVER A PERIOD OF TWENTY-THREE WEEKS in 2015–2016 I published a series of blog posts on Soft Skills: their development, the competencies they represent, and the importance they have in the workplace (or life in general, for that matter). At the conclusion of the series, I revisited the very first post, in which I offered a definition of Soft Skills, and found that after everything I had studied, read and written I still preferred the initial definition I used: “Soft Skills” is a catch-all term referring to various behaviors that help people work and socialize well with others. In short, they are the good manners and personality traits needed to get along with others and build positive relationships. Unlike hard skills, which include a person’s technical skill set and ability to perform certain functional tasks, Soft Skills are broadly applicable across job titles and industries. It’s often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get — and keep— the job. (techtaraget.com, 2016)

Soft Skills are “behaviors that help people work and socialize well with others.” To my mind, this hits the nail on the head.

I initially listed a catalogue of soft skills as:

*Communication — Listening — Showing empathy — Networking —
Self-confidence — Giving and receiving feedback*

Over the course of this writing the series I also added:

*Professionalism — Team building — Problem solving — Time & personal management —
Multitasking — Adaptability/Flexibility — Self-awareness — The ability to learn*

This is a significant list and I’m sure it could be expanded even more.

The blog series generated a lot of interest, and over its course I received many positive and thoughtful comments, some of which provided me with insight to write additional content. I was also very excited that this series on Soft Skills was picked up by two other blog sites, which in turn created significant interest.

I have now collected these posts together to create this book. I hope you enjoy it and if you feel so moved, write to me with your thoughts and ideas. Perhaps tell me what you learned about yourself. You can also [click here](#) to watch my short video, “What Are Soft Skills.”

JKW | **JOHN K. WHITEHEAD**
& ASSOCIATES

E-MAIL john@johnkwhitehead.ca
SKYPE [john.whitehead80](https://www.skype.com/people/john.whitehead80)
PHONE 250.707.1381 (o) 250.826.6088 (c)



Chapter One

So, What Are These Things Called “Soft Skills”?

“Politeness and civility are the best capital ever invested in business. Large stores, gilt signs, flaming advertisements, will all prove unavailing if you or your employees treat your patrons abruptly. The truth is, the more kind and liberal a man is, the more generous will be the patronage bestowed upon him.”

P.T. BARNUM

There are many websites and books that address Soft Skills, however I like the following definition because it is straight forward and concise: *“Soft Skills’ is a catch-all term referring to various behaviors that help people work and socialize well with others. In short, they are the good manners and personality traits needed to get along with others and build positive relationships. Unlike hard skills, which include a person’s technical skill set and ability to perform certain functional tasks, Soft Skills are broadly applicable across job titles and industries. It’s often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get—and keep—the job.”* [Read the source article here.](#)

Soft Skills are “behaviors that help people work and socialize well with others.” To my mind, this hits the nail on the head. In the next chapter I write about the importance of teaching Soft Skills in our education system. I also talk about the cost to the economy the lack of soft skills can cause. In this book I will to expand on what Soft Skills are and why they are so important.

Having the technical skills and knowledge to successfully execute our job duties is only one part of being the best we can be in the workplace. In addition to these “hard” skills, we also need “soft” skills. As I stated above, Soft Skills are those skills that allow us to effectively work with others. No matter what our position, organization or industry, we work with people. Taking the time to build effective soft skills can lead to a

more efficient, more harmonious, and more productive workplace, as well as to our own overall job happiness and satisfaction. Soft



skills encompass both innate personality traits, such as optimism, and abilities that

can be practiced, such as empathy. Like all skills, soft skills can be learned.

Soft skills are personal characteristics that allow us to effectively relate to others. Applying these skills helps us build stronger work relationships, work more productively, and maximize our career prospects. Often we place the focus of our career development efforts on hard skills — technological skills, sector-specific training, and other skills that specifically relate to our ability to get work-related tasks done. Unfortunately, development of this kind often happens at the expense of our soft skills. This is unfortunate, because unlike the sector-specific training, soft skills are directly transferrable to any job, organization, or industry. You will need them wherever you go — they are an investment worth making!

The Soft skills I cover in this book are:

- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Listening
- ▶ Showing empathy
- ▶ Networking
- ▶ Self-confidence
- ▶ Giving and receiving feedback
- ▶ Professionalism
- ▶ Team-building
- ▶ Problem solving
- ▶ Time & personal management
- ▶ Adaptability/Flexibility
- ▶ Self-awareness
- ▶ The Ability to learn

One of the Soft Skills I cover in this book is networking and the importance of this skill in developing our practices or businesses. But networking, along with the other soft skills, aren't just about business or building careers, they are about life and living. Over the course of this book I will cover the other soft skills listed above and expand not only on their importance, but how we can develop them.

John K. Whitehead: Executive Coach ~ Leadership Coach

*Our mission is to provide Executive Coaching, Leadership & Personal Development focusing on Interpersonal Communications, Emotional Intelligence, and organizational and employee resilience, using **workshops, one-on-one coaching, and team building.***

Stress, conflict, and simple misunderstandings all arise from being unaware of differences in communication styles and function.

[CLICK HERE](#) to schedule your complimentary 30-minute coaching/discovery session.

Chapter Two

Do you have the Soft Skills Required to be Successful?

Why is it that soft skills seem to have become the newest and latest “big” thing? Weren’t they always important and necessary? Over the past several years there are more and more articles and posts focusing on the need to increase soft skill training and development, which in turn suggests at least the perception of a shortage of these skills.

In an article published on line [Sierra Charter](#) comments on a US NEWS article in which the author stated that “*Although a*

you can find courses on these subjects as part of many college continuing education programs, but what about in grades K to 12? I think it is important to note that of all the subjects taught in schools, the area where soft skills has the most potential to be developed is the area that tends to get cut first due to budgets, that is the arts—music, dance and theatre.

In his book *Teaching Students To Dig Deeper: The Common Core in Action*, Ben Johnson describes how a software executive stated “[*that*] he doesn’t place much emphasis on what the individual knows right now. He is looking for someone who can learn on the fly a completely new programming language because what is currently being used may be outdated in six months.” (Johnson, 2013) This executive goes on to state that we do ourselves a disservice by using the terms “soft-skills” when referring to reasoning, logic, collaboration, communication, and thinking skills; that in the information technology industry, these skills are crucial and anything but “soft” because they are the most difficult to master and, “*unfortunately, fairly rare in employee candidates.*”

strong background in traditional ‘hard’ skills like writing, mathematics and science will always have its place in academic and career worlds, an increasing number of employers desire prospective employees with ‘soft’ skills.” In the same way that many post-secondary institutions teach a student trade skills but little in the way of how to run a trade business, so do these same institutions fail to provide training in things such as collaboration, communication and interpersonal skills. Granted,



Johnson goes on to state that we need to be teaching skills such as:

- ▶ Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- ▶ Collaboration across Networks and Leading by Influence
- ▶ Agility and Adaptability
- ▶ Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
- ▶ Effective Oral and Written Communication
- ▶ Accessing and Analyzing Information
- ▶ Curiosity and Imagination

These critical skills are what businesses are clamoring for in their future employees, not just in high tech but in other industries as well.

A recent study in the UK determined that “Soft Skills” are worth £88bn (\$186bn CDN) to the UK economy. A business group—including, believe it or not, McDonalds—is doing a three-month study on how government can introduce policies that will help employees and employers develop soft skills. The CPO (Chief People Officer) for McDonalds in the UK and northern Europe stated that abilities such as communications, interpersonal skills and time management were “essential skills” for employees.

So, should teaching “soft-skills” be a priority in schools? This is a title of an excellent article by Alejandro Ganimian in [Education-Next](#) where he describes and concludes that, yes, they should be because, for one reason, children need to be able to use a soft skill such as patience to be able to work on math problems. As another [commentator noted](#), “If we believe that public education is an anchor of democracy, a propeller of our economy and the vehicle through which we help all children achieve their dreams, then we have to make public education about three things: helping our students build trusting relationships—with both their peers and adults; equipping them with essential knowledge and the tools to critically think and problem solve; and perhaps most important, helping them develop persistence and grit—the ability and means to deal with disappointment and lack of success.”

I don’t know what it’s like in the school system where you live, but it’s something to think about. How are we preparing the next generation to succeed when it comes to interpersonal relationships? It’s obviously become an issue that needs to be addressed.

Chapter Three

Soft Skills Starts with Self-Awareness

My journey towards self-awareness started some years ago by trying to understand the kind of leader I am. My personal journey continues and here is what I have learned so far about leadership and why Soft Skills are so critical.

Self-awareness becomes the foundation for developing and improving Soft Skills. How can we know what we need to work on if we are not aware? Take communications for example. If we tend to blindly rush ahead in our conversations, don't stop to listen, miss body language signals because we are so focused on a result, then miscommunication happens, possibly even conflict. However, if we become aware that this is how we tend to communicate and behave and recognize the impact, we can then start to work on making a shift. Self-awareness leads to positive change and in some cases, transformational change.

Self-awareness is an on-going learning process, which is why I tie it to the ability to learn (We really do need to believe that learning is important or why do it? And by taking on "learning" we in turn become more self-aware).

Self-awareness is a state of mind; it is something many of us actively pursue. I have come to understand that people pursue self-awareness for a variety of reasons, all valid as they are theirs. They may be seeking an answer to a challenge they are facing or reflecting on an event that has impacted them. It occurs to me that there is a long history of this practice — self reflection is major



component of many belief systems, and the practice of self-discovery is an integral part of that. Without getting into the mystical, the practice of spending time in reflection brings with it the opportunity for a deeper understanding of one's thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

We can only be assured of our own self-awareness. We can present this "state" to others if you will, but we cannot know how others are feeling, their state of "self-awareness" or what they are thinking unless they tell us. We can then attempt to judge for ourselves whether we want to accept that or not. This in itself becomes a "self-awareness" action, as in doing so we need to be aware

of what we know and how we are “feeling” about the situation.

I tie self-awareness to emotional intelligence (EI) and the model designed by Sparrow & Knight (2006), which breaks EI down to *Intrapersonal Intelligence* (self-awareness and self-management) and *Interpersonal Intelligence* (other awareness & relationship management) or, as I teach in my Social Styles workshops, Know Yourself, Control Yourself, Know Others, Do Something for Others. Sparrow and Knight state that EI is the habitual practice of:

- ▶ Using emotional information from ourselves to other people;
- ▶ Integrating this with our thinking;
- ▶ Using those actions to inform our decision-making to help us get what we want from the immediate situation, and from life in general.

In other words, EI is using thinking about feeling (and feeling about thinking) to guide our behaviour (Neale, Spencer-Arnell & Wilson, 2011). Chade-Meng Tan (2012) uses Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* as an example of someone with very low intrapersonal intelligence and describes how it took the intervention of three ghosts to raise his self-awareness. Raising self-awareness is raising our EI. Although we don't have the opportunity to have ghosts to demonstrate to us the levels of our own self-awareness (thankfully), we do have other tools at our

disposal, such as formal 360 assessments and behaviour profiles such as Tracom's [SOCIAL STYLE and Versatility™](#) profile. We can also solicit feedback from family and friends to check if our perception of ourselves matches how others see us. These tools can give us a start in increasing self-awareness.

As a coach I see this often in my client sessions. As they grasp a better understanding of the challenges they are facing, they get a better understanding of who they are, and become more self-aware. I can actually see the moment of realization or recognition: the client's body position shifts, facial features change and often they vocalize it in some way. As a coach I can help a client become more aware of themselves as I lead them into a deeper exploration of the challenges they may be facing. The technique I use with clients to help them become more self-aware is to journal. I ask them to articulate each day's events and progress as a means of recording how they were “feeling,” how their body was reacting, getting them to recognize triggers and then how to use them to achieve their desired changes. This can be a process of days, weeks, or even longer, but over time the act of just doing it raises their self-awareness and can lead to change. My role in that activity is to hold them accountable to doing it and to ask the questions around what they learn and how that can use that learning to create sustainable self-awareness and change.

Chapter Four

Are Soft Skills Learned or Inborn?

Soft Skills: Nature or Nurture? Are you born with them or are they learned? It's the old chicken and the egg argument, which comes first?

A quick review of the discussion in the research reveals the consensus that we are born with these skills, but like any other, they can be improved over time, with practice. Just as we go to the gym to exercise our muscles, we can exercise our soft skills.

Learning to listen more effectively and then practicing that skill will improve your abilities as a communicator. Becoming more aware of how our reactions change in response to different situations will help us to manage our emotional reaction to them, and in time, will allow us to reduce stress and conflict. On the other hand, not exercising these skills will leave them undeveloped. I have found through my experience working as a coach that it comes down to self-awareness. An individual has to want to improve their soft skills, and make the effort to do so, or it simply won't happen.

Because we all have our own preferences and ways of moving through the world, some soft skills may be more difficult to learn than others. But if we think back, there are also aspects of our hard skill set that were difficult at first, though they now come quite naturally to us. For example, think back to when you were first learning to drive. Do you remember how it felt the first few times you took the wheel? I definitely do. I remember how difficult it was to use just the right amount of pressure on the accelerator, turning the steering wheel

at the same time, while also checking the rear and side view mirrors. There was so much to do all at the same time! But before long those actions become natural, almost like breathing. We don't think twice about all the "over the shoulder" checks or side view mirror checks. Even putting on the seat belt is automatic.



We develop soft skills in the same way we develop hard skills — with practice. One way to do that is to seek out people who seem to be able to demonstrate effortlessly those skills that you find challenging, and spend time with them. Another way is to seek opportunities to practice in which the risk of failure is low, until you feel confident in your ability. You don't have to be born a networker or an empathetic person — you can learn and develop these skills throughout your career. Hiring a coach to work with you is a great way to grow and develop your soft skills. A skilled coach can ask penetrating, challenging questions to get you thinking deeply about where you are in terms of your soft skills and assist you in working to strengthen them.

Chapter Five

Is Professionalism a Soft Skill?

“Soft Skills, or the ability to manage soft issues, is a challenge for modern leaders to master”

ALY MORENO

I received a comment from one of my most reliable blog post followers shortly after I started publishing this material in my blog. He stated,

“...Soft Skills, or the ability to manage soft issues, is a challenge for modern leaders to master! I would only add, if I may Integrity, i.e. all the features you very well mention have got to

abilities, to become professional in our use of them, to counter those that would use them in negative ways.

Professionalism

What does the word “professional” mean to you? What image does the word conjure up for you? For some it may create an image of a cold, distant, brusque person in a nondescript navy-blue suit. For others it can simply mean conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. In that sense professionalism is also a key soft skill, and it is here that the word integrity appears and where it fits with my friend’s comments above. Integrity, honesty, trust—these are values that should drive how we communicate, listen, show empathy, network, demonstrate self-confidence, and give and receive feedback.

A number of years ago I presented a workshop to a group of salespeople which explored the meaning of being a professional. I took some material from Nido Qubein’s book “Professional Selling Techniques” (Qubein, 1985) where he breaks down the concept into five parts:

A professional:

- ▶ Has a specialized knowledge and



be handled with Integrity otherwise you may as well forget about it...” He makes a very valid and valuable point and I think it is an approach one can take to anything in life. The reality is, however, that the opposite can also be true: that those with ulterior motives can and do use soft skills effectively to achieve their own ends. The classic example would be Hitler, who successfully used his communication skills to sway a nation and then led them into a catastrophic war. This reinforces for me the importance of making sure that we all develop soft skills to the best of our

skill that enables them to render a valuable service.

- ▶ Maintains a unique relationship with their clients. People come to them with specific needs and expect them to be filled.
- ▶ Renders services for which people are willing to pay.
- ▶ Is held accountable for the services they render — or fail to render.
- ▶ Maintains a professional attitude.

Acting with professionalism also means seeking to communicate effectively with others and finding a way to be productive. Professionalism can also look like this:

- ▶ Always reporting to work on time and returning promptly from breaks
- ▶ Dressing appropriately
- ▶ Being clean and neat
- ▶ Speaking clearly and politely to colleagues, customers, and clients
- ▶ Striving to meet high standards for one's own work

So, is professionalism a soft skill? There are some who say it is. I'm not so sure. For me professionalism is how you demonstrate and use the soft skills of communication: listening, showing empathy, networking, self-confidence, and giving and receiving feedback.

Coaching Clients

"A professional experience with a personal touch: John creates a wonderful experience that allows me to explore what's going on in my head, throw ideas out into the open and together we look for those gems of truth. His skillful questions, kindness and reflections have helped me find paths through barriers in order to step closer to my goals. I wholeheartedly recommend him as a coach to anyone considering their next steps or struggling with achieving their goals."

Sandra, Kingston ON

"Completely Inspired" is how John left me feeling after one short meeting. He is not only humorous, engaging, and approachable, he is deeply passionate and knowledgeable about Social Styles, Leadership and Coaching.

"John and I initially started our meeting talking about Social Styles. I had heard this concept before and taken a course on it, but I was amazed at how John was able to take the broad Social Styles concept and not only break it down for easier digest—he made it applicable to my daily life. I'm excited that what I learned from him is something I can apply to business and personal worlds.

"John was so passionate about helping people develop themselves that I had to ask about his journey to this point. I was impressed that he was able to keep his natural flare and enthusiasm while obtaining designations within the industry to build on his credibility and knowledge. The combination speaks volumes about his character.

"I highly recommend John to any individual who wants to take themselves to new levels of development and to companies who want to inspire and motivate their employees. Thank You John!"
Christy W.

Chapter Six

Is Communication the Most Important Soft Skill?

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.”

PETER DRUCKER

Is communication the most important soft skill? I believe it is, and it is why the focus of my practice is on interpersonal communications. I have found that even if a client’s initial interest is in exploring another area of their lives, communication quickly come to the fore.



Communication in this context is not just about sending a message, it is about receiving messages: the ability to actively listen and fully understand what is being communicated. Communication is the most important soft skill because everything flows from it — listening, showing empathy, networking, and self-confidence, giving and receiving feedback.

Human communication is complex. The first thing that comes to mind when we hear the word “communication” is often words—either spoken or written. But the words we speak and hear are just one way to communicate, and some studies show

that most of our communication takes place through other means:

- ▶ Nonverbal communication: Communication without words, such as eye contact or posture
- ▶ Verbal communication: Communication with words, both written and spoken
- ▶ Body language: Communication through gestures, personal space, and touching
- ▶ Artistic communication: Communication through images and other creative media
- ▶ Musical communication: Communication through music, whether with lyrics or without



Most of us have a preferred method of communication, but all of us use these different forms at one point or another. Learning to communicate effectively in many forms not only helps when you craft your own messages but helps you to receive messages as well.

Making assumptions about what another person is saying, or the meaning behind the words they are using, can be a disaster. One of Covey's "habits" he describes in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

(Covey, 1989) says, "seek first to understand, then to be understood." He describes it as "the key to effective communication." If we want to have any sort of effective communication among ourselves, we first have to understand each other. And the simplest way of doing that is by asking questions. Another is by observing the other person. Sounds very simplistic, doesn't it? It's true and better yet, we can get better at it!

Looking for a communications workshop for your team?

"Your workshop completely altered my understand{ing} of myself and how I act and encourage others to do as I do. Thanks for doing what it is you do, you have, without doubt helped alter my perspective on my life own life, and for others after you shared with me your knowledge. Thank you, John."

Shayn R., Kelowna

"We had John in for a day long workshop at Sporting Kansas City last week... it was really great. It is some of the best feedback I have received from our Sales/Service reps after going through a training. It not only will help them working with their clients and prospects, but it is going to be extremely helpful with in office culture as well. Can't recommend looking into his services enough."

Jordan Kelsey, Vice President, Ticket Sales and Service at Sporting Kansas City

"...It was our most well received visit from an outside speaker ever. About 10 people lunched together yesterday and went over what you talked about. They were still talking about it today."

H. Hamilton, Sr. Sales Manager, Vancouver Whitecaps FC

"We were lucky enough to have John come in and talk to our Sales and Service staff over two days. He walked them through how to recognize different personality (behaviour) types in clients and each other. Followed by tips and tricks to use in those conversations. I highly recommend John talking to your staff. He was a great addition to our regular training and was extremely professional. Great person to work with!!! Highly recommend!!!"

Brian Graham, Director, Atlanta Hawks & State Farm Arena

Call me to find out how we can do this for you... 250-707-1381

Chapter Seven

Nonverbal Communication — the Ultimate Soft Skill?

Interpersonal communication is a huge part of leadership. The ability to get your message across, whether it's a simple instruction or a complex expectation, is very important. Some believe that being a good leader means being able to get things done in the quickest, most efficient way; less concerned with the method, as with the result. Many of us have worked for the type of manager who marches in, tells us what to do and then leaves, often leaving us feeling both undervalued and used. In this scenario it is not as much what is *said* but what is *unsaid*.

In his book, *Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others*, James Flaherty stated that “*language forms the basis for observation and it is, in fact, not possible to make any observation outside language*” (Flaherty, 2020). So how is language defined in this context? Flaherty's contention is that “language is an orientation to our common world.” Language then is not just the words we use but

also includes observable behaviours, tone and intonation. Several studies have described communication in this breakdown: 7% by the spoken

word, 38% by tone and intonation and a full 55% by body language such as gestures, eye contact, posture, personal space (Mehrabian, 1971). Although there is continuing debate on the validity of these studies, it only makes sense that how you say something and your body posture when saying it will have some effect on how the message is perceived and received.

Other studies show that if a person's nonverbal communication and verbal communication don't match in terms of message, the listener is more likely to doubt the speaker's verity. Improving your nonverbal communication therefore can help improve your overall ability to both send and receive messages.

Improving your nonverbal communication starts with awareness. Paying attention to how



you use your body when you are talking or listening to someone. An open stance, frequent (but not continuous) eye contact, nods, and a relaxed posture help to communicate that you are open and approachable, and that you are communicating honestly. A closed stance, folding your arms across your chest, staring at the floor, or refusing to make eye contact all indicate that you are not listening, or that you are not communicating openly. Shifting from foot to foot, pacing,

or otherwise moving continuously indicate impatience. We do many things without conscious thought, especially when we are otherwise busy. In my coaching practice I work with my clients to be able to slow down, be in the present and take time to notice both their own nonverbal communication and others', and especially their reaction to others, and from there, to understand their own mental and physiological reactions and to respond in an appropriate manner.

Coaching Clients

"Thank you so very much for all the things you have taught me. You have enriched my life and really helped me deal with challenging people."

Coaching client

"John Whitehead has been an incremental part of my success. He is a teacher, who sees the strength and ambition of his clients and allows them to discover it while reaching their goals of becoming increasingly successful in their career. Communication with oneself and with others through an understanding of social styles and emotional intelligence are incredible skills and strong resources to have. Being able to apply this to your employees, co-workers, colleagues and business networking, I believe, is paramount in achieving your highest goals, and the one to get you there is John Whitehead."

Teri K.

"John has played a huge role in my professional development... and has acted as my mentor for the last few years... As the longest-standing employee in a small office, constantly coping with change and working with such a wide variety of personalities has been challenging for me. During that time John has been there for me — listening to my concerns and helping me come to solutions I can live with. John never gives me the 'right answer,' even when I want him to. Instead, he listens to my concerns without judgement, asks questions about what I want and need, and forces me to see my issues from my co-worker's perspectives."

Nicole N.

Chapter Eight

Listening... The Secret to Communication

“There is a difference between listening and waiting for your turn to speak.”

SIMON SINEK

The two previous chapters have been about verbal and non-verbal communications: its nature of being a “two-way street,” the need for both a sender and a receiver in order for the communication to be anything other than mere noise. Some have suggested that listening is more important than talking for effective communication. You’ve probably heard the old adage, “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.” The symbolism is obvious.

Listening is more than just hearing the words someone speaks. It is a total way of receiving verbal and nonverbal messages,

processing them, and communicating that understanding back to the speaker. Many of us listen in order to *respond* — we are formulating our next message while the other is still talking. We should instead listen to *understand* — to fully take in, process, and comprehend the message that is being sent. We communicate from our own perspective, the reality in which we live, our understanding of our own world. So ask questions to clarify the speaker’s meaning. Reframe what they have said in your own words, to see if you get agreement on their intended message. By doing this you learn to seek their perspective and reality, rather than defaulting to your own.



“Man’s inability to communicate is a result of his failure to listen effectively.”

CARL ROGERS

We need to be aware of our own emotional stance. If you are having trouble understanding the message, or having trouble getting your message across, look for the common perspective. It may be difficult

but we need to keep our composure. Try to understand that negative comments are not necessarily personal, but more likely born out of frustration with the situation.

Effective communication then is a two

way street, involving both a sender and receiver. It is about the sender making their intention clear, and the receiver being present and in the moment to actively listen. Intent is important — are we being clear about it? Understanding the difference between words and meaning is a vital capability for effective communications and relationships. For example, as John Ruskin stated: “The essence

of lying is in deception, not in words.” (John Ruskin, 1819–1900, English art critic and social commentator). I learned long ago that when starting a difficult conversation with someone, it was critical to state my intent, and more importantly what it was not. I have found that this allows the other person to listen to what I am saying, and to understand the message behind the words.

“Without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of others are never captured.”

JOHN P. KOTTER

Finally, you can’t make another person actively listen to you, but you can increase the odds in your favour that they will, by understanding the other person’s communications style. Does she only need quick, basic information with few details, or does she need a lot of detail, maybe even to make a list? Does he appreciate it when you infuse your message with emotion, or does he not want any emotional attachment to the message at all? By recognizing these four basic things you can change how you communicate with others, giving them what they need to understand and process what you are saying or asking.

Openness and Honesty

Open, honest communication is the key to building workplace relationships and demonstrating professionalism. While you do not need to discuss personal or private topics in the workplace, being transparent and honest about work matters and generally being willing to communicate with others is vital. People can sense when someone is hiding something or withholding information, and tend not to trust him or her. This damages workplace trust and relationships, and may lead to lower productivity and morale. Each of us has a different level of comfort with what we choose to disclose about ourselves but being willing to share parts of yourself with your colleagues also helps to build rapport.

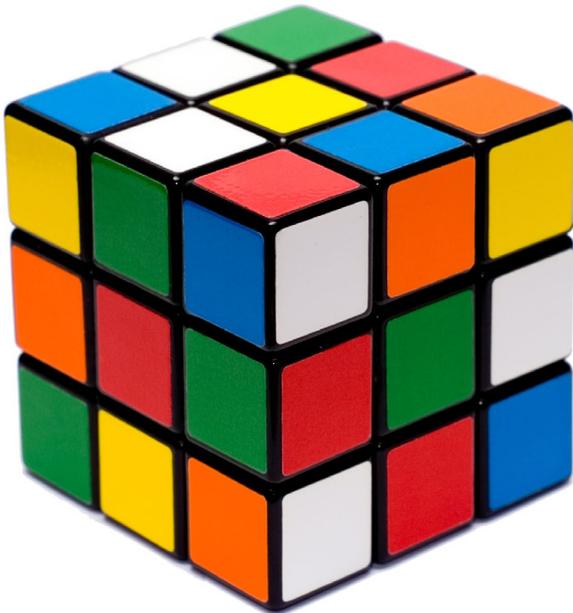
Chapter Nine

The Soft Skill of Problem-Solving

Was Problem-Solving on your list of soft skills? I can't say that it was originally on mine. Why is that? I think that we tend to think of soft skills as "positive." Soft skills are there to present an upbeat environment that everything is okay. It is an improvement mechanism. A reference to problem-solving suggests that there are indeed problems—and that is a downer. No one wants to go there! That is just my thought, what is yours?

"It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer."

ALBERT EINSTEIN



The reality is that no matter your role or the industry you work in, you will encounter problems. How you handle them will go a long way in determining your level of success. It will also determine how you manage the relationships and shared goals you have with your team and/or organization.

In researching this topic, I turned to my substantive bookshelf of management and leadership books, looking for words of

wisdom. I was quite surprised to find that there was not all that much, and what was there was not much help. I then turned to one of my favorite sources of leadership inspiration, Canadian astronaut and author Chris Hadfield. His book, *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth*, is full of leadership gems and sure enough, lots of problem-solving object lessons (Hadfield, 2013). For Hadfield, one of his learnings was to "anticipate problems in order to prevent them... how to neutralize fear, how to stay focused and how to succeed." My favourite quote though is this: "...we learn[ed] to ask ourselves. 'Okay, what's the next thing that will kill me?'" Most of us will not have to ask a question as radical as this, but it illustrates that problem solving is as much proactive as it is reactive.

In *Productive Workplaces Revisited* by Marvin R. Weisbord, there is a neat illustration that provides a simple model for problem solving (Weisbord, 2004):

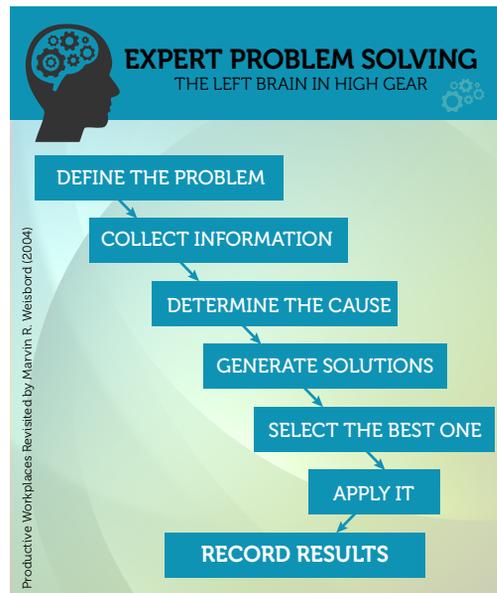
First you need to define the problem: Take a holistic view, look at the big picture, and take time to examine it from as many

perspectives as possible.

Collect as much data about the problem as you can. This will slow down the process, which among other things, can help prevent volatile emotions from taking over and potential conflicts from happening. Another consequence of slowing down the process is to make sure that the **problem is clearly defined** so that you end up solving the problem and not just creating a temporary stopgap measure.

Once you've defined a problem, you can start to **generate solutions**. Don't stop at one — look for a second solution, a third, maybe even a fourth. Each time you search for an additional solution you delve deeper into the problem, which can create opportunities to uncover additional issues and/or highlight unintended consequences. You may conclude that the first solution was the correct one but having examined additional ones gives you an added level of surety.

As you select the best option, check your own emotional stance to make sure you are not favouring one solution over another



simply because it is yours. Here is where the soft skill of communications and teamwork come into play.

Finally, be certain, once you have implemented the solution, to **evaluate the results**. Did the solution generate the desired outcome? Did it cause any unintended consequences? The answers to these questions will help determine your course of action in any future similar circumstance.

Productivity improves when we understand others' communication styles!

Learn how — [CLICK HERE](#) to schedule your complimentary 30 minute coaching/ discovery session now.

Chapter Ten

Time (Personal) Management as a Soft Skill

“Let our advance worrying become advance thinking and planning.”

WINSTON CHURCHILL

I believe the very first workshop I attended in my working life was one on time management. That workshop—in the late 70s in Winnipeg—was the start of a lifelong journey of learning. I attended that workshop because of my then-boss’s strong suggestion that I might want to improve my time management skills. From his point of view (and in hindsight, I can agree with him), my time management was basically non-existent. I learned much from that first workshop over 35 years ago, but I admit that it’s an on-going process and that time management can still be a struggle.

The simple fact is that there are a finite number of hours in a day, days in a week and weeks in a year. Why is it that some people seem to accomplish so much, while others just seem to spin their wheels? It’s not solely about productivity; it is also about quality of life. Spending too much time on “work”

tasks throws your work/life balance out of whack. We can’t create more hours in a day, but we can use those we have in a way that creates success not only in our careers, but in life in general.

“Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have twenty-four-hour days.”

ZIG ZIGLAR



Further to that, it’s more than “time management;” it’s really more like “personal management.” Steven Covey spoke to this in his ground breaking book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, when he talked about personal management being the fourth generation of time management and “that ‘time management’ is really a misnomer—the challenge is not how to manage time, but to manage ourselves”

(Covey, 1989). He goes on to state that “Rather than focusing on *things* and *time*, fourth generation expectations focus on preserving and enhancing *relationships* and on accomplishing *results...*” In other words, Covey’s model is to focus on what is important, not what is urgent.

Covey also outlines several activities for personal management:

- ▶ Write a personal mission statement based on personal, family, and professional values.
- ▶ Define all your roles, both professional and personal.
- ▶ Select the two or three most important goals every week. Tie short-term

goals to longer-term goals.

- ▶ Focus on activities that will achieve the greatest results.
- ▶ Portability — you should be able to carry and access your priority list or calendar wherever you are.

For many of us, managing our time has become second nature; for others it is a continuous struggle. As a soft skill, personal management is crucial as it can have a significant impact on team dynamics (see Chapter 13 on Teambuilding, page 30) and communications. It is tied to our level of self-awareness and our personal growth in emotional intelligence.

“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.”

YOGI BERRA

Some practical applications for use in Time and Personal Management or, Soft Skill Management of Time (Dr Who, take note)

In the previous section of this chapter I discussed Steven Covey’s concept that personal management is the fourth generation of time management. Covey describes the first generation as one of notes and checklists. The second generation is

characterized by calendars and appointment books; the third generation adds to the preceding two with the ideas of prioritizing, clarifying values and “comparing the relative worth of activities based on their relationship to those values.” The third generation introduced the setting of both long- and short-term goals, and daily planning to

accomplish them. In Covey’s mind this made everything very clinical and distant and often didn’t allow for creativity, spontaneity or relationship building. This led to his fourth generation, which he diagrammed in the following:





From: Covey's Time Management Quadrant

Covey's view is that quadrant two is the optimum place to "be." I will let you spend time researching this yourselves as I'm sure most of you have a copy of this book in your libraries or if not, know someone who does. It is worth rereading if it's been some time since you read it.

Some Practical Tips

As promised, here some practical time management tips that work for me. Only you can determine whether they will work for you, so try them out! If you have your own solutions, tips or tricks, please add them to this discussion.

The Art of Scheduling

- ▶ Figure out your goals for the year, month, and week.
 - ▶ Prioritize them.
 - ▶ Set milestones for each item (what needs to be done, and by when).

- ▶ Build in celebrations (treats for hitting targets).
- ▶ Put these events into your calendar.
- ▶ Block into your calendar events that occur regularly or frequently, both professional and personal. For example:
 - ▶ I have specific things I want to accomplish each week. One is producing my weekly blog post, so I block "creative time" into my calendar so that I have dedicated time for writing or producing other material.
 - ▶ Don't forget personal time — block in time for fitness, vacations, family time, etc. (In fact, why not put these in first and then build everything else around them?)
- ▶ At the beginning of each day make a list of items you want/need to accomplish.
 - ▶ Just write them down as you think of them.
 - ▶ Prioritize them, write 1, 2, 3... beside each.
 - ▶ Cross them off the list as you complete them.
 - ▶ If you don't get to these items just move them to your next day's list.
 - ▶ Here is an idea I came across many years ago: If you complete a task that was not on your list, add it anyway and then cross it off. I'll explain why below.



Managing Distractions

A major key to getting things done, is to manage distractions. Distractions happen—we can minimize them and manage them, but never eliminate them altogether. Creating a plan for managing distractions is an important time management skill. The first step is to determine what your major distractions are.

Doing so can help you find solutions and manage them.

Some common distractions are:

- ▶ Colleagues stopping by to chat
- ▶ Checking email or voicemail
- ▶ Noise in the environment
- ▶ Clutter in your workspace
- ▶ Boredom after spending too long on one task
- ▶ New ideas popping into your head that just “need” to be dealt with now

You can solve these by:

- ▶ Establishing “open door” hours
- ▶ Closing your door or otherwise indicating “Please Do Not Disturb”
- ▶ Using noise canceling headphones
- ▶ Setting a regular time to check voicemail and email
- ▶ Letting calls go to voicemail
- ▶ De-cluttering your workspace
- ▶ Building in breaks

Finally, have you ever had one of those days when you feel like you accomplished nothing at all? Let’s go back to my list-making suggestions above. If you cross off the actions you completed plus add to the list other activities you completed that weren’t on the original list, then at the end of the day you can look back at it and, sure enough you will have a documented record of your accomplishments for the day.

The Myth of Multitasking

Multitasking is exactly what it sounds like—trying to do more than one thing at a time. How many times have you heard a colleague proclaim that they are great multitaskers? Many of us claim (or complain about) the ability to handle a “million things” at a time. We listening to a colleague while checking email, working on a document while talking on the phone, attend meetings with our laptops open. We assume that multitasking leads to better productivity or that it is the best way to maximize our time. Many recent studies into multitasking, however, show that it is not after all the great solution to 21st-century, high tech living, but in fact, people who multitask have been shown to take 30%-40% longer to complete tasks. A [recent study documented in INC Magazine](#) from the University of London actually suggests that multitasking is damaging the brain. Another [research study from Stanford University](#) demonstrated how multitaskers consistently underperformed others who took on projects one at a time, disproving the myth that multitasking was a good thing.

As INC points out, “The biggest instigator of multitasking mayhem? Our inboxes. Some

studies have shown that even the opportunity to multitask, such as knowledge of an unread email in your inbox, can reduce your effective IQ by 10 points! ...A McKinsey Global Institute Study found that employees spend 28 percent of their work week checking emails.”

So what can we do?

- ▶ Turn off email notifications
- ▶ Set your email to check for new messages at set times rather than constant refreshing
- ▶ Mute cell phones
- ▶ As I noted in previous posts—create to do lists for the day and stick to them
 - ▶ Complete one task before you move onto the next
- ▶ Block in times on your schedule to answer voice messages, answer emails, and check social media of all kinds.

Multitasking is a significant part of personal and time management. Managing it adds another dimension to improving your overall soft skills.

The Power of Flow

Have you ever had those moments when you are involved in an activity and time just seems to have flown by? Maybe it was sitting at the piano, painting, a challenging chess match, or reading a really good book. Maybe you were playing a sport and everything was working—every pass you made, every shot you took, or every stroke of the golf club—you just couldn’t miss. Athletes call this being in the zone. It is also called “flow.”

Psychologists, and specifically those in the Positive Psychology movement, define



“flow” as “the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity” (Wikipedia). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who spent two decades studying it and who is recognized for discovering this, described it as “being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz” (I love the jazz metaphor). When we are in a flow state, we are completely absorbed in what we are doing, and this produces a feeling of energized focus and enjoyment. Tapping into flow is a powerful way to increase our own productivity, and the productivity of our

teams. We are most likely to achieve flow when we are engaged in a task to which our skills are well matched—another reason to identify the capabilities of each person on a team (see Chapter 13 on Teambuilding, page 30). Flow is also achieved more easily when we have clear goals and can focus on the process rather than the end product. And as I alluded to in my post last week, one of the most important keys to achieving flow is to minimize interruptions when you are working.

In *Search Inside Yourself* (Tan, 2012), Chade-Meng Tan stated that “Flow” is another way of looking at passion. He uses the example of Tony Hsieh of Zappos who

saw passion as one of the three types of happiness. That passion (flow) is “where peak performance meets peak engagement, and time flies by.”

In the work world, when we find the flow state, time seems to pass quickly without our noticing. We are also more likely to create high quality work with fewer errors. Because we are totally focused on what we are doing, a flow state may be a key aspect of mastering a new set of skills—stretching your skill set and cultivating flow can be a great tool for professional development and that’s why it is an important part of the personal management soft skill set.

Coaching Clients

“Thanks to John I was able to gain some valuable insight into my experience as a manager, especially in regard to managing employees. Learning what works and what doesn’t in my business is a huge asset. Thanks John!”

Katie S.

“John is an excellent coach. His approach forces you to really think about a situation and guides you to find a solution to your problems. I have had an amazing experience working with John and am very grateful for his teachings. It has greatly improved my personal and professional life”

Susan, Kelowna

Chapter Eleven

Keep Calm and... Attitude and Work Ethic

“Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

You’ve most likely heard the phrase, “Hire for attitude; you can always train and test for skills.” Hard skills for any job can usually be tested. A simple example would be for typing skills –you can measure a candidate’s keyboarding speed by administering a test. Attitude, though, is different. It cannot be objectively measured, and that is why it can be classified as a soft skill.

A 2012 [Forbes article](#) on a study of 20,000 new hires found that 46% of them failed within 18 months of being hired. Of those 89% failed because of attitudinal issues and only 11% due to a lack of skills. A more recent

study by [Millennium Branding](#) (2014) showed that positive attitude (84%) was one of the top three attributes that recruiters look for.

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL



**KEEP
CALM
AND
ACHIEVE
GREATNESS**

A positive attitude is very much a real thing. There is now science behind the idea that having a positive attitude makes a difference. Using Electromagnetic Imaging machines scientist are mapping the brain and observing

how both negative and positive thinking impacts the brain’s functioning. Evidence indicates that positive events help the brain develop new neuro pathways, which improves learning, making people open to new ideas

and feelings, and that negative thinking actually decreases cognitive functioning and can create a drop in the immune system, which makes a person susceptible to illness. Richard Boyatzis names these effects in his Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis, 2005) and states that we either move towards a Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA) or Negative Emotional Attractor (NEA). Our natural tendency, due to our ancestry, is to move towards the negative (fight or flight). The ancient part of our brain is wired to watch out for danger and to see things in the negative. However, by raising our self-awareness and managing our emotions (EQ) we can consciously move towards and maintain a PEA.

So why is all this important?

- ▶ It increases and improves productivity.
- ▶ It increases and improves workplace happiness.
- ▶ We become viewed as approachable and therefore build more effective workplace relationships.
- ▶ It creates a space that allows us to positively handle challenges or setbacks—it breeds resilience.

Our attitude defines how we approach things. There will be times when we have a bad or negative attitude and time when we have a good or positive one. Our management of these will have a significant impact on our success, not only in our careers but also our lives.

“Our life is what our
thoughts make it.”
MARCUS AURELIUS

Being clear about what you’re working for is an important part of building a positive attitude and strong work ethic. If you are not sure what you are working for, it can be difficult or even impossible to fully invest in a project or in developing your skills. Here are some ideas to get you started (from *Ten Soft Skills You Need*. 2015, Global Courseware Inc.)

- ▶ Take time to clarify your personal goals, both in terms of specific projects and in terms of your overall career.
- ▶ Set specific goals and then create plans to achieve them.
 - ▶ Tie these goals to your day-to-day tasks and responsibilities so that you can keep them in sight.
- ▶ When working with a team, it is also vital that you outline clear group goals.
 - ▶ Know what each member of the group is working for, and what the group is collectively working for.
 - ▶ Find ways to consistently tie individual tasks or steps to the overarching group goals and to individual members’ personal goals.



Attitude and Caring for Others

Has there been a shift in our thinking around caring for others vs. caring for ourselves? I ask this because of the current focus on Self-Awareness. Has the pendulum swung again to a focus on self rather than on others? (Some may ask if the pendulum ever really swung toward the latter!) I remember the 1970s being dubbed the “me” generation because of the way the baby boomers had become so self-centered, more concerned about themselves and their own comfort than those around them. The fallout of that state of affairs was the economic recession of the early 1980’s: very high unemployment and the collapse of savings and loans financial institutions, blamed in part on the excessive greed and over-consumption of that “me” generation.

However, this book is not on economics but on soft skills. So where is the connection? I see it in the way that every few months, it seems that a new “best” system of managing or leading pops up. A new expert writes a book on the latest and greatest method, but a close examination reveals it to be merely a reworking of a system that had already come and gone. We are told that the newest and latest method will give us insight into how to solve our current “unique” issues. The reality, though, is that things may change but they also stay remarkably the same.

I have come to believe that we need to have, and use, the combination of both the new and the old. Of course, we should pay

attention to the latest research and ideas, but we should not necessarily throw away all the experience and knowledge we have gained over many years just to chase the “new” thing. In the context of this post, does it have to be either Caring for Yourself vs. Caring for Others, or can it be both? I believe it can.

Why do we assume that showing care and concern for others and their needs means that we make ourselves and our needs our lowest priority? That we either practice self-care or be a good colleague and team member who demonstrates compassion for others, but that we can’t be or do both? What if we can, and need, to do both. That they are inclusive? If we have shared goals with those with whom we share our personal and professional lives, finding a way to take care of both ourselves and others can create an environment for success. Caring for ourselves can be a template, a model for caring for others. By taking good care of ourselves, we become the best colleague we can be, demonstrating care for others. Seeing the ways in which everyone is interconnected, and the way in which everyone’s success benefits the entire group is an important attitude shift. When we can find a way to care for others and ourselves, we develop a more positive, productive workplace. When we come to the realization that we have shared goals with those we work with, we can find a way to both care for ourselves and care for others. It really is about Attitude.

Chapter Twelve

How Flexible Are You?

The Soft Skill of Adaptability

I read somewhere recently that Soft Skills have become today's Hard Skills. This is something to think about as we move further into the information age and away from the industrial age. It's not that we will do away with hard skills. Trades, factories, mining, the list goes on, will still be around and those working in them will always need those hard, technical skills to do the job. But more and more, even for occupations in those trades, soft skills are being recognized as a critical component of the whole worker. Two of the most important soft skills that are coming to the forefront are adaptability and flexibility.

Some people mistakenly think that the ability to change according to the needs of a situation or a willingness to compromise, show weakness or a lack of conviction. In reality, the ability to compromise, adapt to

change and still thrive are keys to success in the fast-pace workplaces in which most of us find ourselves. Change can be scary, but learning to adapt and flex as needed is an investment worth making.

"You must always be able to predict what's next and have the flexibility to evolve."

MARC BENIOFF

To me, adaptability and flexibility are about creativity. It's being open to other alternatives in any situation. It's about looking for the second or third "right" answer. There is always more than one right answer to a given problem; the trick is to find the one that you are most comfortable with and the one you can live with. Just because we have done something the same way for years, doesn't mean it still works today. Thinking creatively, sometimes "out of the box," will

often produce a solution that is both effective and surprising. It is these solutions that add energy to projects and help them on their way to success.

We all have those moments in life where we are confronted with change: small and inconsequential, or massive ones such as change in the workplace (either a promotion or demotion); change in family life (the birth of a child or death of a parent); a move across town or across the country, may be even to totally different country. The ability to adapt to changes, to be flexible, is about accepting reality and coping with it.



“Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future”

JOHN F. KENNEDY

Changing to Manage Process

One of the most common situations in which we will need to change and adapt is when processes change in the workplace. In order to navigate a new process, we need to change not only what we do but how we approach it. New technology, globalizing businesses, and evolving needs all lead to changes in our work processes. If we hold on to the old way of doing things, we risk reduced productivity (and revenue), as well as increased conflict and other challenges. When we adapt to a new process, we are not just learning a new way of doing a specific task, we are demonstrating our ability to adapt to changing circumstances, learn new skills, and work with others.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time.

We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.

We are the change that we seek”

BARACK OBAMA

Changing to Manage People

Managing people is not a “one-size-fits-all” ability. The [SOCIAL STYLES™](#) process demonstrates that people need different things from a leader. Some need lots of feedback and guidance. Others prefer to work independently most of the time and to get feedback only at regularly scheduled intervals. Some people need a great deal of hands-on training with technology or equipment, while others will come into your

organization as experts. Taking the time to learn what your people need, and then changing your leadership style to meet those needs, is hugely important to workplace success. When you adapt your leadership style to meet the specific needs of those you lead, it demonstrates that your concern for them is genuine, that rather than expecting them to conform to your preferred way of doing things, you want to invest in them and help them grow. Take the time to ask the people you lead what they need from you, what their goals are, and how you can be a better leader and colleague. Then take steps to make the changes that you feel will be most helpful.

“Our only security is our ability to change”

JOHN LILLY

Showing You Are Worth Your Weight in Adaptability

How can you showcase your adaptability? Studies show that people who are highly adaptable may be more highly valued than those who are highly skilled but less willing



to adapt, flex, and change. Some ways to demonstrate adaptability on the job are:

- ▶ Be open to alternative solutions when your first suggestion does not go over well or succeed
- ▶ Be willing to take on new roles, even when they are a stretch for your skills
- ▶ Be willing to help others generate alternative solutions or plans

- ▶ Be willing to accept the unexpected
- ▶ Keep your calm, even when things are moving fast or are stressful
- ▶ Demonstrate confidence in your ability to complete the job even when you've had to adapt or flex

Taking the time to develop your soft skills such as adaptability and flexibility will give you additional opportunities in any endeavour.

Chapter Thirteen

Team Building

Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Why Teambuilding is an Important Soft Skill

John Adair defined “team” as “a group in which the individuals share a common aim and in which the jobs and skills of each member fit in and those of others.” (Adair, 2009)

There is no strength until there is cooperation

IRISH PROVERB

Working in a successful team can be rewarding. It can be even more rewarding to use your own skills to create, develop and lead a successful team. Teambuilding then is a critical component of Soft Skills.

People have always worked in teams, going back to our earliest hunter-gatherer days when working as a team meant our very survival. It has since moved on to working in collaboration for defense, the success of family, and social interaction. When a task has been too big or complex for just one individual we have banded together, in everything from taking down a big animal to performing a symphony.

Even if you work independently most of the time, there will be times when you need to interact with others, either at work or at play. Working in teams is a major part of the modern workplace experience. More than ever before, collaboration has become the crucial element leading to success in today’s high tech and fast paced environment.

Finding ways to build teams that accomplish



their required tasks in the most efficient and accurate manner is often challenging, especially when bringing together individuals with diverse sets of hard and soft skills. There are some basic techniques you can use when building, or working, with a team to help create a cohesive unit that leverages everyone’s talents and ensures that each person contributes.

Identifying Capabilities

“Everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its life thinking it is stupid.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

When building a team, it is key to identify the different talents, skills, and capabilities each team member brings. Take the time at the outset to ask each member what he or she brings to the team.

- ▶ What skills, abilities and relationships does each team member have that can enhance the project?
- ▶ What does each person feel he or she does well?
- ▶ How can the team use all these talents and capabilities to achieve the best outcome?

(Collins, 2001), everyone is in the right seat on the bus, creates a symbiotic relationship that leads to maximum results.

Barriers to effective team dynamics include:

- ▶ Dissonant personality styles
- ▶ Conflicting priorities and work schedules
- ▶ Fast-paced work routines leaving little time for relationship-building
- ▶ Lack of connectedness and understanding among team members
- ▶ Lack of trust in leaders



Figuring out what which team member does well is critical to the team’s success. Putting the wrong person in the wrong spot can lead to disaster, not only for that person but also for the team. Making sure everyone is using the best suited talents and skill sets, or that, as Jim Collins stated in *Good to Great*

We need the ability to look beyond ourselves to understand others’ personalities and viewpoints. The soft skill required is to understand how our communication and behaviour styles, and stress-response patterns, differ from others’ in the workplace. The [SOCIAL STYLEs model](#)[™] of Social Intelligence provides a perspective on first how to recognize our own patterns and then how to recognize others. Once we have done this we can then start to learn how we can “move towards” others and communicate with them better. SOCIAL STYLEs calls this Versatility and it uses the Platinum Rule: treat others how they want to be treated. Once we have developed and implemented this soft skill, we can then start to see team dynamics and performances soar.

Using Soft Skills as a Member of a Team

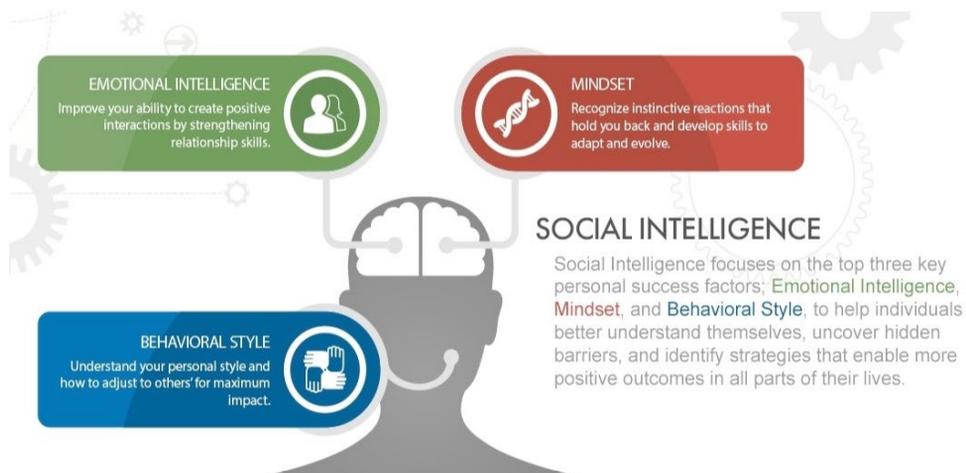
The previous section on Team building was from the perspective of the builder, or leader of a team. However, you don't have to be the leader to be an integral part of the team-building process. Being a member of a team provides its own opportunities for building and sustaining a team culture. Whether you are a new team member or veteran, the opportunities are there for you to learn, grow and actively participate in team growth. The basics for any team member are to know your role, understand what is expected of you, and what the limits of your role are. If you feel unclear about your role, ask the team's leader for clarification.

Critical to your understanding is to recognize the kind of team you are in. Is it a classic "command and control" organization that is highly hierarchical—strong, top-down leadership with clear, subordinate roles (think military), or does the organization take a more collaborative approach, in which discussion and free expression is allowed and even encouraged? This discernment will guide you in understanding your place on the team;

how you should act and perform within it.

As a member of a team it is also important to get a sense of the other roles on the team. In some more progressive organizations, team members are given the opportunity to experience other roles through job sharing and time spent with other team members. This is a great way to expand the knowledge and effectiveness of all team members. Recognizing and understanding each other's roles and responsibilities helps the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the team as a whole. It also provides valuable back up should someone be away for an extended period of time. If your team environment does not actively allow for role sharing, then take the initiative and talk to other team members. Find out what they do and how they do it, and what they expect of you in your role.

Whether you are a member of a team or its leader, the topics covered in this book so far really boil down to the importance of Social Intelligence (also known as Emotional Intelligence). TRACOM defines Social Intelligence as: "the ability to understand and



manage our Behavioral Style, Mindset and Emotional Intelligence to optimize interpersonal relationships. It deals with unconscious biases that we may not yet understand, but that can be learned and controlled. At its heart, [Social Intelligence](#) is the science of

productive relationships. And modern neuroscience shows that it can be harnessed and improved. Organizations that foster Social Intelligence experience higher performance because their teams become more productive, collaborative and resilient.”

Chapter Fourteen

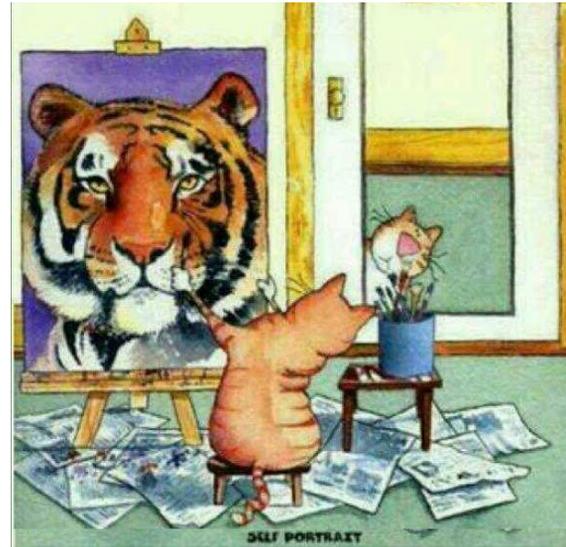
Self Confidence

How can Self-confidence drive success?

In this, the fourteenth chapter of my book exploring soft skills, I want to focus on Self-confidence. How does Self-confidence drive success? One of the problems I have with this particular soft skill is that it can easily become or be viewed as arrogance. There is a fine line between being self-confident and allowing your ego to overtake you, leaving others with the perception that you consider yourself superior to them. Self-confidence has been defined as a feeling of trust in one's abilities, qualities, and judgment and the belief or confidence in oneself that one knows what to do, how to do it, and can handle challenges as they arise. The factor that stops self-confidence from moving into arrogance is humility, which is to say that you remain self-aware about others' perceptions of you and are able to modify your behaviour to avoid coming off as brash or sounding like a know it all.

Self-confidence is the first requisite to great undertakings.
SAMUEL JOHNSON

As I continue my study of Soft Skills, I become more convinced about how connected they are with Emotional and Social Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is based on the foundation of first knowing yourself, managing or controlling yourself, social awareness or knowing others and finally relationship management or, simply put, doing things for others. The foundational piece for all four of these areas is self-awareness. Self-confidence then comes into play in how well you feel about your level of self-awareness; how well you understand your own strengths and weaknesses and strengthening and improving both. Confidence is about building yourself up, not tearing others down. And as I have written in previous posts, when you're confident, you make others around you feel confident too.



Confident Behaviours

What does it mean to be confident? Here are some examples of both confident and non-confident behaviour:

Confident Behaviour	Behaviour Associated with Low Self-Confidence
▶ Doing what you believe to be right, even if others mock or criticize you for it	▶ Governing your behavior based on what other people think.
▶ Being willing to take risks and go the extra mile to achieve better things	▶ Staying in your comfort zone, fearing failure, and therefore avoiding risks
▶ Admitting your mistakes, and learning from them	▶ Working hard to cover up mistakes and hoping that you can fix the problem before anyone notices.
▶ Waiting for others to congratulate you on your accomplishments	▶ Extolling your own virtues as often as possible to as many people as possible
▶ Accepting compliments graciously. "Thanks, I really worked hard on that prospectus. I'm pleased you recognize my efforts."	▶ Dismissing compliments offhandedly. "Oh that prospectus was nothing really, anyone could have done it."

From: <https://www.mindtools.com/selfconf.html>



"Low self-confidence isn't a life sentence. Self-confidence can be learned, practiced, and mastered—just like any other skill. Once you master it, everything in your life will change for the better."
BARRIE DAVENPORT

One key trait of highly self-confident people is that they build up others rather than tearing them down. Having self-confidence means that you do not feel competitive with others—their success doesn't take away from your own. Some ways to exhibit self-confidence are:

- ▶ Find ways to build up others.
- ▶ Compliment others.
- ▶ Acknowledge others' contributions and express your gratitude.
- ▶ Being a mentor can also help to build others up by helping them develop skills, which will help them develop their own self-confident

By exhibiting self-confidence, you are demonstrating your belief in self, increasing your own self-awareness, and presenting a confident, positive image. As a soft skill, self-confidence will give you an advantage over others and lead to better success.

How to Build Self-Confidence: A Soft Skill Work in Progress

Self-confidence, like all Soft Skills can be improved. In fact, a few very simple tactics can help you quickly build your self-confidence. As you become more confident, you will find that you will have experiences that will build your confidence even more.

“With realization of one’s own potential and self-confidence in one’s ability, one can build a better world.”

DALAI LAMA

Self-Questionnaire

How confident are you? It can be hard to assess our own self-confidence. Taking some time to ask a few questions and answer them honestly can help you gauge the areas where your confidence is high and the areas in which you can develop greater self-confidence. How strongly do you agree with these statements?

1. I know intuitively what’s right for me.
2. I walk my talk.
3. I am honest with others.
4. I am honest with myself.
5. I feel comfortable being wrong.
6. I am more interested in finding out what is right than being right.
7. It is not important to me that I be right all the time.
8. I feel like I can meet any challenge.
9. I operate well under pressure.
10. I do not put others down.
11. I like to share the spotlight with others.
12. I have a clear vision for my life.

How did you do? Based on your responses here are some basic ideas to help you build your self-confidence:

1. **Stay away from negativity and bring on the positivity.** This is the time to really evaluate your inner circle, including friends and family. This is a tough one, but it’s time to seriously consider getting away from those individuals who put you down and shred your confidence. Even a temporary break from such people can make a huge difference and help you make strides toward more self-confidence.
2. **Be positive,** even if you’re not feeling it quite yet. Put some positive enthusiasm into your interactions with others and hit the ground running, excited to begin your next project. Stop focusing on the problems in your life and instead begin to focus on solutions and making positive changes.
3. **Change your body language.** This is where posture, smiling, eye contact, and speaking slowly come into play. Just the simple act of pulling your shoulders back gives others the impression that you are a confident person. Smiling will not only make you feel better but will make others feel more comfortable around you. Imagine a person with good posture and a smile and you’ll be envisioning someone who is self-confident.
4. **Look at the person you are speaking to,** not at your shoes—keeping eye contact shows confidence. Last, speak

- slowly. Research has proved that those who take the time to speak slowly and clearly feel more self-confidence and appear more self-confident to others. The added bonus is they will actually be able to understand what you are saying.
5. **Image.** Go the extra mile and style your hair, give yourself a clean shave, and dress nicely. Not only will this make you feel better about yourself, but others are more likely to perceive you as successful and self-confident as well.
 6. **Don't accept failure and get rid of the negative thoughts.** Never give up. Never accept failure. There is a solution to everything, so why would you want to throw in the towel? Make this your new mantra. Succeeding through great adversity is a huge confidence booster. Low self-confidence is often caused by the negative thoughts running through our minds on an endless track. If you are constantly bashing yourself and saying you're not good enough, aren't attractive enough, aren't smart enough or athletic enough, and on and on, you are creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. You are becoming what you are preaching inside your head, and that's not good. The next time you hear that negativity in your head, switch it immediately to a positive affirmation and keep it up until it hits the caliber of a self-confidence boost.
 7. **Be prepared.** Learn everything there is to know about your field, job, presentation--whatever is next on your "to conquer" list. If you are prepared, and have the knowledge to back it up, your self-confidence will soar.
 8. For tough times, when all else fails: **Create a great list.** Life is full of challenges and there are times when it's difficult to keep our self-confidence up. Sit down right now and make a list of all the things in your life that you are thankful for, and another list of your accomplishments in which you take pride. Once your lists are complete, post them on your refrigerator door, on the wall by your desk, on your bathroom mirror—somewhere where you can easily be reminded of what an amazing life you have and what an amazing person you really are. If you feel your self-confidence dwindling, take a look at those lists and let yourself *feel* and be inspired all over again by *you*.

From: [Peter Economy. INC Magazine](#)

“Low self-confidence isn't a life sentence. Self-confidence can be learned, practiced, and mastered—just like any other skill. Once you master it, everything in your life will change for the better.”

BARRIE DAVENPORT

Build Up Others

Finally, one key trait of people who have high self-confidence is that they build up others rather than tearing them down. Having self-confidence means that you do not feel competitive with others. Their success doesn't diminish your own. Find ways to build up

others. Compliment them. Acknowledge their contributions and express your gratitude. Being a mentor can also help to build others up by helping them develop skills, which will help them develop their own self-confidence.

More feedback on workshop facilitation

"John Whitehead has brought significant value, experience and teaching to both myself and the entire Sales and Service team at the Vancouver Whitecaps. We've brought him in for full sales and service sessions, as well as key manager executive training, and all of them have proved to be highly valuable. His coaching is direct and personalized for who he's working with, and with his help the leadership acumen within the department has greatly increased. I'd highly recommend working with John."

*Colby Fackler, Vice President, Partnerships & Tickets,
Sales & Service at Vancouver Whitecaps FC*

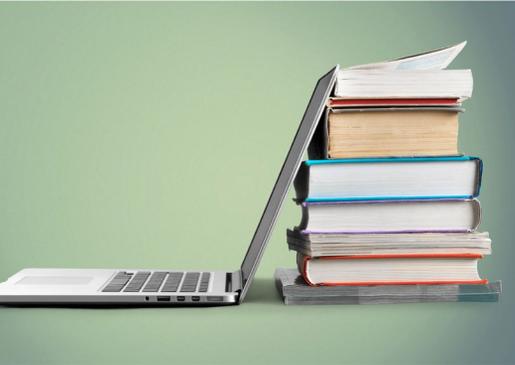
*"Thanks, John, for your informative and interactive presentation at our recent national conference. Not only are your insights on interpersonal communication valuable, you present them in an understandable and entertaining manner. My lingering impression is your passion for this topic – keep up the good work."
Allan B.*

*"The workshop was very interactive, and the facilitator did a great job of drawing people into the exercises – even people who tend to be reticent. Participants left the workshop with practical tools they can use to communicate more effectively. I have attended other "personality type" workshops in the past and found this one to be refreshing and valuable. I highly recommend this workshop to any organization that wishes to improve its members' verbal communication skills."
Elvin G.*

Chapter Fifteen

The Ability to Learn

I am a strong believer in continuous learning. If you follow [my blog](#) you will know that I am constantly looking for opportunities to learn. I often tell the story of the time some colleagues and I were in a management meeting



ing when the topic of learning came up. At the time, two of us were reading Marshal Goldsmith's book, *What Got You Here, Won't Get You There* (Goldsmith, 2007). One of the individuals chimed in with a statement that not only struck me as idiotic then, but still causes me to shake my head in disbelief today. He said (and I'm paraphrasing), "I don't read any of those kind of books anymore. Since I have my MBA I know all I need to know." I remember the setting and the individuals and

those words so very clearly even though this happened many years ago. Its effect on me became so profound that I am sure it had some part in my decision to go back to school in 2010 to get my MA. How could someone believe that they had nothing more to learn?

"Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel."

SOCRATES

This book on Soft Skills development is based on an understanding that we should be improving ourselves, learning how to communicate better, listen to understand and to be intentional in our learning, and in by doing so, gain the confidence in ourselves to be better leaders. The list of soft skills can be endless. I have chosen in this series to focus on Self-awareness, Professionalism,

Communications, Team building, Problem-solving, Time & Personal Management, Attitude, Adaptability, Self-confidence, Networking and finally Continuous Learning. It is not an accident that I started with self-awareness and end with learning. It seems to be that the first step in anything is to recognize that something needs to be done, to figure it out and then decide to do something about it.

"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty.

Anyone who keeps learning stays young."

HENRY FORD

One way to determine where one needs to grow and become aware is by listening to others. This has the potential to be unpleasant and uncomfortable because it means having to listen to what others think about you and where they think you can improve. Such feedback can come in many forms, from formal performance reviews to comments made on the fly, and they aren't always given in a positive manner — sometimes they can come as criticism. Not all of us like to take criticism, but we can attempt to take it in stride, and use such comments as a launch pad to improvement. LeBron James is quoted

as saying: "I like criticism. It makes me strong."

The ability to listen to and accept criticism is a key component of self-confidence. One way to get out in front of this is to actively ask for feedback on how our actions affect other people's performance. It demonstrates that we value what others have to say and helps develop a sense that we are committed to what we do and to our own growth. In an ongoing study by Kouzes and Posner, in their work on leadership (The Leadership Challenge, Leadership Practices Inventory), they find that this one item consistently ranks at the bottom on surveys of leaders.

"Those people who develop the ability to continuously acquire new and better forms of knowledge that they can apply to their work and to their lives will be the movers and shakers in our society for the indefinite future."

BRIAN TRACY

Chapter Sixteen

Criticism and the Ability to Learn

My guess is that not many people like to be criticized. Those who do have most likely learned that listening to criticism is a good way to learn. That doesn't mean it is easy — our egos often get in the way. We tend to see criticism as a personal attack (and sometimes that is indeed the critic's actual intention) however being able to separate the emotional reaction and to then reflect on the actual message can lead to some significant personal and professional growth. Building on what I wrote earlier about self-confidence, the ability to listen to criticism is based on your personal confidence in your own abilities, and knowing that there can always be room for improvement. Finally, listening to others' feedback shows them that you value what they have to say and respect their viewpoint, and provides evidence to them that you value your own growth.



I like criticism. It makes you strong.

LEBRON JAMES

The following are some thoughts on how to effectively deal with criticism from 10 Soft Skills You Need (Global Courseware Inc., 2015):

Wow, You Mean I'm Not Perfect?

It can come as a shock when we get feedback that we're not as perfect as we might like to think. However, one of the hallmarks of a confident person is the willingness to recognize mistakes and accept that sometimes we are wrong. The key is to keep the focus on improvement, not on defending ourselves or on the reasons why we did the thing we are being criticized for. When you accept that you're not perfect, you will have gained a valuable skill. Remember that no one expects

you to be perfect, they just expect you to be the best you can. And criticism is offered in the spirit of helping you achieve excellence, not to make you feel bad.

Listen with an Open Mind

Your active listening skills come in very handy when you're learning to accept and learn from criticism. It is tempting to defend ourselves when we receive criticism, but it is vital to resist this. When someone offers you feedback or criticism, listen with an open mind.

You may not agree with all (or any) of what they have to say, but it is important to hear the person out. Reflect back what you understand the person to have said, and check for understanding. Answer any questions non-defensively, and do not interrupt. Listen to understand, not to respond.

Analyze and Learn

After someone has given you feedback or criticism, it is fine to ask for time to consider what he or she has said. Always thank the person for the feedback. Take time to analyze the feedback and decide what items you want to act on. Give yourself time, especially if you feel defensive. Even if you do not agree with everything the person said, see what you can draw out of the feedback that you can learn from. When you have analyzed the feedback, choose some action items that you can use going forward. You should then investigate training, mentoring, or other ways in which you can improve on in the areas of feedback that you think are valid. If you have difficulty analyzing the feedback, seek out the help of a supervisor or trusted colleague.

Clear the Air and Don't Hold Any Grudges

Even when it's not meant to be, criticism and feedback can feel extremely personal. When someone gives you feedback, it's important to clear the air and not hold onto any bad feelings or grudges. Take the time to thank the person for his or her time, and for caring enough to give you feedback. Affirm the relationship, especially if the criticism has been harsh or difficult to hear. Remember that when people give you feedback, they are

doing so with your best interests at heart. If you find yourself feeling defensive or holding on to negative feelings even after the feedback session, make sure to find a way to clear the air as soon as possible. This demonstrates not only that you are committed to your own growth, but that you value the relationship with the person who gave you the feedback.

The Soft Skill Art of the Critique



The previous chapter focused on the ability to learn — an incredibly important soft skill, perhaps even more so than self-awareness, since without it there is no ability to grow or improve. This may be the ultimate “the chicken or the egg” scenario. What comes first: self-awareness or the ability to learn?

The previous section focused on criticism and our ability to handle critical feedback, and dealt mostly with how to handle criticism, or critical feedback, from the receiver's point of view. At the end of that post I asked, is there really such a thing as positive, or constructive, criticism? Next, I try to answer that question.

There are things we can control and there are things we cannot. We *can't* control how

others give critical feedback to us, but we *can* control how we receive it. Likewise, we can control how we *give* critical feedback, but not how others *receive* it. That being said, if we do our part in framing critical feedback in a positive way, we may minimize negative reactions.

Daniel Goleman gives a perfect example of this in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (Goleman, 1997) when he describes criticism leveled at an engineer by a manager after a product presentation. The manager is quoted as stating, “How long have you been out of graduate school? These specifications are ridiculous. They have no chance of getting past my desk.” These comments destroyed the confidence of the engineer, who had spent weeks with his team compiling the facts, information, and presentation. When the manager was asked about his comments, he had no idea of the effect it had on the engineer. For him it was a “throwaway line” and in fact he thought the project had promise and just needed more work. Goleman offers this alternative set of comments: “The main difficulty at this stage is that your plan will take too long and so escalate costs. I’d like you to think more about your proposal, especially the design specifications for software development, to see if you can figure out a way to do the same job more quickly.” This is what Goleman called the Artful Critique, which “focuses on what a person has done and can do rather than reading a mark of a character into a job poorly done.” It motivates rather than demotivates, and as Bradberry and Greaves stated, “Whenever you show you care, you can help other people to better understand what is

important...” (Bradbury & Greaves, 2005).

It is important to give feedback in a way that does not criticize. You can do that by first checking your emotional stance. Be specific and clear about expectations. Also, if you are in the habit of regularly praising others and expressing appreciation for them and what they do, when the need for a difficult conversation arises, you have created the climate in which it is more likely to be heard and appreciated for its true intention. It is what Sparrow and Knight refer to as creating a “climate of supportive response rather than silence or endless criticism” (Sparrow and Knight, 2006).

So how can you give positive, affirming criticism?

- ▶ **Be specific:** Talk about a specific example or case. Don’t just say they are doing “something wrong.” Reference what the person is doing well along with what they are not doing well. Go straight to the point; don’t be evasive. If it’s helpful, script it out and have notes to which you can refer.
- ▶ **Ask for and be prepared to offer a solution:** Lead a discussion on how the other person may be able to resolve the issue or challenge. Listen to them and offer alternatives that may not have occurred to them. Be open to compromise if possible. Look for the second, third or even fourth “right” solution. Whatever the solution is, make sure you cover its expectations and that any timelines are clear.
- ▶ **Be present:** both criticism and praise are best done in person. If that is not possible, try then for a video link or a

phone conversation. Don't use written electronic media. There is no way an email or written memo can deliver a message with the tone and inflections you intend it to have.

- ▶ **Be sensitive:** This is another way of being "present." It is being empathic, listening to understand and being aware of how the other person is interpreting your comments. Be open to "hearing"

concerns or issues that are not being spoken aloud and ask questions to draw them out.

If we remember that the reason for all the above is to grow, learn and improve, and that being either the recipient or the giver provides a way to learn. This gives us a joint solution and a shared responsibility and accountability. Self-awareness or learning — what comes first? Is it really important?

Colleagues

"I was fortunate to have John as a colleague and a resource... His ability to see the larger picture and develop solutions that are relevant to the members of his team is exceptional. He is an effective and engaging teacher and trainer one-on-one or with a larger group."

Rob W.

"(I) worked with John for over ten years and I've admired his ability to pull together various ideas and summarize and articulate an objective from the group. John has developed a strong understanding of Social Styles and can deliver a memorable and useful presentation to groups or individuals."

Jonathan M.

"John... is one of the best and experienced contributors on BusinessGists.com I have ever met in my life and one of the smartest professionals I have ever worked with."

Samuel Adesanya

Chapter Seventeen

Networking as an Important Soft Skill

“Giving connects two people, the giver and the receiver, and this connection gives birth to a new sense of belonging.”

DEEPAK CHOPRA



Networking is more than just a buzzword. Taking the time to network and build relationships is an important skill. Networking creates connections with others and expands our circle of learning and support. It is more than meeting people or connecting with them at events or online, it involves building mutually advantageous links from which you can learn and benefit one another. That is why it is such an important Soft Skill.

“The single greatest ‘people skill’ is a highly developed & authentic interest in the ‘other’ person.”

BOB BURG

Most people think of networking in terms of their own needs or what they hope to gain from the networking relationship. However, I want to shift your focus from *what can you get out of it* to *what can you give*. Think about what you have to offer people instead of what you need from them. You expand your own network when you think in terms of what you can offer as well as what you need from others. You begin to seek out people to whom you can offer your expertise and talents rather than just those who have something to offer you. Seeing yourself as someone with much to offer also helps to boost your self-confidence. When you network with others, it’s critical to identify others’ interests.

- ▶ Look for common interests and goals, as well as areas in which you have something to offer yourself.
- ▶ Ask about their goals and interests. How do they line up with yours?
- ▶ How can you integrate your interests with others to find common ground?
 - ▶ What goals do you have in common?
 - ▶ What can you offer of yourself to help others reach their goals?
 - ▶ How can they help you reach your goals?

Focusing on ways in which your goals and interests integrate with others’ helps create a strong, powerful network that goes beyond simple friendship.

“You can have everything in life you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want.”

ZIG ZIGLAR

In order to network successfully, you must be able to reach out. There are many ways to do this, both online and in person. One of the easiest ways to reach out is to join professional social networking sites such as LinkedIn and look for people in your industry or who share your interests. Join groups, both online and in person: professional groups and associations, groups that promote skills you want to develop (such as Toastmasters) and groups that work for causes you value are all good choices. Check out your local Chamber of Commerce or downtown business group. No matter what method you choose, as obvious as it might seem, the important part of networking is to talk to people! In the next

on LinkedIn. Make time in your schedule each week to work on networking — schedule it as you would any other important task. Use your soft skills — listening actively, projecting self-confidence, build others up — as you network.

How to Network 101 — Some Lessons learnt

A typical networking interaction may go like this: “What do you do?” or “Tell me about your business.” What is your response? Are you prepared to answer in a way that will engage the asker, perhaps even to the point of persuading them to meet with you and ultimately purchase your product or service? That’s why you are there, right? To network? Unfortunately, at most networking events I attend, the answer to that question I most often hear is, “I’m a <role> and I work for <company>.” If the person is a little more on top of it I hear “I’m <name> and I’m a <role> with <company>, we do <brief description of what company does/offers>.”

I don’t consider myself as an expert in networking. However when I look at the numerous “courses” and workshops that are currently available and are designed to help people with networking, it seems to me that I have learned just as much from simply being an active, engaged networker. Over the past several years I have gained as much experience and knowledge as most of these so-called experts.



section I cover what you need to do to be prepared in approaching people. Following up on that initial contact is the next step. Be responsive when people contact you via email or phone; for example, send a thank you note when someone agrees to connect with you

- Here some of the things I have learned:
- ▶ **Have your business card ready.** You would be surprised at how many people I meet at networking events who don't have a card with them.
 - ▶ **Attend with intent.** Know why you are there! If your intention is to meet with the most people you possibly can, perhaps your real intent is to raise your profile, so have something to use to achieve that. If your intention is to set future meetings to provide a more in-depth presentation on your service or product, be ready for that.
 - ▶ **Be prepared, be proactive.**
 - ▶ Approach others; don't wait for them to approach you.
 - ▶ Be ready with a solid opening question — practice it. Instead of asking, "What do you do?" ask "What brings you to this event tonight?" Then follow up with a question that would tie what this person does to their reason for attending.
 - ▶ Follow up with other open-ended questions that will encourage the person to engage with you.
 - ▶ **Be ready to answer questions.** When someone asks what you do, be ready with a succinct reply. Practice it!
 - ▶ Use a story to illustrate what your business or role: you could relate an experience that describes how you helped someone with your product or service.
 - ▶ Adjust as you go. Be flexible and ready to tailor your response to each individual and situation.
 - ▶ Have a "call to action" ready. While there, set up an appointment to connect later if you can. This means having your calendar at your disposal.

When someone asks you at a networking event, "Who are you, what do you do?" will you be ready?

Epilogue

What About Trust?

As I completed my online blog series on Soft Skills, a commenter asked me about the place of **Trust**, since I had not listed it as a specific Soft Skill. I'm not sure about this. The question of Trust seems to be relevant or applicable in a number of different areas, and so as I did with Professionalism, I ask the question: "Is Trust a soft skill on its own, or an underlining feature or component of all the soft skills I have discussed in the series?"



If people don't trust you, they are less likely to work with you, invest in you, or pursue shared goals. Evidence suggest that if you take the time to build trust with your colleagues or team members, everyone will thrive. Many of the soft skills I covered in my series help to build trust — effective communication, openness and honesty, a positive attitude and a strong work ethic. Demonstrating that you are trustworthy helps not only to build personal relationships, but also to create “buy in” for your initiatives and projects. The literature suggests that people who are deemed trustworthy by colleagues share some of the same characteristics:

- ▶ They are skilled at their jobs
- ▶ They are passionate about their work, and have a strong work ethic
- ▶ They communicate honestly and value transparency
- ▶ They have others' best interests at heart
- ▶ They care about people and demonstrate this care
- ▶ They are self-aware

My own conclusion is that trust is a trait rather than a skill — that when you trust someone or create trust, it is an outcome of something else such as empathy, which helps build trust. In *Search Inside Yourself* Chade-Meng Tan stated that when we interact with empathy “we increase the likelihood that people feel seen, heard and understood” (Tan, 2012). He goes on to say that when we feel these things we tend to feel safer and therefore more likely to trust. In coaching we learn that the establishment of trust is the cornerstone of the coaching relationship, which is why confidentiality is so critical. By maintaining confidentiality we create a bond of trust between the parties. Lencioni in his work *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Lencioni, 2002) places the “Absence of Trust” on the bottom of his hierarchal pyramid, stating that this is the basis of dysfunction — everything starts here and the absence of trust is the basis for all the other dysfunctions.

In *Credibility: How leaders gain and lose it*, Kouzes and Posner stated that “credibility is about how leaders earn the trust and

confidence of their constituents” and that when asked in surveys how leaders build and sustain credibility, respondents’ most frequent answer was, “They do what they say they will do” (Kouzes and Posner, 2011). Trust, then, is tied to how we are perceived by others and by our actions: Do we walk the talk? Do we follow through on commitments and keep our promises?

I still don’t believe that trust is a specific Soft Skill but I’m open to dialogue on the subject. I do believe that trust is an outcome of how others perceive and interact with us. We either trust others or we don’t, based on how we perceive their actions.

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— Justin, Panama City, Panama

John has been an incredible asset in helping us align our core values. His direction on effective communication within our team has given all of us a fresh perspective when working with each other and dealing with potential clients. He is an active listener with keen insight into the inner dynamics of company relations. His approach goes above and beyond the norm. Always there when you need him. His summary of a session was very helpful in identifying areas that myself and the company could improve upon and at the same time, see our strengths for future success. On a personal note — It was great to have John actually stop me sometimes during a conversation and point out a key point that I might have otherwise missed. We will continue to work with John

as our company grows in the years to come.

— Derek, Kelowna, Canada

JKW | JOHN K. WHITEHEAD
& ASSOCIATES

E-MAIL john@johnkwhitehead.ca
SKYPE [john.whitehead80](https://www.skype.com/people/john.whitehead80)
PHONE 250.707.1381 (o) 250.826.6088 (c)