



IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS FOR A TECHNICAL STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the result of a realization that is, a dire need of Soft Skills for a technical student not only in his personal life but also as a professional. This paper explores the real meaning of Soft Skills, its requirement and importance in every field and the ways and means to develop it. This paper is an appeal to parents, teachers, professionals and trainers to deal with the subject seriously and sensitively and feel responsible in teaching it to the students. It's time that students become aware of the fact that Soft Skills are a must to complement hard skills and the right blend of both skills can only take them to places. Usually, students focus more on acquiring technical knowledge of their respective fields and they tend to neglect Soft Skills till the time when their placement for job comes near. But then it's too late to get accustomed to Soft Skills as it's an emotional concept which takes time to develop. So, Soft Skills must be inculcated at a very young age to reap its benefits for long. This will not only increase their chances of employability but also bring about a great transformation in their personality. And, Individual growth shall culminate into nation's progress.

Key words- Soft Skills, Professionals, Hard Skills, Technical Skills, Employability, Personality, Growth, Progress.

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INTRODUCTION

Gone are the days when only 'the grades' mattered in acquiring as well as sustaining a good job. Nowadays, while getting a respectable job is difficult, sustaining or rising in a job has become all the more challenging due to a change in environment at work place for various reasons. In other words, the demands at work place have dramatically changed. And, one of the most indispensable demands is the acquisition and perfection of soft skills.

It is understood that a student has to be academically or technically sound in his/her chosen subject or stream. However, what is often not understood is that technical knowledge alone is not enough to acquire, sustain and rise in a job.

As a result of an in-depth study on the subject and an extensive interaction with the technical

students, this paper explores the following areas of soft skills:

- (A) What does soft skills really mean ?
- (B) How Soft Skills are the need of the hour ?
- (C) How to develop soft skills ?

(A) What does soft skills really mean ?

It is indeed one of the basic and most important questions which needs to be dealt with before exploring the importance of Soft Skills. "Soft Skills" is a vague concept incorporating various traits in itself which makes it difficult to understand at a glance. To put it simply-" Soft Skills are personal attributes which enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people."

Soft Skills is a synonym for 'People Skills'. It describes social behaviour that indicates a high level of emotional intelligence. It is intrinsic by nature. One can only feel the effect of Soft Skills once it is put into practice by a person. No institution can certify if a person really has Soft Skills unless its evident/shown through one's conduct.

Whenever we talk about Soft Skills, the first thing that comes to mind is Communication Skills, may be because it is the main skill in which our students as well as faculties lack to a great extent. It's a lacunae seen in almost all age groups and all categories. Many cannot even define Communication Skills. Most of them relate it with "The ability to express oneself in English Language" which is not at all the case. A more practical definition will be: "Communication Skills basically means a skill where the message is transmitted in such a way that the receiver receives it in a way it is intended to be". Communication Skills is evidently one of the important soft skills but certainly not an all-inclusive soft skills; there are many more and crucial soft skills like decision making , personal energy, emotional intelligence, etc.

Adaptability and flexibility, in all situations, without compromising with personal integrity or intellectual integrity , are also important components of Soft Skills. However, these traits are not easy to imbibe without first imbibing other traits like empathy, commitment, accountability, punctuality, leadership. team- spirit etc. Ironically, it is seen many a times that excellent technical skills are neutralised for want of soft skills. How often we hear managers and supervisors saying, "He knows the job very well, but somehow not delivering-----not as good as he can be. We wonder why! "A close study on the subject shows that Soft Skills are better understood in their absence/presence than by any definition , no matter howsoever painstakingly coined.

(B) How Soft Skills are the need of the hour ?

In the wake of growing competition in the global market and unemployability (not getting the desired candidates), the importance of Soft Skills is growing day by day. Every sector aspires to employ extra-ordinary people (as against mediocre) in this cut-throat competitive era. It is all about 'survival of the fittest' and 'fittest 'are considered those who have vast knowledge and continuously strive to add-up to their positive personal traits and habits that makes them stand apart from the rest of the crowd. In today's fast paced world, employers seek candidates who are creative and productive from day one.

There is no denial that today's graduates may be technically sound in their chosen stream but they certainly lack in Soft Skills like Positive Attitude , Interpersonal skills, Body language, Communication Skills, Time Management etc, to name a few.

The irony is, that on one hand there is so much unemployment everywhere, and on the other hand, the prospective employers or managers are crying for candidates who are holistically competent to deliver despite so-called all-odds. Most of these employers are even ready to pay more than the candidate's expectations. And lack of Soft Skills on the part of candidates, is at the centre of this dichotomy.

Lest the Industry or Institution are mistaken for complaining against their employees, attitudinal problems, their concern may be better illustrated with an example. A client in his early 70s used to visit a bank roughly once in a month and ask for the closing balance of his saving account or printing of his passbook to the bank employee.The bank employee did not like it and showed her irritation first through her body language and later on in so many unpalatable words.The client was at loss as to why the employee concerned behaved

like that with him; and a day came when he decided to withdraw his huge amount of fixed deposits from the bank and close down his account as well with the bank. The matter reached to the bank manager, who immediately understood the lack of compassion and presence of mind on behalf of the bank employee in dealing with old clients. To conclude, lack of Soft Skills can do more harm than we can actually imagine. So it is better to incorporate them in time.

(C) How to develop soft skills ?

Before we dwell on how to develop soft skills, it is equally, if not more, important to know as to why we lack in Soft Skills as against technical skills where most of us are really good at. It reminds me of the proverb that 'Good is the enemy of the Best'. We do not realize the importance of Soft Skills because we think we can do without them. It is exactly as we treat the learning of English language. It is human nature to settle for soft options. We do not put in enough efforts wherever we think we can do without. This is very true about learning Soft-Skills.

Secondly, we do not realize that we are missing on Soft Skills unless we suffer loss or humiliation or embarrassment at work place or during job interviews. It is because it is in the nature of Soft Skills that they are better noticed in their absence than presence. In a classic case, all-along-toppers-in-academics were picked during the campus placements by a reputed company against an attractive package. After a few months of employment, most of these toppers were found to be drastically deficient in Soft Skills like team spirit, team-work, leadership qualities, communication skills etc. They were found to be very good workers individually but could not get much job done from others, which was central to their post profile and job profile. And yet, for no fault of theirs, they never knew they lacked in their skills. So, the first requirement to develop Soft Skills is to understand their deficiency as well as need in our personal and professional life.

The second area to settle for learning Soft Skills, is to make it a part and parcel of upbringing; by the parents at home, by the teachers in schools, by the professors in colleges and universities. At present, the entire emphasis in education is given to formal subjects like Arts, Commerce, Engineering, Science etc. Even the teachers are not very particular about their own soft skills knowledge while teaching. This further reduces the chances of students learning any soft skills in the formal educational institutions through observation.

The truth of the matter is that the soft skills are best learnt informally; by observation. But where are the role models to observe and follow! It is for this reason that parents and teachers can play a very meaningful role in the lives of students to teach soft skills. A close look at the students possessing soft skills reveal that it is due to their family background or the educational institutions they have studied in. So, there is a dire need to focus and strengthen these two institutions.

We live by and large habitually. Once a habit is formed, it is not easy to change it. This is especially true in our interaction with others, in all situations, as an important component of soft skills. The formative years are crucial for learning soft skills. This is true about almost all the soft skills but more so in case of etiquettes and manners. In one of the workshops on the subject for the undergraduate students, most of the participants were ill at ease to develop the habit of saying "Good Morning". They were explained in detail that saying "Good Morning" is important "as an introduction to set pace and get going" for further talks. Yet the participants were found reluctant to say "Good Morning" and if at all said, said not in the spirit it should be said. Closely questioned, they confided that they find it 'funny' and 'odd' to say "Good Morning" whoever they met in the morning; and so prefer to say nothing whatsoever. The point to observe is how a sheer habit can create havoc in developing soft skills. The root cause of the malady is : a habit picked and practised early on, becomes a conviction and attitude over a period of time and very difficult to change later on. And the lesson to learn is "Catch Them Young" to adapt soft skills.

It is not that the importance of Soft Skills has not been realized by the educational institutes. Some of the Universities and Educational Boards have consciously introduced the Soft Skills subject in their curriculum along with the technical subjects, but this did not yield the desired result for various reasons. Firstly, the subject has not been handled by the Soft skill trained teachers. Secondly, not being a written subject (only termwork in the hands of internal examiners), it is not taken seriously by the students as well as the teachers.

Lastly, it is not taken as seriously as other technical papers. And, the result is for all to see for themselves. The remedy lies in making Soft skills a written paper handled by the Soft Skills Trained teachers only.

Conclusion

After weighing the importance of Soft Skills from varied point of views, it can be concluded that Soft Skills occupy central position for people of all age groups and more importantly for youngsters stepping into professional competitive world. Soft skills must be incorporated in the curriculum and must be dealt with by the trained faculty so that justice may be done to the subject. Soft Skills are gaining importance in all fields ;be it school, college, university or industry. It is a collective responsibility of all to make sure that manners, etiquettes, polite behaviour etc is practised at all times. This world would become a better place to live in if everyone puts in his/her best behaviour and thus spread peace and goodwill all around.

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