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THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION & SOFT SKILLS –INDUSTRY EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Communication is what connects us to other people. If we want to be good communicators, we are likely to have strong, positive relationships; whereas if we are a poor communicator, we may feel isolated, misunderstood, and have trouble forming strong connections with the people around us. Most of us fall somewhere in between those two extremes of “good communicator” and “bad communicator.” Since communication is an integral part of our life and career, inability to communicate effectively and efficiently will affect our private and public interests. In short, all sorts of communication are good. Soft skills play a vital role for professional success; they help one to excel in the work place and their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge. Good communication and soft skills, which are, in fact, scarce in the highly competitive corporate world, will help a person stand out in a milieu of routine job seekers with mediocre skills and talent.

**Keywords:** business communication, listening, speaking, writing, Interpersonal relationships, industry requirements

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INTRODUCTION

The word, “communication”, has been derived from the Latin word ‘communis’ which means “to share”, that is, sharing of information, ideas, speaking, reading and writing skills. If any of them cannot be done properly, there will be a communication gap. In fact, effective communication skills facilitate successful human relationships. In other words, human behavior and social relationships are the result of the process of communication. Whether we are listening, talking, or thinking, we are engaged in some form of communication. As a dynamic process, communication gives meaning and expression to the activities of man. A comprehensive communication package includes the verbal and non-verbal signs, symbols and sounds that accompany the spoken word. Since communication is an integral part of our life and career, inability to communicate effectively and efficiently will affect our private and public interests.

Psychologist and relationship researcher John Gottman explored this concept of reciprocal communication through studying couples’ communicative behaviors. He observed that some couples – those

most likely to stay together longer than 6 years – would “turn towards” each other’s needs, while unsuccessful couples more commonly “turned away”

It is obvious that the process of communication involves the coder, the code and the decoder, that is, the sender of the message, followed by the response or feedback of the receiver. In short, all sorts of communication are goal directed. The term “language” which has come from the Latin word “lingua” which means, “tongue” is an effective means of communication. Of course, one can also communicate through other means, such as, gestures, facial expressions, drawings and pictures, but language is the primary and only effective means of communication in human interaction, that is, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. It may be noted that communication is a larger canvas which is both verbal and non-verbal but only language gives man a unique status in nature as a paragon of species, while communication gives him a unique place in the society. Thus communication provides man a distinctive ability by means of language. The pace of globalization has increased rapidly in recent years. This reality raises increasingly pressing management issues for multinationals engaged in today’s complex and rapidly changing environment. Various studies and reports point to the gap in the skill set of an individual vis-à-vis the expectations of the industry. One of the key areas required to enhance one’s skill sets is soft skill. Soft skills or life skills are required by every individual for the development of his personality, communication skills, time management, self-esteem, team work, leadership and cross cultural sensitivity.

Soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person’s Emotional Intelligence Quotient, personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job and other activities.

Soft skills are interpersonal and intra-personal skills that determine a person’s ability to excel or at least fit into a particular social structure, such as, a project team or a company. These skills include competencies in areas, such as, Emotional Intelligence, Communication, Leadership ability, etiquette, conflict resolution, decision-making, self-motivation, self-discipline and persuasion.

Soft skills play a vital role for professional success; they help one to excel in the work place and their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge. Good soft skills, which are, in fact, scarce in the highly competitive corporate world, will help a person stand out in a milieu of routine job seekers with mediocre skills and talent.

As the axiom goes in business circles, hard skills will get a person an interview but soft skills will land that person in a job. This means an applicant with years of education and experience in the field might have the hard skills necessary to fill the position, but not the soft skills, such as, leadership ability or self-motivation necessary to perform well on the job. An ideal candidate for many job openings has a combination of both hard and soft skills.

Soft skills are qualities, personality traits and social skills which every one possesses in varying degrees. Some people make friends easily, for example, which would be considered a valuable soft skill in the world of sales. Others are extremely punctual, or able to make rational decisions under pressure. A person may also have the innate ability to work with co-workers from other cultures, or learn a new language quickly. All these would be considered valuable soft skills.

Unlike specific hard skills, such as, mathematical ability or mechanical aptitude, discovering a job applicant’s soft skills can be very difficult. Some companies use special psychological screening tests to determine if an applicant has the right temperament or personality for a specific job title, although these tests cannot always predict how an applicant would perform under real-world conditions. A new employee may have the technical skills and experience to work on a customer support team, but lack the soft skills such as patience or the ability to work under stressful conditions to be effective in the position.

Some employers use open-ended interview questions about an applicant’s work or life experiences in order to determine desirable soft skills. For example, an applicant for a managerial position might be asked about a past incident in which he or she had to assume leadership. Another applicant might be asked to recall a time when he or

she had to resolve a conflict or deal with a difficult co-worker or customer. How an applicant handles such probing questions during an interview can also reveal a number of other soft skills, such as, the ability to form answers quickly or to see the positive side of a negative situation.

Many employment experts strongly urge job seekers to improve their soft skills along with their hard skills such as continuing education or specialized training. Many employers are reluctant to hire technically skilled applicants who display little emotional investment in their careers or the ability to work well with others under stressful conditions. A proper balance of hard and soft skills is essential to prosper in one's career. Communication skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing are also effective soft skills. If a person is impatient or unable to listen well, there will be a communication gap. This will adversely affect his relationships with others, and his job or interview skills. After all, to be successful in any field one has to develop soft skills. Similarly, if one cannot speak well, he will lose his audience. He is bound to lose his opportunities since he cannot put his ideas and convince his peers and superiors. After all, speaking is central to all communication. In the same way, reading increases one's knowledge, understanding and intelligence. Reading certainly makes a full man. One must read not only the printed lines, but also read between the lines, behind the lines and beyond the lines for symbolic meanings, concealed meanings and ironic meanings. Finally, writing makes an exact man. It is a record of one's ideas and opinions. All these communication skills are interrelated. In fact, one who listens well, speaks well, and, one who reads well, writes well. Effective communication skills are all soft skills since they enhance one's personality and improve one's chances of a successful career.

Therefore this study will make an in depth probe into the nature and importance of the four communication skills which pave way for one's personality growth and career prospects. In particular, the theme of my study is the ways and means of developing communication and soft skills to improve the interpersonal relations in the organization.

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