

## **Soft Skills – Too important to be ignored!!**

Recently Shiv Khera, the renowned corporate trainer, made a very significant statement. He said, “We are hired for our technical skills, but fired for the lack of soft skills”. In the corporate world, HR departments rate soft skills, as valuable skills while selecting new employees, conversely they also agree that employees with well-developed soft skills are hard to find. Clearly, there’s a huge gap between the soft skills that organizations need, and that the fresh employees possess. Companies have offered soft-skills training to employees for years. But as every experienced trainer would acknowledge, these programs are typically the first to go when budgets are cut. Given a choice between funding a course on computer skills or a course on active listening, the corporate heads more willingly sign off on the computer course. Why? Because until recently, there had been no hard evidence that soft skills make a difference.

What are soft skills? This basic question is not easy to answer, because the perception of what is a soft skill differs from context to context. A subject may be considered a soft skill in one particular area, and may be considered a hard skill in another. Moreover, the understanding of what should be recognized as a soft skill varies widely. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job. Generally, soft skills are define it as “skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge,” and it commonly includes at least two distinct clusters of behaviors: interaction (including friendliness, teamwork, ability to fit in, appropriate grooming, and the like) and motivation (including such components as enthusiasm, positive work attitude, dependability, and willingness to learn). The term often also includes some communication behaviors.

Technical or hard skills are domain specific and cannot be transferred, but soft skills are transferable skills and are necessary for every domain. An individual’s ‘employability assets’ comprise their knowledge (i.e. what they know), skills (what they do with what they know) and attitudes (how they do it). There are a number of detailed categorizations in the literature which, for instance, distinguish between:

- **‘baseline assets’** such as basic skills and essential personal attributes (such as reliability and integrity)
- **‘intermediate assets’** such as occupational specific skills (at all levels), generic or key skills (such as communication and problem solving) and key personal attributes (such as motivation and initiative), and
- **‘high level assets’** involving skills which help contribute to organizational performance (such as team working, self- management, commercial awareness etc.).

Merely being in possession of employer-relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes is not enough for an individual to either ‘move self-sufficiently’ in the modern labor market or ‘realize their potential’. They need the capability to exploit their assets, to market them and sell them. The real key to the efficacy of professionals is their soft skills. They help transfer their domain knowledge into purposeful practice.

The mandate for our institutes of higher learning and professional courses is to provide the industry with employable candidates, who could be productive from day one. To achieve this end, they should invest more time and resources in training their students in the soft skills domain. Would it make business sense for our academic institutes to invest in soft skills labs and training? It’s imperative to elucidate a few reasons stating why it’s a sound investment.

Training in soft skills would give the students an edge towards effectiveness in;

- **Leading people:** Leading and motivating self, leading a team, conflict management, interviewing and selecting new members, delegation, coaching, networking, and developing others,
- **Managing information:** Decision making, problem solving, meeting management, persuasion, and presentation skills,
- **Managing activities:** Product quality, workplace safety, customer care, and fund raising,
- **Managing resources:** People and finances.

As the global employment environment becomes challenging, potential recruiters seek personal attributes like attitude, values, and communication skills apart from the core competencies for

any job. Developing soft skills are important in facilitating and empowering committed individuals to ensure a smooth transition from aspiring students to young successful managers and practitioners in the business world.

Concluding, soft skills are like the salt in our food. No matter how simple or complex your recipe is, it will not taste good until there is a dash of salt in the right amount.