Soft Skills: What Should Have Been Learned in Kindergarten

Erik Christensen

Learning Goals

• Be able to explain what soft skills are.
• Be able to describe why you should emphasize developing soft skills.
• Be able to identify how to develop activities focused on developing soft skills.

My Inspiration

Note Taking Guide

What?

A simple term for a complex set of personal qualities
**Origin of the term “soft skills”**

U.S. Army training manual in the 1972
“skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than to formal or technical knowledge.”

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**Many Other Names**

- Power Skills
- Employability Skills
- Communication Skills
- People Skills
- Emotional Intelligence
- Behavioral Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Human Skills
- Personal Skills
- Interpersonal Skills

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**Soft vs. Hard Skills**

Soft skills are character traits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person’s relationship with other people.

Hard skills are specific, quantifiable, and teachable abilities that can be defined and measured.

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**Hard and Soft Skills Should be Taught in Tandem**

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**Bad News**

Some people are innately better than others at soft skills

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**Good News**

Soft skills can be trained, coached, and developed
**Soft Skills**

**Why?**

Because there is a need!

**The Disconnect**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Considered Essential by hiring managers</th>
<th>Rated Proficiency by college graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork/Collaboration</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking/Problem Solving</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism/Work Ethic</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral/Written Communications</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Management</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

**21st Century Challenge**

80% of executives believe we need to fuse the three R’s with the four C’s

- **Reading**
- **Writing**
- **Arithmetic**
- **Critical Thinking**
- **Creativity**
- **Collaboration**
- **Communication**

**Shoulder Partner Activity**

“**We hire for hard skills. We fire for soft skills.”**

Discuss with your **shoulder partner** what soft skills are and why they are important in the workplace.

**Boeing**
SOFT SKILLS: What Should Have Been Learned in Kindergarten

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How?

Implementation Options

- Embed components into curriculum
- Develop a one or two credit soft skills class
- Integrate into departmental/divisional meetings

Recommended Framework

1. Discussion
2. Activity
3. Conclusion/Reflection
4. Extension Activity

Discussion

- Start with a short overview of the topic
- Engage in discussion
- Present a situation and ask for comments
- Show a video and then discuss

Activity

- A fun, yet meaningful, activity focused on a specific soft skill
- Easy to understand and relevant
- Applicable to both workplace and home
- Presented so it easy to digest and retain

Conclusion/Reflection

- Summarize what should have been learned from the activity
- Ask some reflective questions
  - What would you do?
  - What would you tell your friend?
Extension Activity

- Follow-up assignment to assess the learning that was accomplished
- Individual or group assignment
- Options:
  - Post online for others to comment
  - Present at next meeting
  - Submit for evaluation and grade

Teaching Soft Skills

1. Time Management
2. Communication
3. Teamwork
4. Positive Attitude
5. Critical Thinking
6. Professionalism

Which of these do you think is the most important?

Critical Thinking
Creativity
Collaboration
Communication

Teaching Time Management

- Effective planner
- Organizing time
- Prioritization of tasks
- Process of planning time
- Time allocation
- Time analysis
- Time control
- Time optimization
- Time scheduling
- Timing
- Working time arrangement

Discussion

- In small groups, define time management and multitasking
- Make a list of skills involved in managing time
- Compare lists with other groups
- Can you be effective doing two or more tasks at the same time? Let’s find out!

Teaching Time Management Activity

- [Diagram or activity page]

Page 5
Activity Example - Part 1
• Write down your typical morning routine while simultaneously counting out loud backwards from 100 by ones
• Record the number of words you wrote and the number you reached

Activity Example - Part 2
• Write down your typical morning routine
• Record number of words you wrote
• Now, count backwards from 100 by ones
• Record the number you reached

Conclusion
• Compare your results from Parts 1 and 2
• What observations did you notice?
• Now, how effective do you think you are at multitasking?
• Share some apps related to time management

Extension Activity
• Write a case study on time management
• Develop a hands-on activity on time management
• Write a reflective journal
• Find and review 10 apps related to time management
• Create an Internet scavenger hunt related to time management

Teaching Communication

Communication
• Able to listen
• Listening
• Negotiation
• Nonverbal communication
• Persuasion
• Presentation
• Public speaking

• Read body language
• Storytelling
• Verbal communication
• Visual communication
• Writing reports/proposals
• Writing skills
Discussion

- Communication comes in many forms (e.g., verbal, aural, non-verbal, written, visual)
  - Can you give me an example of each?
- It is important to understand your preferred communication method and those you work with
- Communication skills are some of the most desired skills employers look for

Activity Example

- Get a sheet of paper (last page of handout)
- Hold it in front of you
- Close your eyes and listen carefully to my directions
- The rules: No peeking or questions!

Discussion

- Fold your sheet of paper in half
- Now, tear off the upper right-hand corner
- Fold the paper in half again and tear off the upper left-hand corner
- Fold in half again in half
- Now tear off the lower right-hand corner

Activity Example

- Open your eyes and unfold your paper. If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look exactly the same!
- Hold up your sheet for everyone to see. Compare your sheet with others.
- Why do you think no one else’s paper matched your paper exactly?

Conclusion

- Part of being a good communicator is recognizing that people need to receive information in different ways in order to be successful.
- If the goal of this activity was really to have everyone’s snowflakes look exactly the same, what changes could have been made to the directions?
- Work in small group to create a definition of “Good Communication” by making a list of responsibilities for being a good communicator and a good listener

Extension Activities

- Create a poster on communication
- Develop a hands-on activity on communication
- Create a top 10 list of good communication traits
- Create an instructional video on communication
- Write an advice column with several communication problems
Now, It’s Your Turn!

- Each group is assigned a different soft skill
- At your table, discuss teaching that skill
- Develop a draft lesson with a graphic organizer.
  - Discussion
  - Activity
  - Conclusion/Reflection
  - Extension Activity

Teaching Soft Skills

1. Teamwork
2. Verbal Communication
3. Written Communication
4. Positive Attitude
5. Problem Solving/Critical Thinking
6. Professionalism
7. Time Management

Infusing Soft Skills: Activities and More

Soft Skills Teaching Plan Activity

LET’S DEBRIEF

- Can you explain what soft skills are?
- Can you describe why you should emphasize developing soft skills?
- Can you identify how to develop activities focused on developing soft skills?
Questions?

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Thank You!

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