

Show Your Softer Side

Technical and scientific skills aren't enough in today's workplace

AS A WHOLE, most experienced professionals value their technical mastery highly, and rightfully so. After all, look at the marvel of scientific achievement that is Curiosity, the robot the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory just put on Mars. Currently, it's beaming back to its earth-bound creators terabytes of information that will propel mankind forward in many not-yet-imagined arenas of astronomy, space exploration, medicine, chemistry, microbiology, botany and zoology for decades to come.

It is the dedication to excellence in scientific and technical endeavors that makes everyday life on planet Earth richer, safer and physically less demanding than ever before in the history of humankind. Having recently undergone major surgery, I am astounded at how the combination of engineering and chemistry restored me to my normally high-speed functioning self in less than two weeks after an operation that in the past required a recovery time of four to six weeks.

Yet, as amazing is the technology and science that brought about a smoothly executed procedure and almost painless

recovery, what is more significant was how the surgeon deftly combined his technical skills with his developed softer skills of empathy, intuition and in-person communication. This brings me to this month's topic: how to power up our professional lives through the perfect blend of hard and soft skills.

Transformation

Until relatively recently, there has been little attention and importance placed on softer skills. In fact, it is difficult to quantify soft skills. But more companies are realizing that while an individual's hard (technical or scientific) skills will move them ahead quickly, it is the dearth of soft skills that can derail an individual's advancement.

If out of alignment with a department or organization, a lack of soft skills will result in the employee being sidelined or even eliminated. In part, this new focus on the balanced professional is due to the transformed workplace.

The pressures of globalization, swift and chaotic economic changes, exponential growth in technology advances and

the presence of at least four generations with four different styles and philosophies of work have forced workers to accept some hard truths. Perhaps the most important is that while they cannot control external forces, to survive and thrive professionally, they must deal with diminishing personal power and productivity by proactively managing and directing these changes to their own benefit.

Empowerment

To direct their career destiny, experienced professionals must take preemptive action. Using their well-developed critical thinking skills, they must realize their final frontier is the mastery of the soft skills that ensure they gel with the increasingly diverse workforce.

Soft skills are abilities used to function effectively in the workplace. Among these are your unique work personality, behaviors (such as actions and interactions) and attitudes. Soft skills are not inborn. They are, as the term indicates, abilities and skills that can be acquired through observation, training, education, reading, experience, practice and other means.

There are empowerment tools to capitalize on the development and fine tuning of soft skills. Here are two suggestions that are useful no matter where you are in your career at the moment:

1. Create an online work personality profile. In my organization's work of identifying and placing midsenior-level technical and scientific subject matter experts (SME), we have found that a dominance, influence, steadiness and compliance assessment helps us determine an individual's dominant work style; their influencing behaviors; their steadiness, or



Technical professionals must realize their **final frontier** is in the **mastery of soft skills.**

response to work pace and consistency; and their response to procedures and compliance.

There are no right or wrong answers. The assessment helps our clients, our candidates and us determine a right fit for a position at a particular moment in time.

For example, if an individual's work style is best-suited for constant new challenges, greater responsibility and leading their team with a high level of autonomy, we would assess whether a proposed position met all or at least most of that individual's personal work style preferences and abilities. This might mean the individual would contribute at the highest level in a start-up or even as an SME consultant.

2. Get certified. One of the more enduring and valuable benefits of ASQ are its 17 certifications. Though being certified would certainly be considered a hard skill, having a certification in your industry engenders confidence in you and those you would benefit.

The implied message is you are strategic about your career, you recognize how to build trust, and you know how to make informed choices that benefit both internal (within the organization or consultancy) and external customers (clients). The express benefit to the certificate holder is increased ability to control his or her workplace destiny. **QP**



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