

Art of Speaking – An Impression of Man: Analysing the Need for Communication and Soft Skills

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to establish the fact that simply scoring good marks and completing a degree is not enough to succeed in this swiftly changing world. Soft skills are an indispensable part of the present system of education. This paper documents a brief survey of soft skills with a focus on etiquette and manners and how, with them, students can have a more complete personality. The paper aims at revealing the need and role of good communication skills for professional students and how they can help in building a successful career. Soft skills, along with good manners and conduct can complement the personality of any individual. Etiquette and manners form an integral part of soft skills, as each aspect of communication i.e. listening, speaking, body language, writing etc. is interrelated with courtesy. There is ample evidence that technical students lack the required standard of communication skills, particularly when measured against the needs of the industry. The teaching of soft skills and communication must not be undertaken merely to complete the syllabus; it should also be seen as a means to instil good manners and offer tips on appropriate behaviour. Impeccable soft skills and etiquette go hand-in-glove with every level of good and effective communication, good behaviour, age-appropriate conduct and, above all, becoming a better co-worker and human being.

Keywords: Education, EQ, hard skills, IQ, life skills, soft skills, training

INTRODUCTION

Life's not about finding yourself; Life is about creating yourself (Shaw)

The rapid development of industry and technology has made communication imperative. Communication is the most important tool at the heart of all organisational operations. In fact,

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recruitment advertisements of all major and minor organisations specifically ask for candidates with good communication skills. Higher and professional education not only requires fluency in spoken language but also in written form. Graduates of technical programmes require an ever increasing range of skills to maintain relevance in the global environment of the new millennium. The expectations and requirements that the industry has of professional students vary from place to place and from business to business and, hence, are varied and complex. There is ample evidence that graduate engineers lack the required standard of soft skills, particularly when evaluated against industrial needs.

This paper documents a brief survey of soft skills with a focus on the role of etiquette and manners in producing pupils who are more complete in personality. Soft skills along with good manners and conduct can complement the personality of any individual. The teaching of soft skills and communication must not be undertaken with the objective of merely completing the syllabus but also should be seen as a means to instil manners and to offer tips for appropriate behaviour. If basic and elementary etiquette is taught to pupils especially at a young age, they can flower into individuals who will easily be able to climb the ladder of success. If educators take special responsibility to teach soft skills in a broader perspective teaching etiquette in speaking, listening, table manners and telephone and mobile use in addition to teaching courtesy, empathy,

honesty and ethics can have a major positive influence on the development of students' personality. Soft skills pertaining to etiquette and manners can fulfil an important role in shaping an individual's personality. It is highly important for everyone to acquire adequate skills of general conduct beyond academic and technical skills. Expertise in communication and soft skills is now considered the most crucial element in the make-up of a global engineer.

Unemployability is today a greater issue than unemployment. As APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India has said, "*It is not unemployment that is the major problem; it is the question of unemployability that is the major crisis in this competitive arena....*" As if in answer to this we have the words of Dr. Jitendra K Das, Director of FORE School of Management: "*At FORE we are driven by employers' demands, and we shape up our students in such a way that they become employable and get selected for the industry.*"

It is very important to create a good impression and impact for professional development. Good soft skills will help to attract the interest and gain the trust of other people. Technical skills will not have any value if the individual possesses poor soft skills. Soft skills help a person to contribute his best to the team and the organisation so that the best results may be achieved. Personnel with soft skills are better empowered than other workers and can create opportunities for themselves. Soft skills not only improve an academician's career, for instance; they also lead to personal

growth. The goal of soft skills training is to give the personnel an opportunity to learn and practice new patterns of behaviour and, in doing so, to enhance human relations. Soft skills development focusses on those elements of training that require changes in behaviour and thinking. Organisations today recognise the strong relationship between the soft skills of their employees and effective customer relationships. Soft skills focus on how a person conducts himself or herself at work. Each category of skills can be applied to almost any position in nearly every company. That's one of the reasons why so many institutions of higher education offer students the opportunity to develop soft skills as part of the curriculum. Soft skills do not only provide benefits in one field nor do they need to be discarded after serving their purpose. These skills can help the individual in every area of his professional life. It includes all aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication to ensure that the user is equipped to sell himself effectively.

Good personality and communication are synonymous with good etiquette, well-mannered behavior and good conduct. Impeccable soft skills and etiquette go hand-in-glove with every level of effective communication, good behavior, age-appropriate conduct, and above all, becoming a better co-worker and human being. Etiquette and good manners form an integral part of soft skills as each aspect of communication i.e. listening, speaking, body language, writing etc. is linked to courtesy. Moreover, a Well-groomed and

well-mannered personality can significantly increase chances of success in personal, social and professional life. Developing etiquette and manners as part of one's personality can be learnt effortlessly through skills, and can prove beneficial in building relationships and forming a pleasant impression.

Any facilitator's dream is that graduates, especially professionally qualified ones, should not only be experts in a certain field but display a mature personality and a well-balanced, rounded education as well. This characteristic is reflected in soft skills, not in hard skills. Soft skills should complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job the student is trained to do. It is highly important that every student acquires adequate skills beyond academic or technical knowledge. While hard skills are a passport for one's career, soft skills are the visa. Hard skills take one to the country whereas to enter it, a visa, or soft skills, is needed. Hard skills are needed for earning a living and soft skills are needed for living a life well and successfully. Developing great tech skills but ignoring the need for soft skills is akin to moving one step forward and taking two steps backwards.

METHODOLOGY

Most empirical studies done on soft skills find that the highest rating criteria from employers' perception are communication skills (Scheetz, 1977; Henry & Raymond, 1982; Scott & Frontezak, 1996). Other important criteria are team work and

learning skills followed by technical skills. Billing (2003) conducted a comparative study between the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa on skills requirement among graduates. His study demonstrates that for all countries under study, communication skills were the most important. According to Scheetz (1977) communication skills include oral, writing, listening, positive thinking and interaction with customers. Apart from this, his study found that employers were looking for a workforce equipped with leadership skills, is adaptable, mature and confident and has interpersonal skills. Courtesy, basic etiquette, interpersonal relationship, time management, body language, a positive attitude, leadership qualities and communication skills are the significant soft skills that employers desire in their workforce. Indeed, these are required not only in one's career but also in order to lead to life of success.

The ability to practise high moral standards in professional tasks and social interactions is one of the major requirements in soft skills. These skills also include the ability to analyse ethical problems and make problem-solving decisions. Having a sense of responsibility towards society is another criterion of soft skills.

The paper exhorts facilitators to take special responsibility regarding soft skills because undergraduate study is the optimum period when facilitators have a major influence on the development of their students. Personnel with soft skills are more empowered than others and create

opportunities for themselves. Soft skills not only improve an academician's career but they also offer personal growth. The goal of soft-skill training is to give personnel an opportunity to learn and practise new patterns of behaviour and, in doing so, to enhance human relations. Training in soft skills focusses on those elements that require change in behaviour and thinking.

Manners and etiquette are expressions of inner character, and both go hand-in-hand. Manners include common sense, a combination of generosity of spirit and specific know-how. Proper etiquette is meant to help people get along with each other and avoid conflict. Manners are made up of trivialities of deportment which can be easily learnt with the help of communication. Etiquette and manners cover behaviour in speech, action and the act of living; in other words, in every type of interaction and in every situation. The rules of proper etiquette and protocol have been around for years, but they are far more important in this day and age than they have ever been before. Implementing proper etiquette and protocol skills into everyday life should be the norm for everyone, including children. After all, a person who displays proper etiquette not only feels good about himself; he also makes those around him feel important and respected through effective communication. An understanding of interpersonal communication infused with etiquette and manners is an essential ingredient in cooking up good relationships. Interpersonal communication lies at the junction of our cultural understanding and

construction and consequently, each of these components influences one another in more ways we can imagine. Language or the way we speak is perhaps the most pertinent tool in communication. There are rules of cultural etiquette that regulate the appropriate expression of a language. Applying etiquette and manners in communication enhances what we want to convey to our loved ones. Etiquette refers to socially accepted behavior and manners to appropriate action that should be followed in formal situations. It includes office manners, dining etiquette and procedures to be followed in different situations. Etiquette differs according to culture and nation. But there are certain common features which are generally accepted across the world. For example; showing respect to and being gentle with the elderly and women, taking care of guests, being gentle and polite in words and actions, eating without making a loud noise etc. All this should be taken care of in personal as well as professional life.

Behaving appropriately can help one succeed in reaching one's goals. The pertinent question that arises is, can etiquette be taught and, if yes, then how? Manners and etiquette in the classroom can be taught by brainstorming with students to get them talking about appropriate behaviour in various settings. Discussions can be held on what is the appropriate behaviour for conversations, including listening when someone is speaking to you, speaking when spoken to, not talking about private matters in public and looking at the person to whom you are speaking. Students can be asked to

role-play conversations with their peers and adults, focussing on making small talk about appropriate and positive topics, giving and receiving a compliment graciously and to always be polite and smiling. The catalyst for real change will come with these subtle changes.

It is best when a professional person guides his/her behaviour by the following values which are essentially related to reason, purpose and self-esteem. The question which arises is, is man's life an art of living? Or is it the expression of freedom with or without moral values to give added meaning to it?

Speech is one of the means to add value to human living. Speech can reflect one's behaviour, moral values and ideas. It articulates vision, endurance, will power, forbearance, integrity, and courage, among others. Speaking is the action of conveying information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language. The words one chooses can have an incredible impact on the way people perceive one. An effective communicator is one who is able to successfully deliver a message in its entirety to any recipient.

Effective communication is also all about the art of speaking persuasively and in such a way that will convince the listener that one really knows what one is talking about. The art of speaking is the ability to speak well, that is, to get to the point, express the core of the matter at hand, say only what is necessary, be convincing and pleasing and have the ability to influence others. The ability to do all this is an art.

This art can definitely be acquired. With frequent practice, these skills will become easier; they are worth learning as they are the key to success. Soft skills can be polished at any given time as every act of life is an opportunity to practise soft skills; one can improve by practising them when conversing professionally, by encouraging others, by providing constructive feedback or by speaking positively at every chance. As Belzer says, soft skills is an art; one should be ready to acquire them. (Belzer, 2004)

There are a number of institutes that offer courses in soft skills in India, namely:

- Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee
- Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur
- Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur
- National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training Chandigarh
- National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training Kolkata
- National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training Bhopal

Some are born with the gift of the gab and others acquire it but for both groups, speaking skills are improved through practice. To improve in speaking skills, one must be aware of the dos and don'ts of speaking skills. The art of speaking is a showcase of the individual's moral values and can display their importance. Firstly,

speech depicts an individual's character and hence it has to be carefully nurtured. Secondly, all individual characters can definitely have an impact on the national character so one's character has to be consciously developed.

DISCUSSION

What are soft skills?

Soft skills is an umbrella term which includes communicative skills, listening skills, team skills, leadership quality, creativity and logic, problem-solving skills, diplomacy and change readiness, among others. Soft skills aims at developing key skills such as:

1. Business etiquette
2. Interpersonal skills
3. Negotiation skills
4. Team skills
5. Social skills
6. Public skills
7. Listening skills
8. Communicative skills
9. Telephone etiquette
10. Table manners
11. The ability to motivate others
12. The ability to maintain social talk as well as carry on discussions
13. Group presentation
14. The ability to explain details to others
15. Leadership skills

16. Behavioural traits such as attitude, motivation and time management
 17. English communication skills
 18. Grooming - dressing etiquette, office etiquette
 19. Effective use of body language
 20. Presentation skills
 21. Interview skills
 22. Group discussion
 23. Time management
 24. Stress management etc.
8. Speaking at an audible and soothing volume of voice
 9. Avoiding being aggressive during discussions
 10. Dressing to suit one's profession and to create positive vibes in one's workplace
 11. Taking the lead
 12. Clear communication
 13. Taking care of one's behaviour and dealing with the annoying behaviour of others
 14. Learning to respond to feedback
 15. Showing respect to everyone

These can be practised through effective speech techniques.

RESULTS

How to enhance soft skills

Soft skills cannot be learnt quickly in an intensive class; they are developed throughout life. Better interpersonal relationship management skills can be enhanced through the following:

1. Participation in team activities
2. Cultivation of positive attitude and thinking
3. Positive work ethic
4. Co-operation with others
5. Socialising
6. Being an active listener
7. Greeting family members, colleagues and one's superiors at work

These soft skills can be developed through constant practice and training. Soft skills alone may not land one a job but along with hard skills they are the best tool one can have in seeking employment. In fact it is believed **that hard skills get you hired but the lack of soft skills get you fired.** "Soft skills are very important in business. It is essential to be technically sound, but one should also have the ability to convey the idea to the masses in the simplest possible manner," says Mayurkumar Gadewar, an ERP consultant with Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Prasad Kaipa *et al.* (2002)¹ conducted a study on the role of soft skills development in entrepreneurial success and categorised important the soft skills as leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, negotiation, communication, creativity and presentation skills. It was

observed that soft skills are essential for entrepreneurial success and maximising human capital in any enterprise. The findings of the study also emphasised the importance of hiring the right people with the right skills set. Prasad Kaipa *et al.* described soft skills as the keystone to success and stated that good leadership presupposes refined soft skills. Some of the skills are related to attitude while others are processes and still others relate to awareness, self-control, and team focus, influencing others and building relationships. The researchers observed that nearly one quarter of executives in high-tech positions get into trouble due to poor soft skills. About 70% of managers feel that soft skills are more important now than they were five years ago. According to Prasad Kaipa, 'Technical skills get you at the door, but soft skills keep you at the job' (Prasad Kaipa *et al.*, 2002).

We have to fine-tune students' attitudes, values, beliefs, motivation, desires, feelings, eagerness to learn, willingness to share and embrace new ideas, goal orientation, flexibility, persuasion, futuristic thinking, ability to feel compassion and diplomacy and the various skills sets of communication, manners and etiquette so that they will be able to deal with different situations diligently and responsibly. Companies nowadays look for people skilled in all the above-mentioned areas. It is neither wise nor possible for anyone to overlook these skills. According to a Nasscom-McKinsey report, the Indian business sector's biggest challenge ever is that of talent shortage. It faced a talent shortage of 3.1 million

knowledge workers, across Industry, by 2010 compounded by the fact that a mere 10% of fresh graduates of that year were actually employable! The situation is grave, but it can be addressed through solutions that empower the youth such as reshaping assessment methods, especially exams, at the large affiliating universities to assess higher-order thinking skills and not measure memorised knowledge. This would require institutions to focus on learning rather than memorisation and mere understanding. In order to do so, curricula should be designed in a way to promote teaching-learning sessions where students are actively learning and developing their own analytical and evaluation skills. In the age of globalisation, it is all the more essential to have interpersonal skills to work efficiently with people of varying cultures from all over the world.

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills (i.e. skills that go together to complete the set of skills needed to perform a task/project) who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable (i.e. each team member is equally responsible for successfully performing the task/project) (Jan Kutzenback, Douglas Smith)

With globalisation, the geographical boundaries have disappeared. Now project teams in most companies comprise

experts from all over the world. With technological advancements people can now hold meetings and discussion via video conference, chat or emails. Therefore, cross-cultural understanding has become a new skill that companies look for in prospective employees.

People are like diamonds. Their basic value multiplies a hundred fold when they are polished. Today's youth needs to be groomed for the challenges of real life world. (Ramesh Batavia, xxxx .) For ages we have had a higher education system which allows us to train our youth to handle machines or issues or numbers. However, we do not train them to deal with the most important component of any industry i.e. people. Soft skills are sometimes referred to as people skills. Based on the examples provided earlier, soft skills are not easy to quantify, and are sometimes described as intangible.

It has been said that one's IQ (Intelligence Quotient) is fixed from birth. But one's EQ (Emotional Intelligence Quotient), IPQ (Influence and Persuasion Quotient), MQ (Motivation Quotient) and all other types of "Q" can be improved on.

CONCLUSION

Individuals are like shoes; the more you polish them, the more they shine, said Ramchandram, a soft skills, etiquette and public speaking trainer. This paper aims to drive home the fact that simply scoring good marks and completing a degree is not enough to succeed in this swiftly changing world. The gap between academic output

and industrial requirement must be bridged to improve the employability of students and to enhance the quality of higher education.

Soft skills are the answer, and should become an indispensable part of the present system of education. In addition to this, it has become utterly important to raise children with social and moral ethics so that they may become good human beings and responsible citizens. Hence, apart from academic skills, soft skills and emotional management skills, social ethics should also be inculcated in children so that they may have a holistic upbringing and education.

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