

Selling in Skirt

The Soft Skills of Leadership

Why do people and companies do things the way they do? The best answer I have found is “That’s how we’ve always done things around here.” That seems to be how the discussions are going when it comes to explaining and educating everyone on soft skills. It’s not the way it’s been done before...but does that mean that’s the way it needs to stay? Are soft skills just for women? Why do we need to understand this...We don’t do it that way.

Job-related expertise is essential in any profession and in many careers. However, over the last twenty to thirty years, studies have been done that have shown that soft skills may ultimately be more important in determining levels of success.

The hard skills are a basic minimum necessary in order to operate in a particular workplace. Whether or not you are successful in your career may depend on how you relate to other people and to work...the so-called soft skills.

If you need some hard evidence of why the soft skills are ranking high in conversations today, how about these?

- 77% of employers believe soft skills are just as important as hard skills
- 94% of recruiting professionals believe an employee with stronger soft skills has a better chance of being promoted to a leadership role than an employee with more years of experience and weaker soft skills
- 58% of recruiting professionals believe soft skills are more important for leadership and management positions than for entry-level positions

The question is, do we need only soft skills? Here’s the reality. Hard skills are like your technology: anyone can acquire them, with training, and they are necessary. Without them you will not be able to operate in the workplace. Soft skills are your unique selling point and give you a competitive edge in the workplace, and perhaps even in life.

Women want to be treated equally...Not identically™

When it comes to most positions, especially in leadership, a mix of soft and hard skills is what will truly matter. It's one of the best ways to set yourself apart from others who tend to be weak in one area. Imagine having a conversation with someone on your team or another team, a vendor or colleague, your technical knowledge is much more helpful if you can communicate it to others. Being book smart will only take you so far.

Now that isn't saying that you don't need your technical skills. You do but, imagine having all those skills and yet you can't convey them to your team, to your clients, to your vendors. How far will that take you? When I was in college I had a professor teaching logic. To me, I'm very logical and my brother who was a computer science nerd before it became as popular as it is, told me the course is based on this... "If it is raining you have an umbrella. Therefore, if you have an umbrella, it is raining." I was set for the class...and that was the first example the professor gave us. After that, he spoke directly to the whiteboard and did not relate to anyone in the class...not even the math and science majors. Needless to say, we were all receiving less than passing grades. Until someone in the room stood up and asked a question. He was a math major and he was aware of how the rest of the class were agonizing every time we met. He took the equation that was written around the room on the whiteboards. You had to solve it for x. As he asked the question, the professor invited him up to the board to explain what he was trying to ask. As he did, he conveniently added in how he got to each step, and everyone in the room was asking him questions. We all related to him and he offered to tutor any of us that needed it.

While we may never be in a situation like that, think about the difference between being brilliant and sharing your brilliance. It is on opposite sides of the spectrum. Leadership is not any different. You can lead or you can manage. One takes technical skills and one takes people skills. Which team are you on?

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