



The Leadership Letter March 2014

Soft Skills vs. Hard Skills: What do You Need as a Leader?

When human resource personnel that hire employees are asked this question, their response is BOTH! The ideal leader is a person who exhibits strengths in both areas.

Hard Skills are “teachable abilities or skill sets that are easy to quantify.” Hard skills can encompass things such as proficiency in a foreign language, college degrees, computer proficiency, etc. These are things that you learn or achieve through education or experience.

Soft Skills are much harder to quantify and are subjective and frequently known as “people skills”. These skills relate to either innate or acquired abilities to relate effectively to other people and promote positive interactions. They include such things as the ability to communicate, patience, effective time management and motivation.

As you move into a leadership position, either as a new director of an early childhood program or as a

member of your local or state affiliate Board, you’ll need to assess what skills you possess, what skills are “ready to go” and what skills you will need to polish.

You should ask yourself these questions:

- ⇒ **How do I relate to others?** (soft skills) Is it generally a collaborative relationship or do I tend to work alone?
- ⇒ **Do I know how to delegate** to effectively utilize the skills of others or am I a “one man or woman show”? (soft skills)
- ⇒ **Am I a good manager** (hard skills) in terms of organization and time management?
- ⇒ **Do I possess the knowledge or experience base necessary** to do the job? (hard skills)
- ⇒ **What do I need to do to prepare myself** to effectively manage either my employees or my colleagues on a board?

Topics for 2014: Leadership 101

January 2014/ #1—*Top 10 Qualities of a Good Leader*

March 2014/ #2—*Soft Skills & Hard Skills: What a Leader Needs*

May 2014/ #3—*Communication & Feedback: A Critical Skill Set*

July 2014/ #4—*From Buddy to Boss: Making the Transition*

September 2014/ #5—*Creativity & Flexibility: New Approaches?*

November 2014/ #6—*Commitment & Trustworthiness*

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Top Ten Leadership Soft Skills

What makes a strong leader?

Regardless of whether you're beginning a new job, assuming a new leadership role within your local or state organization or other personal endeavor, a blend of both hard and soft skills is necessary to effectively lead.

We all know that the acquisition of "hard skills", such as that advanced degree in early childhood, can make the difference on a career path. *What we may not know is that "soft skills" are just as critical, if not more so, as one moves into an increasingly responsible role within an organization.*

Employers and boards are increasingly looking for persons who possess these "soft skills." They are confident that they can train someone to be proficient in a required job task; however, "soft skills" are more difficult to teach and they are looking for persons who already possess those skills.

The "soft skills" that are most often sought are:

1. **Communication:** As a leader you must be able to communicate to your employees or board members about everything from organizational goals to specific tasks. You must master all forms of communication and become proficient in the media that your employees or board uses to communicate. That may mean leaving your comfort zone and learning to use Facebook or Twitter, particularly if you're working with younger members.
2. **Motivation:** If you're not motivated and acting in the best interests of your organization, you can't expect anyone else to do so. What motivates your members and helps them become invested in your mission?
3. **Delegating:** Do you allow others to have responsibility for tasks within your organization or do you think you must do it all yourself? Utilizing the skills and resources at your disposal is a mark of a strong leader.
4. **Positivity:** Do you come across as someone who is the "glass half full" or someone who is the "glass half empty?" Your attitude will go a long way to influence how tasks are completed and goals reached.
5. **Trustworthiness:** Can persons rely on your word? Do you demonstrate your integrity in your words and actions? Do the persons you are leading respect you? Without trust, your leadership will not be effective.
6. **Creativity:** Are you finding new and different ways to accomplish tasks or are you doing it "the way it's always been done"? Great leaders approach problems and opportunities with non-traditional solutions and alternative pathways.
7. **Feedback:** Do people hear from you? Are you affirming when things are good or are you only providing feedback when it's negative or there's a problem? Leaders who provide consistent and effective feedback are developing an environment that makes delegating much easier and more successful.
8. **Responsibility:** "*The buck stops here.*" President Harry S. Truman kept this sign on his desk. Great leaders take responsibility for their actions and for those who are under their management. These leaders acknowledge mistakes and move forward in a positive manner to rectify those mistakes.
9. **Commitment:** Strong leaders follow through on what they say they will do. They do what it takes to successfully complete a project and expect others to do the same.
10. **Flexibility/Adaptability:** Being willing to "go with the flow" is probably one of the most significant soft skills that someone can possess. Very few things in life go as planned and the ability to make changes along the way marks a strong leader. Very often those changes turn out a more positive result than the first plan.

When all is said and done, a strong leader is 1) someone who values themselves and the persons with whom they work, 2) demonstrates creativity and flexibility as tasks move forward, and 3) knows how to work with people.

Source: *Top 10 Leadership Soft Skills*, retrieved 2/24/14, <http://jobsearch.about.com/>

You Know About IQ...How About EQ?

Soft skills is a term often associated with "**Emotional Intelligence Quotient**" (EQ) or the "cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language personal habits, friendliness and optimism that characterize relationships with other people." Soft skills are related to feelings, emotions, insights and they provide an important complement to hard skills and IQ.

Research around the impact of the presence of "soft skills" and success is a hot topic and many corporate entities are now mandating "emotional intelligence training," utilizing EQ tests as part of the hiring process.

So, if these skills are so important, what are they? Are some more important than others?

The Six Soft Skills that Everyone Needs

In a survey conducted in 2008 in the state of Washington, employers identified six areas that employees were lacking.

- ◆ **Communication Skills**
- ◆ **Teamwork and Collaboration**

- ◆ **Adaptability**
- ◆ **Problem Solving**
- ◆ **Critical Observation**
- ◆ **Conflict Resolution**

The employers stated that employees could not communicate effectively (write effective memos, share ideas, etc.), could not work in teams, had limited conflict resolution skills and were unable to problem solve or observe critically.

They deemed these six skills to be necessary to both professional and personal success in the workplace.

If these skills are so necessary to success, is it possible for persons who do not possess them to learn them? **The answer is YES.**

For managers and leaders, there are two things to remember:

- ⇒ If you're wishing to help persons learn soft skills, **show—don't tell.** Because soft skills are so tied to emotional intelligence, they cannot be demonstrated in the same manner as hard skills. It's much harder to teach someone how to work effectively with another person

than it is to train them on a particular software program.

- ⇒ If you're going to teach soft skills to others, **do what is necessary to boost your "emotional intelligence quotient."** This might include taking classes such as college courses that mix "technology with areas such as effective written and verbal communication, teamwork, cultural understanding and psychology." Take a writing or speech class to boost your communication skills.

Teaching soft skills is a "show and tell" process. And when you really think about it, isn't this exactly what we're doing with young children? We spend every day boosting their EQ by helping them to acquire these skills. Perhaps our greatest contribution can be to teach very young children how to develop their soft skills....teamwork and sharing anyone?

Source: *Six Soft Skills Everyone Needs*, retrieved 2/24/14, <http://career-advice.monster.com>

IQ or EQ? Which is More Important?

As research has continued on intelligence and what that term really means, *the ability of an IQ test to predict future success has been severely diminished.* Once the "gold standard" of whether someone would be successful, scientists have now come to the conclusion that the standard IQ measurement cannot predict future success.

Today, researchers recognize that a high IQ is not a sole predictor of success. Although individuals with high IQ's are usually successful in both education and business, other factors such as "emotional intelligence" are now recognized to play a much more prominent role.

The ability of successful people/

leaders to interact effectively with colleagues and a variety of people can make more of a difference than a high IQ.

Researchers have found that individuals with strong leadership potential also tend to be more emotionally intelligent.

Did You Know?



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*Promoting Quality Care and Education for
Young Children and Their Families*

SECA is a "Voice for Southern Children"

www.southernearlychildhood.org

SECA has a series of nine Board orientation/ training modules that are available on-line on the Leadership page.

The modules include a background paper, a PowerPoint presentation (and questions) for Board training, and information about resources. One of the modules will be useful in further research on topics in this newsletter.

Module 5B:

The Board of Directors, Training, Recruitment

All materials can be downloaded from the website at <http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/leadership.php>.

You might also be interested in these past issues of *The Leadership Letter*: January 2014, November 2011, and May 2009. You'll find them archived on the Leadership page of the SECA website.

Strategies to Teach Soft Skills

If you're in a leadership position and feel that either your employees or board members need some assistance in developing those "soft skills" that will help you move your organization forward, there are several strategies that you can employ to help.

- ◆ **Set up a system in which communication is facilitated and structured.** If folks don't communicate effectively, try a template or form to help them organize their thoughts. Schedule times when regular communication is to be conducted...model how that communication is to occur. (This can be particularly important if staff members are communicating with parents.)
- ◆ **Bring in a coach** to identify problem areas and develop training to assist. Everyone can brush up on their writing skills. Do it in an environment that has everyone participate. This might be for a new marketing brochure or curriculum guide or everyone could work on their training verification portfolios.
- ◆ **Provide opportunities for individuals to do presentations, either at center meetings or during a board meeting.** Keep the topic focused, the presentation time short and assist that individual as needed.
- ◆ **Develop mentoring programs.** Pair a new employee or Board member with an experienced one who has devel-

oped those "soft skills" along the way. Make sure that the personalities mesh and give the mentors some guidance on what you would like for them to do. Promote teamwork and delegate tasks to these teams.

Working with a volunteer board is a natural opportunity to develop soft skills. On these boards, everyone needs to help carry the load, work together, communicate effectively and show adaptability and flexibility. Structure your organization's activities to ensure that all participating individuals have the opportunity to showcase those developed or developing skills.

Above all, model the behavior you're trying to develop.