

What they don't teach you in college

THE OTHER SKILLS Soft skills enhance your employability by effectively projecting your personality. It also helps you get along well with your colleagues, leading to career growth and satisfaction, writes V Pradeep Kumar

Recently, in a pre-placement lecture, I spoke on the importance of developing soft skills. Subsequently, campus placement began, but five students of the college weren't selected. My investigations identified the causes:

- One of them had a grooming problem
- Two of them were weak in spoken communication
- Three of them were weak on initiative
- All of them had good academics, but were weak on soft skills

It's important to realise that academic excellence isn't enough to get into good corporate companies. With increasing competition, soft skills are crucial during campus selections and while pursuing a career.

Soft skills influence behaviour

Every career has occupational requirements of knowledge and skills. An IT Manager needs strong technical skills; a Factory Manager may need a degree in Engineering, a Sales Manager may require a degree in Marketing. These are hard skills, which are essential for any job. However, when you deal with people—management, juniors, suppliers, customers—to perform your duties and responsibilities, you require soft skills to interact effectively.

For example, your behaviour with people, determines their response and hence your ability to get things done. Behaviour is an outcome of your inner values, beliefs and attitudes. Soft skills create intrinsic and positive influences in your values, beliefs and attitudes, which results in refining your behaviour and personality.

The most common soft skills that are essential for students choosing any profession are:

■ **Personality:** The sum total of your unique, characteristic mental, spiritual and physical traits, as perceived by others in business, social and family interactions, is personality. This includes appearance, manners, emotions, habits and ethics, which are unique. For example, people are considered pleasing, warm, dominating, open, sensitive, suspicious, perfectionists, etc., based on these perceptions. To be successful, you must have strong positive traits, and must minimise the effect of the negative ones.

■ **Grooming and etiquette:** Augment your intrinsic personality by dressing for the occasion and using appropriate accessories. For example, distinguish between dressing for college and a campus selection. Enhance your grooming by developing a good etiquette for business, social, and family interactions. Greeting people with a smile, speaking gently and politely, a warm handshake, are small things that go a long way in perfecting your personality.

■ **Time management:** Become disciplined and manage your time. A career enforces many aspects such as reaching office on time, keeping appointments and completing responsibilities on time etc. Time management is about distinguishing between urgent, important and routine tasks and fixing priorities. Time management enables you to find



time for leisure and sports, and balancing your work and life.

■ **Communication skills:** To understand others and communicate effectively, listen empathetically. Body language is the unspoken language and is important in any interaction. Using an appropriate body language, speak confidently, maintaining eye contact. At work, avoid political, religious and negative comments. Prepare your presentation keeping the audience in mind, practice the presentation, and deliver with confidence. Remember, communication provides a platform to project your knowledge, skills and overall personality.

■ **Inter-personal skills:** Today, teamwork is more important than ever before. Every day, you deal with superiors, co-employees, family and friends. Inter-personal skills are your ability to understand others, control emotions and resolve day-to-day issues and conflicts tactfully. As Dean Rusk, an American Professor said, "the best way to persuade others is through your ears, by listening to them". If you are strong on inter-personal skills, you get along well, which is essential for success in work and life.

Soft skills: Be open to learning and feedback

The focus in colleges is mainly on developing hard skills. However, in practical life, your soft skills are also critical. Developing soft skills requires an attitude to learn and being open to feedback. This process can be simple or rigorous, depending on the nature of soft skills, and the proficiency level desired.

■ **Self-help:** Understand your strengths and concerns, through personality tests on the internet. Armed with self-awareness, observe successful people and analyse their personality. Get feedback about your personality from teachers and elders. Use a mirror or a video shoot to perfect body language and communication skills. Explore self-help

books, videos and the internet, for personality development. The effectiveness of these methods depends on your taking feedback constructively and overcoming concerns.

■ **Personality development training:** A good institute conducts a professional psychometric test to understand your inner self and

identify areas of strengths and concerns. Professional institutes organise short-term and long-term courses and specific customised courses too.

The training process incorporates explanation, demonstration and participation by trainees. The course content takes into account the trainees' profile and deploys techniques like lectures, videos, role-plays, games, case studies etc. Such professional coaching helps in identifying issues and correcting them. This could be by changing attitudes and belief systems. The benefit of this process is lasting as it works on your intrinsic and invisible value systems, transforming visible be-

haviour.

Though training is highly effective, choosing an institute is tricky, with the mushrooming of institutes. Please check for institutes' reputation, the qualification and industry experience of faculty, and feedback from seniors.

■ **Mentors:** Mentors can be professionals or experts in the family. They understand your strengths and relate what additional soft skills are required for excellence in the preferred career. Mentors can impart skills or suggest an action plan, including recommending institutes.

■ **Advanced training:** Depending on your profession, you may need a high proficiency on specific skills. For example, communication skills for an IT manager is different when compared to that of a Sales Manager or the host of a TV talk show. Consult professional trainers, if required.

The traits discussed above are life-skills that enhance employability by effectively projecting your personality. Further, it helps you to get along well at work, leading to career growth and satisfaction.

As Napoleon Hill, the famous author and motivational speaker said, "The best job goes to the person who can get it done without passing the buck, or coming back with excuses". Hard skills prepare you to make a living, and soft skills enable you to live successfully.

(The author is a management and career consultant.)

