

Education

Your window to the world of learning

A job needs more than just your aptitude

MULTI DIMENSIONAL Your expertise at your work alone is not good enough to garner professional success. Soft skills have now become an unwritten pre-requisite for jobs across most industries, writes **V Pradeep Kumar**

A few weeks ago, I was part of a guest lecture series at a prestigious college. Among the three guest faculties, we had covered the entire gamut of topics in the subject and the Q&A session that followed the lectures was indeed very interactive. In the concluding remarks, a professor of the institution candidly said, “In three hours, everything that you covered is more comprehensive and useful than we could do in a month”. The principal of the institute had earlier spoken about the practical difficulties in a university’s curriculum driven pedagogy.

While the debate about the deficiencies of our university system continues, it may take ages before a balanced knowledge and skill-based curriculum becomes a reality. Hence, the focus for students seeking employment should be to attain employable skills.

Dearth of employable skills

The economy is on fast track and the GDP is set to cross 7.5 per cent. The key question is, where are the people who can be readily employed? Many surveys and research conducted by several agencies have revealed the dearth of employable skills in our students. A report in 2007 by Nasscom revealed that only 25 per cent of our engineers have readily employable skills. More recently, as per the National Employability Report, Engineering Graduates-2014, only 18.33 per cent of the engineers are employable.

Even in Industrial Training Institutes, lack of soft skills was an impediment affecting the placement of trainees. Recognising the importance of soft skills, the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) in 2011 recommended introducing the subject Employability skills replacing Social studies in ITI curricula. The Government of India accepted the recommendation of NCVT and introduced Employability skills from the August 2012 session.

The level of soft skills in students of other courses, including management, rendering the problem universal. With a growing economy, our industrial and service sectors can provide employment opportunities to all university graduates. However, skills gap in potential employees is a huge challenge being faced by companies. This has forced many companies to conduct extensive training programs to employees, to fill skill gaps and provide job specific skills.

What are employability skills

Employability skills comprise hard skills or application skills based on your learning, necessary to complete a task or a job and soft skills are those that complement the hard skills. For example, to be a suc-



cessful doctor, one should have expertise to diagnose and treat a patient, which is a profession specific skill (hard skill); but s/he should also have communication skills such as probing and listening skills, confidence building, motivating skills etc (soft skills). I have come across finance professionals proficient in financial and accounting practices (hard skills) but lack other skills such as communication, time management, decision making and problem solving etc. (soft skills) due to which they fail to grow beyond a level. In other words, it’s mandatory to have soft skills complementing job specific skills for professional success.

In general, possessing the following soft skills will make you suitable for most jobs:

- Business focus
- Self-motivation and resilience
- Communication skills

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- Problem solving and decision making
 - Leadership
 - Team work & interpersonal skills
 - Integrity and personal value systems
 - Time management
- So how does one begin to attain employability skills? Because our institutes are still focused on hard skills, you have to plan and make efforts to attain soft skills. Consider multiple options with key benefits as below, as appropriate to your specific needs.
- Organising and participating in sports team, cultural team, lectures and seminars, group project, student society etc.
- Learning benefits:** Initiative, leadership, resource management.
- Getting into course related projects, vacation internships, part-time work etc.
- Learning benefits:** Discipline, planning, time management.

- Working for social causes, organising fund raising projects etc.
- Learning benefits:** Ethics and values, social responsibility, persuasion.
- Participating in student journalism, institution newspapers and journals.
- Learning benefits:** Communication, presentation, meeting deadlines.
- Participating in NCC, NSS etc.
- Learning benefits:** Health and fitness, discipline, social concern.
- Organising and participating in debates etc.
- Learning benefits:** Organising, communication, persuasion.
- Organising and participating in case studies, moot courts, mock parliaments etc.
- Learning benefits:** Analysis, experience.
- Organising and participating in inter-college or inter-university competitions and games.
- Learning benefits:** Leadership, initiative, ambition.
- Taking an online or offline course to build soft skills.
- Learning benefits:** Knowledge, confidence.
- Take the help of a mentor when needed

Such initiatives will make you proficient in application and soft skills. Organising various events will help you realise the importance of taking initiative, improve your communication and ability to work in a team and help you developing strong inter-personal skills. You will also get exposure to decision-making and crisis management, which are invaluable soft-skills in your first job. A list of such activities undertaken by you will be an impressive addition in your résumé and will lead to qualitative discussions in placement interviews and selection process.

An undergraduate or a postgraduate degree can only display your mastery of an academic discipline, but can’t prove your worth to a prospective employer. What’s of interest and relevance to an employer is your intrinsic attitude, personality and employable soft skills. Developing employable skills will make you an assertive personality with strong communication skills boosting your self-confidence.

An all round personality with well-balanced hard and soft skills will ensure your success in any employment selection process. Hard skills prepare you to make a living and soft skills enable you to live successfully.

(The author is a management & career consultant.)

Emerging era of digital marketing

By T J Joseph

Digital marketing involves mining of data to determine individual customers’ tastes, hobbies, food preferences etc. and products and services customised to suit an individual’s profile. Digital Marketing uses the Internet, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc.), Short Messaging Service (SMS) and file sharing services (Google Drive, Dropbox etc.) to promote products and services offered by companies and establishments. In the digital space, marketing is highly focussed. Advertisements and promotion campaigns are no longer “one-size-fits-all”. It is directed at a particular community, a social group, family or even individuals.

But you should know that digital marketing is not e-commerce. The latter is the sale of goods and services through a digital medium. Digital marketing involves understanding customer preferences in much greater detail than was ever possible hitherto. In fact, e-commerce companies themselves use digital marketing to further their sales. Digital marketing is also used by brick-and-mortar shops and service providers to promote their offerings.

The field has numerous opportunities to offer to those interested. Here’s looking at a few:

- **Analytics professionals:** When marketing through digital media, the effectiveness of each effort or expenditure needs to be analysed. Usually, raw data is available in Big Data. Analytics uses advanced statistics and sophisticated algorithms to analyse effectiveness.
- **Community managers:** The Internet propagates development of communities of people from around the world with similar interests, such as fans of a particular television show. Managing such communities and providing a link between customers and the parent organisation is the work of people in this area.
- **Content marketers:** Content marketing is that set of activities which involves creation and sharing of media and publishing content used to acquire and retain customers. The information may be in the form of news, video, white papers, e-books, infographics, case studies, how-to guides, Q&A, photographs, images etc.
- **Digital advertising professionals:** This career is the equivalent of advertising in newspapers and magazines, but now in digital space, e.g., running Facebook or Google ads.

- **Email marketing professionals:** Email is one of the media in the digital space and it is possible to market goods and services through aggressive and imaginative mass emailing. In this activity, techniques and methods of persuading customers to buy products or services are fine-tuned and made suitable for emailing.
- **Graphic designers:** The digital medium lends itself to visual presentation of information, either static or dynamic. Along with content writing, graphic design creates the pages in digital space that will be viewed by customers over the Internet and on mobile devices.
- **Marketing strategists:** These are experts who work out the overall strategy for a company, identifying which channel and which market can best be tackled using a particular digital medium. They would work out the specifics of the strategy to be used in each case.
- **Mobile marketers:** This is the equivalent of email marketing, but on mobile devices. Products and services can be marketing directly or indirectly along with apps.
- **SEO experts:** This is one of the most important functions in digital marketing. SEO uses many techniques to ensure that a particular content appears high on the relevance listing, and people in this area do this.
- **SMS marketers:** These experts who specialise in marketing through SMS’s, which has its own unique set of capabilities and constraints. SMS marketers adapt the overall marketing strategy of an organisation to sell through SMS.
- **Social media managers:** Users of social media number in the hundreds of millions. They can be construed as a social bloc, much like a large country. The Internet provides a direct access to the population of this “country” and marketing products and service can be done to the citizens through social media.
- **Software developers:** Coding in digital marketing is no different from other areas. Understanding languages like HTML, Java, Python, Ruby etc. as well as understanding CSS will be mandatory.
- **User experience experts:** User experience with a marketing approach is very important because it is very easy (just one or two clicks of a mouse) for a user to switch to another site. These experts would assess and monitor user experience to ensure that users find their experience delightful.



Is your child not doing well in studies?



CAUSE AND EFFECT There are several reasons for decline in a child’s performance. **K L Nagaraju** points at three major causes that could potentially upset a child’s academic growth

Every parent wants their child to do well in school. Culturally, we value scholastic achievements to a great extent. Arrival of the progress report is a great event and either there is celebration or disappointment, based on the outcome. Of course, there is nothing wrong with expecting the child to do well. But parents have to check for the reasons for their child’s lack of progress and do their bit to redress the problem. We can look at the root of the problem to check if it lies within the child, at school or at home. An objective assessment of the situation can help remedy the situation.

Problems within the child

Physical disability or illness of the child could adversely affect the child’s performance at school. Frequent medical check-up and advice is desirable. Children at this age are frequently afflicted with ENT problems. Parents have to guard their children against recurring allergic reactions which affect the health. Vision and dental problems also come in the way of performance.

Underage or lack of physiological maturity could be disturbing factors. Parents are in a tearing hurry to put their wards

in the school. In the age of play homes, preschool or kindergarten education, they forget or fail to appreciate the fact that the child needs to grow to perform age-specific tasks. Psychologists have charted milestones for attainment at different ages. Also, these milestones are reached by different individuals with different speeds. We cannot expect all children to reach milestones simultaneously.

Intelligence and personality factors contribute to achievement of expected learning outcomes. They are the product of nature and nurture. Hence a stimulating environment augurs well for these traits to develop. The neuron connections in the brain develop fast between the ages of three to eleven and therefore the parents need to ensure that their children get exposed to a variety of experiences and exposures.

Problems within the school

To accommodate growing needs, our schools have to cater to a large number of students. Overcrowded classrooms have become order of the day. Teachers cannot extend individual attention. To carry out meaningful correction of note-

books is a tall order for the teachers. Unhealthy teacher pupil ratio can adversely affect the teaching learning process. Parents are advised to keep this factor while selecting a school for their child.

To get good teachers is another difficulty. Lack of encouragement and ineffective teaching can really put the child’s career in jeopardy. Because of inept teachers and teaching methods, the child may lose interest not only in the subject but with the school itself. This can be really dangerous. The schools have to take great care to remedy the situation.

Strict teachers may intimidate students. Loving and caring teachers can turn round the most disinterested child. Critical remarks by the teacher can inflict incalculable damage on the psyche of the children. Change of teachers or school can also be traumatic. Children need to be helped in the transition when change is inevitable.

Unfavourable peer pressure can also cause stress. They should learn to manage this pressure by not resorting to comparisons. After all, learning speeds are different due to individual differences. Each child has certain strengths and they have to be identified and nurtured.

Problems within the family

Sometimes, parents themselves are responsible for the slow academic growth of their wards. Emotional insecurity at home due to disharmony among parents puts the child in a disturbed state of mind. Parents who nag and find faults with their children put them in a distressed state. Instead of getting help they are ridiculed and belittled. Their efforts are not recognised and rewarded. Some parents believe in corporal punishment. Children are threatened of dark rooms, deprivation of food or such other silly and archaic punishments. Excessive punishment can only be detrimental to the child’s mental growth. Partiality among siblings is also not fair.

Lack of play is also a reason for under performance. Children need to play, preferably outdoors. They should get opportunities to play and socialise. Interaction with peers during play develops many desirable qualities. Physical development takes place along with mental and social development.

Parents need to look up at the issues raised above and help their children. If they are unable to help, a visit to a counsellor is a good idea. A counsellor can always help the students with study-related problems. An objective analysis of the situation and a practical set of solutions help the children.

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