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The solid case for soft skills

WOMEN AT WORK

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In groundbreaking research, Daniel Goleman found that virtually 80 percent to 90 percent of the competencies that differentiate top performance are in the domain of emotional intelligence (EQ), often referred to as soft skills.

Soft skills include competencies such as self-awareness, communicating effectively, listening, managing conflict and change, building trust and influence, empathy, resilience, and behavioral self-management.

Appropriate training and technical skills may open doors, but they alone cannot guarantee a good hire or a successful career. As one young MBA lamented, "Deploying my technical expertise is the easy part. Motivating and managing people is a whole lot harder! "

Organizations that put a premium on soft skills produce stronger results in leadership and management effectiveness, sales performance and employee engagement and retention. In a notable example, a study of Fortune 500 companies including AT&T, IBM and PepsiCo found that the top 10 percent of their sales forces were very strong in EQ, outperforming average salespersons by more than double.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership, many of the top reasons for careers that stall or derail are directly related to a lack of soft skills:

- Inability to accept feedback
- An aloof, dismissive style
- Inability to acknowledge and learn from mistakes
- Failure to delegate and build a team
- Devaluing others' contributions
- Rigidity or resistance to change
- Poor interpersonal relationships

Leaders and individual contributors alike can become more self-aware by regularly soliciting feedback and accurately assessing personal strengths, needs and limitations. Show sincere interest in others' ideas, contributions, needs, and concerns.

Be mindful of your triggers-- the situations that cause you to lose it and not handle things in a way that serves you well.

The good news is that, unlike IQ, it is possible to greatly improve EQ / soft skills with coaching and training.

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