Bridging the Soft Skills Gap

Teaching the Missing Basics
Welcome!

Who we are:

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Who are you?

- Introduce yourself to your table mates
- Explain what professionalism, critical thinking, and followership mean to you in your current position. How do you think these would relate to soft skills?
What is the Soft Skills Gap?

The space between the expectations of employers (teachers) and the reality of how today’s young talent (our students) are showing up in the workplace (in class).
What is the Soft Skills Gap?

The Bad News?

- It’s our problem as educators and bosses. We’re dealing with them here and now and we have the greatest opportunity to help abate this perceived downward spiral.

The Good News?

- Bridging this Gap is possible and doing so will give us and them a strategic advantage by getting them up to speed faster, they can/will self-manage more effectively, their relationships improve, they stick around longer, and are more successful.
Soft v. Hard Skills

Hard Skills - Teachable abilities or skill sets that are easy to quantify.

- Proficiency with foreign language
- Typing Speed
- Operating machinery
- Often job specific and are listed on job descriptions

Examples: Accounting, Automotive, Banking, Bookkeeping, Carpentry, Computer programming, Construction
Soft v. Hard Skills

Soft Skills - attributes and personality traits that affect interpersonal interactions that include characteristics such as: leadership, empathy, communication, problem solving, team work, and social etiquette - among others.

Soft skills can’t be learned by rote, and they involve emotional intelligence and empathy, which often makes them more complicated to impart to a student.

Influencing factors- things that drive this gap:

- Globalization- connecting and traveling to work across borders in every direction. Gen Z’ers look at a future of interdependency and competition with a rising global youth tide.
- Technology - in every aspect of life, anything can become obsolete at any time; possibilities appear and disappear swiftly, radically and often without warning.
- The Information Environment - Our kids are “digital natives”; their access to information is unprecedented.
Other Influencing factors

- Helicopter (or bulldozer) parents: “Our current generation has been so insulated, scheduled, supervised and supported to a degree that no others have ever been before.” (Tulgan pg.14)
- “They have become accustomed to being treated almost as customers/users of services and products provided by authority figures, not to mention their not infrequent experiences as actual customers...They expect authority figures to always be in their corner, to set them up for success and to be of service and they are stunned when they find otherwise.” (Tulgan pg. 15)
The Missing Basics

“The problem is that Gen Zers are neither accustomed nor inclined to conform their attitudes and behavior for an institution or an authority figure (especially a non-parental authority figure). Tulgan pg.19

Three main areas to look at in regards to The Missing Basics:

1. Professionalism - Holding oneself to a higher standard regarding attitude, work habits, and social skills.
2. Critical Thinking - “Thinking on their feet” - learning, problem solving, and decision making in their own heads, without a device.
3. Followership - Respecting authority, joining something larger, and making personal sacrifices for the greater good.
The Missing Basics

What will it take?

- On-boarding and Up-to-speed training
  - What will you do on day 1 to leverage and maximize learning?
- Performance Management
  - They need to know how they are doing
- Ongoing Training
  - If we think of soft skills training as “extra” rather than “mission critical” then it’s a waste of time.
- Become a teaching style manager -
  - At what time can I back off giving them so much support? Whenever you want to start losing that person’s best efforts.
Professionalism: The Missing Basics

- Self Evaluation
  - Regularly assessing one’s own thoughts, words and actions against clear, meaningful standards
- Personal Responsibility
  - Staying focused on what one can control directly
- Positive Attitude
  - Maintain and convey positivity, generosity and enthusiasm in one’s expressions, gestures, words and tone
- Good Work Habits
  - Self-presentation, organization, productivity, quality, follow-through and initiative
- People Skills
  - Attentive listening, observing and reading; perceiving and empathizing, effective verbal skills one-on-one, in groups, in person and remotely.
Critical Thinking: The Missing Basics

- **Proactive Learning:**
  - Keeping an open mind, suspending judgement, questioning assumptions, studying, practicing etc. to build one’s stored knowledge base, skill set and wisdom.

- **Problem Solving:**
  - Mastering established best-practices so as to avoid reinventing the wheel. Using repeatable solutions to improvise when addressing decisions that are new but similar.

- **Decision Making:**
  - Identifying and considering multiple options, assessing pros and cons of each, and choosing a course of action close to the desired outcome
Followership: The Missing Basics

- **Respect for Context:**
  - Reading and adapting to the existing structure, rules, customs, and leadership in an unfamiliar situation.

- **Citizenship:**
  - Accepting, embracing, and observing, not just the rights and rewards, but the duties of membership/belonging/participation in a defined group with its own structure, rules, customs and leadership.

- **Service:**
  - Approaching relationships in terms of what you have to offer - respect, commitment, hard work, creativity, sacrifice - rather than what you need or want.

- **Teamwork:**
  - Playing whatever role is needed to support the larger mission
Teaching the Missing Basics

The authors suggest the following approach to teaching soft skill lessons:

- Make them aware: Name and describe what the skill means to the organization.
- Make them care: Explore what the skill means to them.
- Sell it: Explain the “self-building” value of the skill (what’s in it for them).
- Break it down: Step-by-step; spell out what they need to do.
- Make it easy: Use ready made lessons (they are in the book).
- Involve them: Give them credit/opportunity for self-directed learning.
- Make it practical: Spotlight opportunities to practice on the job (in class).
- Follow up: Coaching style feedback to reinforce the lessons.
Professionalism - The Missing Basics

**Self Evaluation**: Regularly assessing one’s own thoughts, words, and actions against clear, meaningful standards; and one’s own performance against specific goals, timelines, guidelines and parameters.

The Mirror is the Best Teacher

- **Lesson 2: Evaluating Yourself on Ability, Skill and Will**
  - [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wc4EvPDwhPLezN61I2qfxIMDu8YiJgfTis6sQUorEOA/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wc4EvPDwhPLezN61I2qfxIMDu8YiJgfTis6sQUorEOA/edit)

**Ability**
- What are my natural strengths that are applicable to my current tasks and responsibilities and projects? How am I applying those strengths?
- What are my relative weaknesses? How can I better leverage my strengths? How can I better plan around, bolster, or otherwise mitigate my weaknesses?

**Technical Skills**
- What are my key technical skills applicable to my current tasks and responsibilities and projects? How am I applying those skills?
- What are my relative technical skill gaps? How can I better leverage my skills? How can I bridge those skill gaps?

**Soft Skills**
- What are my key soft skills applicable to my current tasks and responsibilities and projects? How am I applying those skills?
- What are my relative soft skill gaps? How can I better leverage my soft skills? How can I bridge those soft skill gaps?

**Will/Motivation**
- What is my current motivation level? High, medium, or low?
- In what areas inside or outside of work am I most motivated?
- What motivates me? What can I do to find more of what motivates me?
- What demotivates me? What can I do to avoid those things that demotivate me?
Professionalism - The Missing Basics

**Personal Responsibility:** Staying focused on what one can control directly - principally one’s self - and controlling one’s responses in the face of factors outside one’s own control.

- Lesson Plan 2/3: All the Factors That Are in Your Way & Considering the Most Common Factors That Get in the Way at Work

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**Personal Responsibility: Lesson Plan 2—All the Factors That Are in Your Way**

**Step One** Brainstorm all of the factors that get in the way of your ability to do your job and make it harder for you to perform at the highest level.

**Step Two** Now take a look at all the factors you’ve listed and ask yourself, for each factor: “Is this a factor within my control or outside my control?” Take note of how many are within and how many are outside your control. What is the score?

**Step Three** Consider the factors, one by one. For each:

1. Can you think of a recent example? Exactly how did this factor get in your way? When? Where? Who was involved? What happened?
2. What did you do? What could you have done differently, in retrospect? What were your options? What thoughts, words, and actions could you have taken?
3. Now look ahead. Can you anticipate this factor getting in your way in the future? When is it likely to happen? Where? Who might be involved? What do you think is likely to happen? How will you respond? What options will you have? What thoughts, words, and/or actions are available to you? What can you do to improve the outcome?

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**Personal Responsibility: Lesson Plan 3—Considering the Most Common Factors That Get in the Way at Work**

**Step One** Consider the following factors that people in the workplace commonly list when asked to brainstorm factors that get in their way at work:

- Resource constraints—insufficient information, people, material, or tools
- Limited time
- Too much work
- Other people not doing their part
- Things are constantly changing
- Competing priorities
- Distance
- Weather
- Company policies, rules, regulations, and procedures
- The way things have always been done around here
- Too many low priority distractions
- Interruptions
- Conflict between and among employees
- Manager is often unavailable
- Unclear lines of authority
- Answering too many different people
- Inconsistency from one manager to another

**Step Three** Consider the factors above, one by one. For each:

1. Can you think of a recent example? Exactly how did this factor get in your way? When? Where? Who was involved? What happened?
2. Ask yourself: What did you do? What could you have done differently, in retrospect? What were your options? What thoughts, words, and actions could you have taken?
3. Now look ahead: Can you anticipate this factor getting in your way in the future? When is it likely to happen? Where? Who might be involved? What do you think is likely to happen? How will you respond? What options will you have? What thoughts, words, and/or actions are available to you? What can you do to improve the outcome?
Professionalism - The Missing Basics

Positive Attitude: Maintaining and conveying a positive, generous, enthusiastic demeanor in one’s expressions, gestures, words and tone.

- Lesson: Lesson 1: Considering Theories of How to Be Your Best at Work
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTm1kWkntLo&list=PLbg5Ls9_xLbOEYenl7uWhikuoQ0VDNlg5&index=2&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTm1kWkntLo&list=PLbg5Ls9_xLbOEYenl7uWhikuoQ0VDNlg5&index=2&t=0s)
Professionalism - The Missing Basics

Good Work Habits: Lesson Plan 12—Going the Extra Mile

Step One Brainstorm. What does it mean to you to “take initiative” at work? What does it mean to “go the extra mile”? What does it mean to go “above and beyond”?

Step Two Make a list of all of your current tasks, responsibilities, and projects. What are all the aspects of doing your job very well, very fast, all day long?

Step Three Now, next to each task, responsibility, and project, take note: What would it look like for you to go the extra mile on that task, responsibility, or project? After you do your job very well, very fast, all day long—in those extra moments—what are some extra ways you can add value?

Make an “extra mile” list for yourself, a list of all the extra ways you can go above and beyond on every task, responsibility, or project.

Step Four HOMEWORK. Every single item on your extra mile list is a concrete opportunity to excel in your current role. How often do you complete items on your extra mile list? Keep score for yourself going forward.

Good Work Habits: Wellness, self-presentation, timeliness, organization, productivity, quality, follow-through and initiative.

● Lesson 12: Going the Extra Mile
Professionalism - The Missing Basics

**People Skills:** Attentive listening, observing, and reading; perceiving and empathizing; effective use of words, tone, expressions and gestures - verbal, written, and otherwise; one-on-one and in groups; in person and remotely.

- **Lesson: 1/2: Interpersonal Communication and Self-Evaluation**

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**People Skills: Lesson Plan 1—Interpersonal Communication**

Consider the following “interpersonal communication” best practices and what they mean to you. For each one, use these questions for brainstorming: What are the business reasons for this best practice? What are the reasons why it is in your best interests as an employee to follow this best practice? Are there good reasons to NOT follow this best practice?

- Listen twice as much as you talk.
- Never interrupt or let your mind wander when others are speaking.
- Empathize: Always try to imagine yourself in the other person’s position.
- Exhibit respect, kindness, courtesy, and good manners.
- Prepare in advance before meetings or one-on-one conversations so you are brief, direct, and clear.
- Never speak of a problem unless you have thought of at least one potential solution.
- Take personal responsibility for everything you say and do.
- Don’t make excuses when you make a mistake.
- Don’t blame or complain.
- Don’t take yourself too seriously.
- Always take your commitments and responsibilities seriously.
- Always give people credit for their achievements, no matter how small.

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**People Skills: Lesson Plan 2—Self-Assessing Interpersonal Communication**

Consider your own personal track record when it comes to the following “interpersonal communication” best practices. For each one:

- Give yourself a grade (+A, +B, +C, +D, F) for your track record so far and consider what you can do to improve on that best practice.

- Listen twice as much as you talk.
- Never interrupt or let your mind wander when others are speaking.
- Empathize: Always try to imagine yourself in the other person’s position.
- Exhibit respect, kindness, courtesy, and good manners.
- Prepare in advance before meetings or one-on-one conversations so you are brief, direct, and clear.
- Never speak of a problem unless you have thought of at least one potential solution.
- Take personal responsibility for everything you say and do.
- Don’t make excuses when you make a mistake.
- Don’t blame or complain.
- Don’t take yourself too seriously.
- Always take your commitments and responsibilities seriously.
- Always give people credit for their achievements, no matter how small.
Critical Thinking: The Missing Basics

**Proactive Learning: Lesson Plan 2—Open Mind**

**Step One**  Consider the following statement: “Keeping an open mind is the first key to proactive learning.”

*Brainstorming questions:* What does “keeping an open mind” mean to you? Can you think of specific examples? Why is keeping an open mind important to proactive learning?

**Step Two**  Consider the following: Let’s assume closed-mindedness is the opposite of open-mindedness.

*Brainstorming questions:* What does “closed-mindedness” mean to you? Can you think of specific examples? Why does closed-mindedness get in the way of proactive learning?

**Step Three**  Make a list of at least ten statements about which you are absolutely certain.

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**Proactive Learning:** Keeping an open mind, suspending judgement, questioning assumptions, and seeking out information, technique and perspective; and studying, practicing, and contemplating in order to build one’s stored knowledge base, skill set and wisdom.

- Lesson: 2: Open Mind
Critical Thinking: The Missing Basics

**Problem Solving:** Mastering established best-practices - proven repeatable solutions for dealing with regularly recurring decisions - so as to avoid reinventing the wheel. Improvising when addressing problems that are new but similar.

- Lesson 2: Preventing or Avoiding Problems Before they Happen
Decision Making: Lesson Plan 2—Information Analysis: Simple Pros and Cons

**Step One**  Brainstorm: Think of an important decision that you need to make—inside or outside of work. Or else take one of the choice sets below and use that “decision” to be made as your case study. In each of the following choice sets, imagine you must make a mutually exclusive decision: If you could only choose one or the other, would you rather:

- Be paid more money or have more time off?
- Disappoint an important customer or disappoint an important vendor?
- Impress your boss or impress your direct reports?
- Improve the quality of your work or improve your productivity?
- Improve the quality of our products or lower the price?
- Love your work or win prestigious accolades for your work?

Or think of another choice set to use as your example for the following steps.

**Step Two**  Now consider the decision to be made and the options before you:

- What do you know? What don’t you know?
- What else should you know in order to make a good decision?
- Do you need to do some research before considering your options?
  - If so, what are your research questions? and
  - What are your best sources for answering those questions?

**Step Three**  Now before considering your options, consider what’s at stake in making this decision. Answer these questions:

- Why is a decision required?
- When does the decision have to be made?
- What are your goals in making the decision?
Followership: The Missing Basics

**Respect for Context**: Reading and adapting to the existing structure, rules, customs and leadership in an unfamiliar situation.

Lesson 2, 3, 4: Respect for context—adapting to existing structure, rules, and leadership

- [https://docs.google.com/document/d/15mJj2VlVI6IQjHHcQ-UEiszRvL4ABGHGtYxbHSE61MzE/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/15mJj2VlVI6IQjHHcQ-UEiszRvL4ABGHGtYxbHSE61MzE/edit)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scBIOIP4rPkl&list=PLbg5Ls9_xLbOEYenl7uWhiokuoQ0VDNlg5&index=13&t=15s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scBIOIP4rPkl&list=PLbg5Ls9_xLbOEYenl7uWhiokuoQ0VDNlg5&index=13&t=15s)
Followership: The Missing Basics

Citizenship: Accepting, embracing and observing, not just the rights, but the duties of membership/belonging/participation in a defined group with its own structure, rules, customs, and leaders.

● Lesson 2: The “Respect for Others” Model
Followership: The Missing Basics

**Service**: Approaching relationships in terms of what you have to offer - respect, commitment, hard work, creativity, sacrifice - rather than what you need or want.

- Lesson 3: Realities About Service in the Workplace

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Service: Lesson Plan 3—Realities About Service in the Workplace

Consider the following realities about the nature of "service" in the workplace, one by one. For each one: Why is this statement a reality? Have you ever seen this reality in action? Can you describe the example in detail? What happened? Where? When? Who was involved? What lessons do you draw from this example?

**Reality**: No matter how good a person is at a job, everybody needs guidance, direction, and support in order to succeed.

**Reality**: If you really want to be creative at work, the first thing you need to know is exactly what is and what is not up to you.

**Reality**: If you want special treatment, you should be prepared to go the extra mile to earn it.

**Reality**: Your best path to success is making sure you have a regular structured dialogue where you receive the guidance, direction, support, and coaching you need.

**Reality**: The smartest workplace politics are to keep your work relationships focused on the work.

**Reality**: When you deal with mistakes and problems as they occur, you are much more likely to solve them while they are still small and manageable, before they get out of control.

**Reality**: Being coached on your performance is an opportunity to improve—and that is always good news.

**Reality**: You owe it to yourself and the organization to keep track of everything you do in writing.

**Reality**: Whether or not you are “political,” if you learn and practice the “service” mindset, then you will be everybody’s “go to” person.

**Reality**: No matter how busy your boss may be, your boss does not have time *not* to meet with you on a regular basis.
Followership: The Missing Basics

Teamwork: Lesson Plan 3—Your Role in Relation to the Mission

**Step One** Consider the first dimension of being a great team player: Playing whatever role is needed to support the larger mission.

*Brainstorm:*

- How would you describe the larger mission of this organization?
- How would you describe your role in relation to the mission?

**Step Two** Drill down on your role. Make a list of all the different tasks, responsibilities, and projects that comprise your role. Now take them one by one. For each one: What do you actually do? How exactly does your work on that task, responsibility, or project contribute to the larger mission? Who relies on you to do this work? What are the consequences if you don’t deliver? What is the value added when you deliver successfully? How are you doing on this particular contribution to the mission? How can you improve?

**Step Three** HOMEWORK. Discuss what you learned from this exercise with your manager in your next one-on-one.

**Teamwork:** Playing whatever role is needed to support the larger effort; coordinating, cooperating, and collaborating with others in pursuit of a shared goal; celebrating the success of others.

- Lesson 3: Your Role in Relation to the Mission
All material brazenly borrowed from ...
Questions?

What questions do you have?

Thanks for attending our presentation!