

PAYING IT FORWARD

Leading With Purpose

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After 40 years in the fire service, Chief Randy Bruegman founded The Leadership Crucible Foundation to reshape future leadership with a focus on fostering courage, empathy, and humility in leadership positions.

A crucial lesson that every leader should embrace is that leadership is not about oneself, but about making a difference in the lives of others. The greatest reward a leader can receive is to positively impact the people they lead, regardless of their profession. So, if you aspire to become a great leader, remember that your focus should always be on serving others and making a positive difference in their lives.

Your Competitive Advantage: Developing Your Soft Skills

I recently had the opportunity to attend a meeting with several chief executives and their senior staff, where we discussed the challenges they were facing in acquiring talent for their organizations. There was one issue they all raised. Despite representing different types of organizations, they all noted the lack of soft skills in many of the employees they hired over the past couple of years. It is becoming increasingly evident that soft skills are just as important, if not more so, as technical skills in the workplace. According to a survey conducted by LinkedIn, 92% of talent professionals and hiring managers agree on this point. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and time management are critical in today's fast-paced and collaborative work environment. From my experience working with individuals across various levels of the organization, ranging from skilled labor to those having a Ph.D., I have noticed that the one thing that separated them all from other employees was their ability to navigate the human dynamic of working in, engaging, and having an impact within the organization. It is imperative for employees to have strong soft skills to build solid relationships with colleagues, clients, and customers. Employers are actively seeking candidates who possess these skills as they contribute significantly to an employee's career success and the overall success of the organization.

In today's world of constant technological advancements, it is often believed that soft skills such as emotional intelligence, creativity, and adaptability hold little value in the workplace. However, this couldn't be farther from the truth. In fact, these skills have become more critical than ever before. The changing nature of work demands a shift in the skills required for success. While technical skills are undoubtedly important, there is increasing evidence that "soft skills" such as problem-solving, teamwork, and resilience are just as crucial in today's job market. If you want to be successful today you must recognize that technical skills are no longer enough to advance one's career in the long run. Employers are now looking for individuals who possess a combination of technical proficiency and soft skills. In today's rapidly transforming workforce, the ability to understand and manage emotions, think outside the box, produce innovative solutions, and adjust to changing circumstances are what employers are looking for today.

Four Categories of Maturity

In his book "A New Kind of Diversity," Tim Elmore discusses the four categories that educational psychologists use to measure maturity in children: cognitive, biological, social, and emotional. Elmore notes that while cognitive development has made significant strides and physical maturation occurs at an accelerated rate, social and emotional growth has stagnated.

A concerning trend has emerged in which people exhibit decreased abilities to navigate relationships and experience heightened emotional fragility. The importance of social and emotional maturity cannot be overstated, as it is critical to success in various areas of life, including work, relationships, and personal growth. The impact of the Covid Pandemic and the increasing reliance on technology, which provides a platform for virtual interactions, have compounded the issue by reducing opportunities for in-person social interactions.

Cognitive

Biological

Social

Emotional



The impact of smartphones and the constant connection through devices, rather than human contact, has produced both positive and negative effects on the development of soft skills. While there have always been individuals who lacked social skills, technology has amplified this issue. A quick observation of individuals in a public space, waiting for a ride or dining at a restaurant, reveals that most people are staring at their phones, rather than engaging in conversation. Even at home, it is common for family members to text each other, despite being in the same house.

While technology has made communication more efficient and accessible, it has also reduced the need for face-to-face interactions, limiting individuals' ability to develop interpersonal skills such as communication, empathy, and the ability to engage in critical conversations that are crucial for personal and professional growth. Technology has facilitated the development of soft skills in virtual teams and remote working environments through online training programs, webinars, and virtual workshops. At the same time it has also reduced opportunities to develop soft skills through face-to-face interactions.

It is vital to recognize that technology is a tool that should facilitate the development of soft skills, rather than replace human interactions. Organizations are developing strategies to strike a balance between using technology for communication and fostering face-to-face interactions to develop their employees' soft skills. It is crucial to understand that feedback delivered through an email does not have the same impact as face-to-face communication. Meaningful conversations and interactions with others can help individuals develop their soft skills and succeed in various areas of life, including work, personal relationships, and personal growth.

Developing your soft skills is essential for your personal growth, developing effective communication skills, and career success. The skills that often go unnoticed but make a significant impact are the ones that involve personal relationships, character, and attitude. With the rise of digital communication, many people have become accustomed to this lack of face-to-face interaction, leading to a decline in the development of these skills. As a result, it has become increasingly challenging for individuals to communicate effectively in person.

To enhance your soft skills, here are some practical steps you can take:

- Identify areas that you need to improve. Review a list of soft skills and determine which ones you need to work on.
- Be present in the conversation. Put your phone down and listen actively to what others are saying.
- Learn nonverbal communication. Body language, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice are all essential parts of effective communication.
- Be clear and concise. Focus on the main point of your communication and avoid using overly complex language or industry jargon.
- Maintain eye contact during conversations to show engagement and attentiveness. - Watch your body language. Avoid slouching, putting your feet up, or using gestures that convey impatience.
- Network regularly. Attend events, workshops, and conferences to meet new people and develop your soft skills.
- Take on extra tasks and seek out challenging work and different teams to work with. This will help you step out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself.
- Keep learning. No matter where you are on the soft skill chart, continue to enhance your skill set.
- Find a mentor. A good mentoring relationship can help you build empathy and learn how to put yourself in someone else's situation.
- By focusing on these practical steps, you can improve your soft skills and enhance your personal growth, communication, and career success.

In today's competitive business landscape, organizations are beginning to realize that to be successful and sustainable, that investment in the development of soft skills among their employees is extremely important. Here are a few strategies you may wish to consider if you are running an organization or a team.

1. Training and Development Programs.

Providing Your employees with training and development programs on essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and how to effectively communicate.

2. Mentoring Programs.

Mentoring programs provide employees with the opportunity to learn from experienced professionals within the organization and help them develop skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving. Take the time to carefully match mentors and mentees based on skills, interests, and backgrounds. This can help ensure a strong and productive mentoring relationship.



3. Leadership Development.

Leadership development programs can help individuals to improve their soft skills, providing them with the necessary tools to lead their teams effectively. These programs can include training in communication, team management, and conflict resolution.

4. Employee Engagement.

Engaged employees are more likely to develop their soft skills. Organizations that promote employee engagement by providing opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making, recognizing and rewarding their contributions, and encouraging open communication are building a foundation from which their employees can operate. Engaged employees are more likely to develop their soft skill as they are actively involved with others inside the organization. This helps to cultivate their soft skill set.

5. Cross-Functional Teams.

Cross-functional teams is a proven way to provide employees with opportunities to work with colleagues from different departments, enhancing their interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, and collaboration.

6. Socialization.

Often overlooked, but the interactions that occur in social setting among co-workers helps people develop their soft skills, establishing relationships that they can carry back into their everyday work environment

Investing in the development of soft skills is not only essential for organizations seeking to remain competitive but also demonstrates empathy towards their employees. By providing opportunities for personal and professional growth, organizations can create a culture of empathy, mutual respect, and collaboration, leading to sustainable growth and success.

Leaders Are Readers

I believe that to be a good leader, one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight. To that end, we provide a few suggested titles below for you to consider:

The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish They'd Learned Sooner

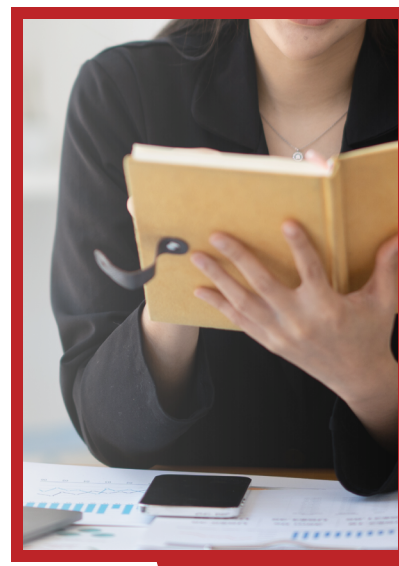
Peggy Klaus

A New Kind of Diversity: Making the Generations on Your Team a Competitive Advantages

Tim Elmore

The Hard Facts About Soft Skills

Richard Anthony Celestin Esq.



Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways



Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in The Leadership Crucible Podcast, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways that we discussed. We share these personal and leadership takeaways—these insights—with you in hopes it will help you reflect on them personally or from a professional perspective. These may also provide potential talking points that you can discuss with your team or colleagues, which often create great dialogue insights.

- Technology and the Covid pandemic have impacted the development of our interpersonal and soft skills. Put your phone down once in a while and talk to people, you may find you like it.
- Soft skills, such as communica-

tion, teamwork, problem-solving, and time management, are becoming increasingly crucial in today's fast-paced and collaborative work environment. That requires good interpersonal skills.

- Employers are seeking individuals who possess a combination of technical proficiency and soft skills. If you have one and not the other, you will limit your potential to contribute to the organization.
- Developing soft skills is essential for personal growth, effective communication, and career success. You can be the smartest person in the room, but if you can't engage and talk to people how will they ever know?
- Practical steps to enhance soft skills include identifying your

own areas for improvement, learning nonverbal communication skills, networking, and finding a good mentor. It is up to you. No one else can do this for you.

- Organizations should invest in their employees' soft skills development. This is a win-win proposition. When you develop more engaged and happier employees, they make your organization better, more profitable, and more effective.
- Your investment in soft skills development fosters a culture of empathy, mutual respect, and collaboration, leading to sustainable growth and success, and a healthier and more productive work environment.