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# STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

**ORGANISATIONS EXPECT GRADUATES TO POSSESS SOFT SKILLS DESPITE THE FACT THAT THESE SKILLS ARE UNDERVALUED AT A DEGREE LEVEL. COULD THIS BE WHERE THE PROBLEM LIES?**

**H**AVING just attended my convocation late last month, it was clear to me that I was merely one of the many hundreds of thousands who were graduating with a bachelor's degree for the year 2015. Data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States showed that 1.5 million students graduated in 2014. This got me thinking about what I had to offer to employers in order to stand out from the rest?

What would differentiate me from that RM50,000 piece of paper? Coming from the human resources line, my father had always told me that when push comes to shove, your degree merely serves as your passport for an interview. It will be your soft skills that gets you hired and promoted!

## WHAT ARE THESE SOFT SKILLS EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT?

Soft skills refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that describe an individual's ability to interact with one another and is usually linked to a person's emotional quotient, or EQ.

Say you visit an optometrist for your yearly eye checkup, but beyond his or her technical skills, what else do you look for?

Would you prefer someone who is warm and takes time to answer your questions or would you go to someone who talks to you as though you owe them for taking up their time? In this circumstance, soft skills matter.

With more Gen-Ys entering the workforce, the diversity in age, experience and work ethics now becomes more apparent. Here are the most important soft skills:

### ■ THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE

Everyone always talks about the importance of having communication skills but no one actually feels the need to improve themselves. Why? Because people feel that communicating appears to be so common that it should be innate.

The question is: What do employers want to see? Would it be in terms of learning how to listen instead of just hearing?

Hearing would be the act of perceiving sound by ear whereas listening is something one consciously decides on doing.

It is something that requires



attentiveness in order to process the meaning from words and sentences. Knowing when and how to speak in the workplace is essential as it will dictate your success of sharing ideas between one another.

### ■ DEVELOPING INITIATIVE

It is always difficult to be the one who makes the first move. That first move becomes even harder when it involves making decisions with regards to organisational matters. However, this is where initiative comes in.

The ability to act without being told is what makes someone a proactive worker, who is able to think and foresee problems rather than have to solve them later.

These individuals are motivated to perform above and beyond their line of work and that is important as they are usually the inciters of change!

Criticism can be crippling but when

taken in stride it allows for personal growth. Only when we welcome failure are we able to learn from it and to focus on our strengths.

Personally, I used to be someone who took criticism too much to heart but I have learnt to embrace it.

The ability to accept criticism from others has made me more open to the possibilities for coaching thus in a roundabout way, making me more teachable.

### ■ FOSTERING CREATIVITY

Conventionally, art, music and dance are considered to be creative outputs. In the workforce however, creativity refers to one's ability to transcend what is ordinary and to think out of the box.

Flexibility refers to the readiness to adapt to changes given the constant evolution due to globalisation.

Rather than resisting the adjustments by kicking and screaming, why

not jump on the bandwagon early and be noted for your willingness to try new approaches?

Individually, I would use that opportunity to equip myself with the necessary skills to cope with that change rather than to fight it.

Creativity also refers to problem-solving skills. When conflicts arise, it should serve as a means towards improving relationship and work performance rather than for it to be of negative connotation.

The ability to understand the issues at hand and to critically and creatively come up with solutions with consideration of everyone's interest is an important aspect in problem solving.

### ■ DEPENDABILITY

In order for things to run smoothly and as planned, a sense of reliability is required to be displayed by employees as it ensures completion of every task assigned to them.

A key point would be in terms of actually doing what you're assigned to do without the need for supervision.

Never shirk your responsibilities, instead always strive to deliver your best work. It is also essential to do that within the deadline for it to be laudable.

### ■ ENTHUSIASM AND POSITIVITY

Having a positive attitude may seem trivial to some when in fact, it carries significant weightage in light of performing in the workplace.

With the right attitude, one would be willing to go above and beyond in completing the task at hand.

They would also be able to translate that positivity within their team members to be able to improve overall functionality.

### ■ CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Having said that, these are skills that should be developed from a young age for it to become a habit.

With Leaderonomics Youth, we help develop soft skills such as communication and performance characters traits such as creativity, initiative and dependability through our DIODE camps and Leaderonomics Clubs in schools.

So while it may be important for a surgeon to know how to make proper incisions, an importance must still be placed on fine-tuning one's soft skills in dealing with patients empathetically.

Now wouldn't you say that it's a good time to grant equal importance to soft skills as you would to a degree?

■ *Stephanie Ling is part of Leaderonomics Youth and is currently under the Clubs initiative. Her personal passion lies in developing all-rounded youths who are able to impact their communities. Occasionally, she can be seen engaging in downward dogs and headstands for her own leisurely pursuits. To engage with Stephanie, email her at [stephanie.ling@leaderonomics.com](mailto:stephanie.ling@leaderonomics.com)*



↙  
Perseverance:  
**marathon**  
or **sprint?**

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**10 ways**  
to not  
**procrastinate**

→  
Mourning  
over **job**  
**loss**

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