

TOP 5 SKILLS SME EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

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EARLIER this year, we launched Leaderonomics Digital Learning. In our library of courses, we aim to provide useful information, skills and knowledge that would help small to medium enterprises (SMEs) grow their people, and with that, grow their organisation too. The more we speak to clients, the more evident it becomes that the following five topics seem to concern most of these organisations.

So what are the topics that are considered "hot" buttons for SME owners and human resources professionals that we talk to? The ones we get the highest levels of interest

for, are not some highly technical, advanced skills. Instead, these are:

1. Time management
2. Producing high-quality work
3. Motivating self and teams
4. Engagement habits of effective managers
5. Managing difficult clients

WHAT DOES THIS INDICATE?

A massive 96% of employers in Asia believe skill shortages have the potential to impact the effective operation of their business or department this year.

These skill shortages seem to be evident in even some of the areas that one might think should come naturally to working professionals, such as time management and producing

high-quality work.

The demand that we get for these five topics indicate that employers have to face this reality: They need to develop their people, not only in the subject matter of their business, but also on skills that might have been considered as given.

If I were to share the additional five most requested topics, this would become even more apparent. They would include personal branding, reducing stress levels at work, conducting effective meetings, delivering presentations, and influencing skills.

But let's have a look at the top five topics mentioned, and see what each of them entails, as well as how they can be of benefit to both individuals and the organisation.



1 TIME MANAGEMENT

Time is money, and managing your time well ensures you are a productive, efficient and effective worker. Knowing how to make the most of the limited time you have at work, or even your personal life for that matter, will ensure you achieve much more than you currently do, reduce stress and halt work eating into your personal time.

What we do with our limited time is what distinguishes us from the rest. Despite the importance of time, and the profound results that it leads to, so few of us give importance on how we organise ourselves, and how we spend our time.

Knowing and applying some tools and ways that you can be more effective in the way that you organise your activities, in order to increase your productivity and at the same time find time to do those activities that you keep postponing – claiming that you do not have time for – can make a huge difference and differentiate you from your colleagues, making a positive impact in your professional and personal life.

Benefit to individual: Becoming more effective in your work output, ensuring your bosses see you as someone that knows how to handle the pressures of the working environ-

ment, always able to complete the necessary tasks on time and accurately. At the same time, allowing you to have more work-life balance, and finding time for enjoyable activities outside work that would usually not be prioritised.

Benefit to organisation: Employees who manage their time well are a gem to the organisation. They ensure tasks are completed on time, without delays to customers or to other team members. An employee who is fully productive and in control of their time will naturally produce more output, translating to higher productivity and thus higher returns for the organisation.

2 PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY WORK

Quality is relative. Or is it? Although a few organisations are able to give specific definitions of what quality looks like to them, the lines are oftentimes fuzzy when it comes to making sense of balancing our own expectations of quality with those of our managers', the organisation's, and the industry we work in.

Is it really that difficult to identify a quality standard that makes sense, and then ensure that the quality of our work meets this standard consistently?

Knowing your key stakeholders, and identifying where they are coming from and what their expectations are will ensure you meet high-quality standards again and again, and also indicate how you can exceed expectations.

Benefit to individual: Producing high-quality work is something to be proud of, and something that you will see some rewards for, if not immediately, at least down the line. Producing consistent high-quality work will indicate to your bosses you are someone worth keeping in the organisation, which may lead to rewards in the form of bonuses, promotions, and more responsibility entrusted on you.

It's easier to move to a different company later on as well, as you have something great to shout about and take pride on, and it's a great indicator of your professionalism and your high standards.

Benefit to the organisation: As an organisation, you would want all your people to produce the best work possible. High-quality work is what builds your brand and reputation in the market, and what keeps your error costs to a minimum. As such, you should always emphasise on the importance of this.



3 MOTIVATING SELF AND TEAMS

We all have things that we want to achieve in life. Only difference is, some of us make it and some of us don't. Why is this so? As normal human beings, we all have the same abilities and capacity. However, are we all motivated to get what we want?

Knowing how to keep ourselves motivated will allow us to go the extra mile and stay committed to our promises – whether to ourselves, our bosses, or our clients in reaching our goals.

For those running a team, part of your role is also to ensure all your team members do stay motivated as well and carry on working towards your team's goals. A motivated team is filled with positivity and is always enthusiastic about its tasks and assignments. Members in a motivated team are aware that their time and effort are invested into a worthwhile cause, thus they make it a point to give their utmost best and tend to perform well.

Benefit to individual: Motivating yourself will not only make you more productive, ensuring you reach your



goals and deliver on your promises, but will also make you a happier person. If you are a team leader, ensuring your team is motivated allows for happy, engaged employees, who are willing to go the extra mile, and also a team that meets its goals.

Benefit to the organisation: Having people that are motivated and knowing how to motivate

the rest is always beneficial for an organisation, as it means that these people will strive for excellence and for achieving their objectives on their own. Having a demotivated workforce, on the other hand, will make everything move much slower, and pushing people to work towards the collective goals would prove a big challenge.

4 ENGAGEMENT HABITS OF EFFECTIVE MANAGERS

According to Gallup, managers account for at least 70% of variance in employee engagement scores across business units. This variation is, in turn, responsible for severely low worldwide employee engagement.

Gallup reported in two large-scale studies in 2012 that only 30% of employees in the United States are engaged at work, and a shamefully low 13% worldwide are engaged. Worse, over the past 12 years, these low numbers have barely moved, which indicated one thing: the vast majority of employees worldwide are failing to develop and contribute at work.

As a manager, knowing how to engage with your team members will lead to an increase of the level of team engagement, leading to sustainable high performance. Everyone knows the importance of high performance but unfortunately many managers do not really know how to drive this.

Benefit to individual: It is often the frustration of many managers that even though they have dreams



and aspirations of what they would like their team to achieve, or even set objectives to reach, they don't seem to be able to reach that as they don't seem to get the team aligned and working towards those.

Knowing how to engage with the team and ensuring that they are all working towards the same goals will make the team a productive and effective one, and consequently make you seem like an effective manager.

Benefit to the organisation: Oftentimes, people are promoted based on their individual contributions. Getting managers to really know how to get a team moving as well to achieve the goals set to the team, means that the organisation will reach its objectives successfully, and at the same time ensure that your employees are also engaged and happy doing what they do.

5 MANAGING DIFFICULT CLIENTS

All kinds of businesses, more often than not, face a myriad of challenges when dealing with difficult clients – handling customer objections, deciding on the most effective solution(s) to a problem(s) and closing a deal. Sealing a business deal is often left to chance: the client may or may not patronise your business. Knowing how to deal with objections from clients and how to turn them around can make an interaction with a difficult client a successful one.

Benefits to individual: On a personal level, knowing how to deal with stressful situations you find yourself in when dealing with a difficult client will put you at ease, and give you perspective. At the same time, it will allow you to address such situations more effectively, and be seen as someone

that really knows how to deal with challenging situations, making you all the more valuable to the organisation.

Benefits to the organisation: Having people in your organisation that know how to deal with challenging circumstances while not losing their cool and remaining professional and understanding would really differentiate your customer service and your brand, and elevate your worth in the market.

Eva is the Digital Learning Design & Development Leader at Leaderonomics. She believes that everyone can be anything they wish, if they are willing to put in the effort and are curious to learn along the way. To find out how your business and employees can benefit from these courses, e-mail learn@leaderonomics.com.

