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Soft Skills for Hard Times: Practice Leaders Should Never Discount the Importance of Soft Skills

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Editor's Note: For additional tools and resources related to this topic, visit the BSM Café (www.bsmcafe.com).

In an increasingly frantic business world driven by difficult decisions and hard numbers, it is easy to dismiss soft skills as simply touchy-feely people skills that are nice-to-have but not all that important to the overall success of a practice. Nothing could be further from the truth. Today's fast-paced, service-oriented economy features a growing reliance on interactive teams that is elevating soft skills to a new level of importance within the workplace.

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To help build a strong, compatible team, practice management should identify, hire, develop, and reward workers who possess these important soft skills:

Strong work ethic. Self-motivation, passion, and dedication to getting the job done, no matter what, are prized individual characteristics. Employees who are conscientious and adamant about doing the best work possible need to be identified, encouraged, and rewarded.

Sense of team. Today's economically mandated do-more-with-less philosophy requires that employees embrace a total team approach. Lean (and, perhaps, getting leaner) practices can no longer tolerate a "that's-not-my-job" attitude. All workers need to see the big picture while being able to accomplish even the smallest tasks.

Effective interpersonal skills. Everyone's professional life suffers when coworkers cannot connect. Having the social skills necessary to become closer to colleagues is essential to the overall happiness and productivity of a practice. It's helpful to note that interpersonal skills can be improved, so there is hope for staff members who lack some of these important skills.

Desire to learn. The craving to participate in continuing education—be it of the daily, on-the-job learning-through-experience format or more formal away-from-the-office offerings—is important both personally and professionally. The best employees always want to be better, know more, pitch in when needed, and do a good job.

Sense of commitment. On the outside, workers with a strong sense of commitment are dependable, have good attendance records, and report to work on time. On the inside, these workers usually have an established set of meaningful personal values, principles, and beliefs that they bring into the work environment.

Positive attitude. A positive, cooperative attitude goes a long way in a group setting. Positive people are contagious—in a good way. Those who tend to see "the bright side" and have a "glass half-full" mentality can energize an office and bring other teams members along for the ride.

Flexibility and adaptability. Workers confident enough to be flexible and adapt to unexpected challenges are worth their weight in gold in a busy practice. Flexible employees generally understand and follow directions well and embrace change without missing a beat.

Confidence. While over-confidence can be a turnoff, a healthy, balanced level of self-confidence is a fair indicator of positive self-esteem. Employees with good self-esteem tend to believe in themselves and therefore welcome challenges and find it easy to embrace objectives and goals. They also tend to mix well with other employees and are quick learners.

Accepting of criticism. This skill is difficult to master. When faced with critical feedback, many people first feel hurt and then lash back. However, the best employees view criticism in a positive light and see it as an opportunity to learn and grow. They tend to see criticism not as a personal attack and focus more on the actions criticized.

Complementary Skills

Practice leaders should never discount the importance of soft skills, that unique blend of personal qualities, attitudes, habits, and social behaviors that makes someone a good employee and easy to work with. Successful practices see the advantages of using recruiting and development strategies that help them identify qualified workers who also possess a strong set of complementary soft skills.



About the author: Allan Walker is director of publication services for BSM Consulting, an internationally recognized health care consulting firm headquartered in Incline Village, Nevada and Scottsdale, Arizona. For more information about the author, BSM Consulting, or content/resources discussed in this article, please visit the BSM Café at www.BSMCafe.com.

