



Technical Skills x Interpersonal Skills = Performance

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A couple of years ago, [an article in ComputerWorld](#) proclaimed that soft skills are sexy and declared the importance of soft (or non-technical, people, or interpersonal) skills for IT professionals. We can skip the argument about whether soft skills are indeed sexy—I can only imagine the debate and hear Andy, our IT director, exclaiming, “I am not going there!” But it’s impossible to deny the importance of interpersonal and business skills to success in most professional careers, including IT.

Canadian business leaders echoed that sentiment when, in a recent [leadership and learning survey conducted by Global Knowledge](#), they unanimously agreed that communication is the management trait with the most influence on individual and organizational performance. Ranked just below communication were execution, decision-making, coaching, and mentoring.

All in all, the skills required to be successful have evolved. In a world of functional interdependencies, live and online communication, internal and external customer service expectations, and business outsourcing, interpersonal skills—or lack of them—are affecting your individual and team performance more than ever. Of course, realizing the importance of non-technical skills has been brewing for a long time.

Seminal research such as that by professor Robert Kelley from Carnegie Mellon Tepper School of Business has demonstrated clearly that technical skills alone do not distinguish standout employees. Competencies such as initiative and business awareness, as well as skills in leadership,

collaboration, communication, and presenting also factor in. Foundation work on emotional intelligence by psychologist and author Daniel Goleman revealed similar results. His findings affirmed the now well-known notion that one’s ability to understand one’s own emotions as well as those of coworkers is key to better business performance.

The importance of strong technical skills in today’s business environment is obvious. To be considered competent, you must know your area of expertise. The mistake is to think it stops there. Consider this mathematical formula:

Technical Skills x Interpersonal Skills = Performance

A low number on either side of the multiplication sign will yield a lower score on performance. Competently interacting with colleagues, influencing those who do not report to you, communicating effectively with a client, or presenting a highly technical solution in a way that yields critical buy-in make a huge difference in the performance of a strong technical professional versus another who ignores the people side of the equation.

It’s time to redefine skill. For today’s business professionals, soft skills are as important as hard skills. Gone are the days of linear thinking. It’s time to get out of your silo and take a cue from business leaders and psychologists alike: having people skills is not an option anymore; it’s a multiplication factor that directly impacts your success.