

Why Building Relationships May Be the Only Soft Skill You Need

In a recent survey of millennials, asking them of their most important life goals, over eighty percent responded: getting richer. Fifty percent of those very respondents said that another major life goal for them was to become famous. Contrary to these results, Robert Waldinger, the director of a 75-year old study on adult development at Harvard, observes that the clearest message from their wide-ranging study rather concludes: Good relationships keep us happier and healthier.

In a nutshell, the ultimate goal of all the soft skills we need to learn should be building good relationships.

Good relationships are built by truly caring about people who put their trust in you. This is possible only if we listen with an open mind and open heart, have a clear awareness of ourselves, the people around us, and the world, and work by connecting to the highest future possibilities.

What we see is not the Reality

MIT Professor Peter Senge teaches us: World of relationships is a world of conflicts by its very nature. Different systems with different realities are interacting and sometimes interacting in very problematic ways. It is important to be aware of the fact that we do not perceive the world we see, we see the world we perceive and our perception is a reflection of our history. It is characteristic of a living system. Unlike non living devices, like a camera, for example, we create our own reality. Men see this world different from women. So telling someone what is reality, is like making a demand for obedience. None of us can see actual reality because we are not a recording device. And understanding "Love is an act of allowing others to be a legitimate other" by the prominent biologist Humberto Maturana is essential to truly caring about people.

So imposing our opinions on others will only damage relationships. Understanding that you cannot change the thinking of people but can only provide them tools to do it themselves; and that you cannot control people, but can only influence them, may keep relationships healthy.

Wisdom and the Fog

Tim Urban, famous blogger and TED speaker, tells us how to improve our awareness and understand the big picture that may help to build relationships and gain happiness. He says in his blog (I am paraphrasing it here):

The goal of human development should be: gaining wisdom. This means being aware of the truth. The truth is a combination of what we know and what we don't know. Awareness of knowing, and its absence, is the key to being wise. So what is in our way: The fog.

A human is the *combination* of the Higher being (brilliant, big-thinking, and rational part of our brain) and the lower-level, Animal being. These lower-level instincts are the remnants of our animal past and

still a prominent part of our brains, creating a turbulent zoo of small-minded emotions and motivations (such as fear, pettiness, jealousy, greed, instant gratification, etc. and the fog) in our heads.

The battle of the Higher being against the animals—of trying to see through the fog to clarity—is the core internal human struggle.

The most glaring example is the way the fog convinces us, time after time, that certain things will make us happy that in reality absolutely don't. The only real way to improve happiness in a lasting way is to make progress in the battle against the fog.

So if it were not because of the fog, is there any point for developing a reputation for being cheap, a liar, selfish, greedy, dishonest, or rigid or someone with a bad attitude or bad work ethics?

Being aware of our biases, shortcomings or weaknesses and continuously trying to overcome them is a major struggle for all of us. A major key to achieving this is to develop our listening skills.

Four Levels of Listening

According to MIT Professor Otto Scharmer, there are four levels of listening:

- i- Listening from Habit: You listen only to what you already know. You reconfirm your opinions and judgments.
- ii- Factual Listening: Listening with an open mind. Listening to what contradicts your own opinions and judgments.
- iii- Empathic Listening: Listening with an open heart. Listening with feelings and seeing the situation from the eyes of another. Listening with an emotional connection with another.
- iv- Generative Listening: Listening with a connection to emerging future possibilities. Noticing the arrival of your highest future possibilities.

We cannot improve our awareness unless we really listen with an open mind and open heart. Not listening with an open mind and open heart is one of the major causes of conflict or troubles in the world.

A study conducted by Harvard University noted that 80% of achievements in career are determined by soft skills and only 20% by hard skills.

Here it's worth it to remind ourselves of the famous quote of Aristotle: "What is the essence of life? To serve others and do good."

Whether it is for career success, happiness or a good life, it makes all the sense to let go of short-term benefits or instant-gratification and keep improving ourselves to build good relationships.

Top ten soft skill attributes for business executives

Following is a list of soft skills compiled by Eastern Kentucky University.

1. Communication – oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening.
2. Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, graciousness, saying please and thank you, being respectful.
3. Flexibility – adaptability, willingness to change, lifelong learner, accepting new things, adjusting, teachable.
4. Integrity – honest, ethical, having high morals and personal values, doing what’s right.
5. Interpersonal skills – being nice, personable, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, patient, sociable, having self-control, sense of humor, warmth, social skills.
6. Positive attitude – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident.
7. Professionalism – business-like, well-dressed, appearance, poised.
8. Responsibility – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense.
9. Teamwork – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative.
10. Work ethic – hard working, willing to work, loyal, takes initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance.

<http://waitbutwhy.com/2014/10/religion-for-the-nonreligious.html>

Professor Otto Scharmer Presentation on Youtube.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLfXpRkVZaI>