

Interpersonal Skills Give You the Edge

WRITER
JOAN
BURGE

Outstanding administrative professionals not only have excellent business skills but also excellent interpersonal skills. They realize that these skill sets are as important to their business success as appropriate excellence in the performance of any of their basic work duties. Daniel Goleman wrote the “bible” on interpersonal skills in his book, *Emotional Intelligence – why it can matter more than IQ*. The Harvard Business Review hailed emotional intelligence (EI) as “a groundbreaking, paradigm-shattering idea”, one of the most influential business ideas of the decade. Today, companies worldwide routinely look through the lens of EI in hiring, promoting and developing their employees.

While many administrative office professionals have become technically proficient, they have not similarly focused on their people skills. Yet if you think about your day, what do you do all day in some way, shape or form? The answer: you interact with people! Even if you are sending an email message, that message is going to be read and evaluated by a person. When you leave a voice message, a person is going to listen to it.

I have often seen administrative professionals overlooked for promotions or kept from top positions because of poor interpersonal skills. If you think interpersonal soft skills don't matter, you had better think again. You are exposed to a multitude of people inside and outside the organization. Your business and personal success will depend on your ability to handle situations and people with tact, poise and discretion.

Whether you call them interpersonal skills or soft skills, they are necessary for business and relationship success. I have been teaching soft skills to all levels of administrative professionals in every industry since 1990. In fact, all the programs Office Dynamics International has written and taught are soft or interpersonal skills. Our research proves over and over that executives at all levels, Human Resources managers, Training & Development professionals put soft and interpersonal skills at the top of their list in what they look for in an administrative or executive assistant.

Administrative professionals themselves have identified soft skills as necessary to be successful in the profession. In our World Class Assistant™ certification course, the first question we ask attendees is “How would you describe a World Class Assistant? What words

would you use to describe this person? What skills, behaviors and attributes would this person possess? 90% of the list the participants create is around interpersonal or soft skills. Here is a very small portion of the answers we have received over the years. How would you rate yourself in each of these?

- Proactive
- Dependable
- Organized skills
- Professional
- Multi-tasker
- Team player
- Flexible/adaptable
- Approachable
- Trustworthy
- Respectful
- Knowledgeable
- Teachable
- Mind reader
- Intuitive
- Buffer
- Parent
- Diffuse situations
- Communicator
- Mentor
- Follow through
- Anticipate and look ahead
- Available
- Positive
- Helpful
- Positive attitude
- Organized
- Go to person
- Proactive
- Follow through to completion
- Good customer service
- Multi-tasking ability
- Dependable
- Communication
- Researcher
- Works well with others
- Educator/trainer
- Open to new ideas
- Not afraid of change/flexible
- Negotiation
- Initiative
- Organized
- Positive attitude
- Strategic partner
- Continuous learner
- Adaptable/open minded
- Professional/ambassador
- Knowledgeable/sharing
- Approachable
- Communication skills
- Looks at the whole picture
- Positive and can do attitude
- Team player
- Personable
- Adaptable
- Cool under pressure
- Good listener
- Good sense of humor
- Accountable
- Knowledgeable
- Detail oriented
- Researchers
- Assertive
- Leadership skills
- Take leadership roles
- Be technically savvy
- Be proactive
- Intuitive
- Personable
- Advocate for others
- Decisive
- Creativity
- Confident
- Refers
- Diplomatic
- Trust worthy
- Flexible
- Approachable
- Gate keeper to boss
- Communicator
- Detail oriented
- Maintain confidentiality
- Cheerleader – positive representation

As you can see, the expectations are huge. Your technical skills are critically important because those are the tools to help you get

your job done. The question is how good would you be at your job if all the technology was taken away? I'll use an analogy from my field of professional speaking. An awesome professional speaker doesn't need any technology. They rely on their own talents, speaking ability, communications, and being

able to think on their feet. PowerPoint and other fun techy tools are used to enhance their work, not replace it.

It should be the same with you. Star assistants and world class assistants receive higher scores on their soft skills. In a world where everyone relies on technology but lack people skills, you will stand out when you develop your soft skills.

So what are some of those areas that you need to develop? Before I answer that I want to tell you that no matter how good you are today, there is always room for improvement. As someone who has been inspiring excellence in administrative professionals since 1990 through training and coaching, I can tell you there is always room to excel.

First, communication is probably the largest area that you should work on. This skill area is huge. There are many facets under communications. I could spend weeks teaching communication skills. I identified some areas to work on in the chart.

- Staying motivated
- Encouraging feedback from your leader on work performance
- Goal setting
- Being flexible and adaptable
- Solution-oriented
- Leadership
- Building peer synergy
- Anticipating problems

Soft skills are not easy to teach a person and are not always easy for a person to change. It is not like teaching keyboarding. Much of a person's interpersonal skills polish comes from within. I say it is in a person's DNA. Some people are just naturally good at delivering bad news and others are not. Certain individuals maintain a good attitude no matter what is going on at work or home; and other people do not. I don't want you to think this is hopeless as I

COMMUNICATION AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT			
Assertive Communications	Listening Skills (Listening is active; hearing is passive. They are not the same.)	Being aware of people's moods and adjust your communications accordingly	Understanding communication styles and know when to stretch into another person's style
Persuasion skills	Negotiation skills	Selling ideas up and down the organization	Communicating effectively with difficult people
Recognizing communication deterioration and knowing what to do and say	Building rapport	Body language and facial expression	Presentation skills
Knowing how to communicate with various generations	Knowing what to say when someone has criticized you or your work	Initiating purpose communication with your executive	Cultivating business relationships through communication
Being adept at delivering difficult messages in a tactful manner	Having critical conversations with higher-positioned individuals	Understanding diversity and tailoring your communication to meet those needs	Choosing the correct medium for maximum impact

Remember, this is only a *partial* list. Here are a few soft skills that most people do not consider, yet star performers do:

- Consensus building
- Risk taking
- Changing your mental outlook
- Overcoming intimidation in the workplace
- Leveraging criticism
- Displaying courage at work

have taught tens of thousands of administrative professionals how to develop, fine tune, and excel at their interpersonal and soft skills.

Please do not believe anyone who says, "Soft skills aren't important. It's all about technology today." Employers are more interested in the soft skills because that is hard to change in a person. If a person can learn, they can go to a class on Excel or PowerPoint. Just think about



Star-Performing Executive Administrative Professional Competency Model

This rich combination of attitude, skill, teamwork and strategy leads to performance excellence and career success.



anyone in your workplace who has a bad attitude or communicates aggressively or speaks before they think... how are they perceived by others at your office? I'm sure not in a positive fashion.

The Star Approach™ model displayed in this article is the big picture overview of the core competency areas for star-performing administrative professionals. You will notice that technology is a very small piece of the picture of success. This model is based on years of research as well as required future skills by executives, managers and organizations.

In summary, there is nothing in the business world today that can give you the edge more than interpersonal skills. If you insist on working with little attention paid to soft skills, you will be sidetracked and sidelined in no time at all.

Perhaps Joel Osteen said it best, "Friend, there's no greater investment in life than in being a people builder. Relationships are more important than our accomplishments."

If you want to gain the edge, stay sharp and grow your capabilities so you can earn the opportunity toward achieving that "next step" (whatever it is, personal or professional), you need to look no further than soft skill development.

about the author



Joan Burge is known as the red-lipstick-wearing "Rock Star" of administrative and executive Assistant training and a successful entrepreneur who created a unique niche in 1990 by founding a training company that would uniquely provide sophisticated, robust educational programs and information to administrative professionals. Joan is an accomplished author (8 books), professional speaker, consultant and corporate trainer. She is the creator of: *Annual Conference for Administrative Excellence™*; *World Class Assistant™* Certification course; *Star Achievement Series®* Certification and Designation course; 30+ customized workshops, 200+ educational videos, 150+ articles and 900+ blogs for executive and administrative Assistants. Her company, Office Dynamics International, is a global industry leader which offers a broad range of solutions and provides high-performance, sophisticated executive and administrative Assistant training and coaching. For more information visit www.officedynamics.com.

