

How to Improve Soft Skills

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Soft skills revolve around personal relationships, character, and attitude.^[1] ^[2] By nurturing these skills, you can increase your work performance, build stronger relationships, and work toward earning a promotion. Develop your communication skills, strengthen your interpersonal relationships, and demonstrate your professional enthusiasm to show your colleagues and supervisors that your soft skills are well rounded.

Method
1

Method 1 of 3: Developing Your Communication Skills



1 Aim to be understood. Your goal, whether speaking or writing, should be to communicate clearly. Fancy or highfalutin language can oftentimes make the point you're trying to make confusing or unclear. Some ideas to improve your clarity in communication include:

- Staying on topic. Focus on the point of your communication. This could be something as simple as determining whether your coworker is free for lunch.
- Be specific when communicating. You may have difficulty getting to the point. To improve your clarity, use specific terms instead of general pronouns or indefinite periods of time.^[3]



2 Make eye contact. Acknowledge that you are paying attention to someone by meeting their gaze eye to eye. Eye contact will make your conversation partner feel like you're more engaged. If you have difficulty doing this, turn your body to face the person you're speaking with.

- By turning your body to face your conversation partner directly, you'll naturally be more likely to look them in the eye.
- If you're uncomfortable looking someone directly in the eyes, choose a point just above or below the eyes, like the bridge of the nose, and look there instead.
- Even if there are other distractions in the room, keep your eyes focused on your conversation partner. Allowing your gaze to wander can come across as rude.^[4]



- 3 Monitor your body language.** Show interest by sitting up and leaning forward slightly. Resist the urge to tap your fingers or foot, as this can indicate impatience. You can also connect with conversation partners by mimicking their posture.
- Although it might seem odd at first, by mimicking the posture of your conversation partner, you're subconsciously sending the message that you both are the same, which will put them at ease.
 - Try to curb unconscious motions that could be taken the wrong way, like playing with your hair or bouncing your leg up and down.^[5]



4 Practice speaking. This includes both [public speaking](#) and [casual conversation](#). Even if you're uncomfortable speaking in front of others, practice will make speaking come more easily and improve your ability. Be conscious of your pace and volume while practicing.

- If you are uneasy in personal relationships, try practicing with a close friend or family member you are comfortable with.
- If you are nervous about speaking in public, volunteer to give presentations within a smaller group and work your way up to a larger one.^[6]



5 Develop your writing skills. Much like speaking, the more you write, the easier it will become. You can also take courses to improve your writing. You can do writing exercises on your own. You can also frequently find affordable writing workshops offered at community centers, community colleges or online.^[7]

- When you finish writing something, be sure to glance it over for grammar and spelling errors. This only takes a minute or two, and can drastically improve the quality of your written work.
- Be direct and to the point instead of elaborate. Although you may feel uncomfortable with this at first, being direct can greatly improve the clarity of your writing.



6 Practice active listening skills. Listening requires focus and self-discipline. We listen for many different reasons: to understand instructions, to empathize with another individual, or to judge whether a plan is good or not. You can show your conversation partner you're paying attention by:

- Paraphrasing and asking questions about what was said. This demonstrates interest and focus. It also helps you understand the situation.
- Taking notes when appropriate. This shows that the subject matter is important to you. Practice taking notes in team meetings or staff training sessions.
- Refraining from interrupting others. Show respect to your speaking partner by letting them finish saying what they are saying.[8]



7 Pay attention to the other person's body language. Observe their posture, tone of voice, eye contact (or lack thereof), gestures, and facial expressions. This can offer clues for how you might best respond and can help you better understand your conversation partner's frame of mind.^[9]

- For example, if your coworker has red eyes and is sniffing, you might surmise that they have allergies or a cold. In this situation, you might want to be more sensitive, as it's likely they don't feel well.
- If your speaking partner keeps checking the time, they might be enjoying your conversation but have an appointment to keep.

Method 2 of 3: Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships



1 Build relationships. Interpersonal skills are important in the workplace, especially since so many organizations are designed around teams and departments. Seek to build friendships with peers, supervisors, clients, and business partners.

- Invite coworkers, colleagues, and supervisors to local events, like block parties, museum events, concerts, and more.
- **Host a party** of your own and invite your coworkers, colleagues, and supervisors. An informal setting might be just the place to cement your relationship.^[10]



2 Be friendly with colleagues. Greet them when they get to work. Invite them to lunch or coffee. Talk for a few minutes in the break room as you are getting a drink. Participate in work events like softball clubs, staff lunches, and training days. These are great ways to strengthen your professional relationships.

- Try to avoid gossip. Talking about others is often interpreted as rude, and should the individual you're talking about find out it could harm your relationship with them.[11]



3 Manage conflict in a healthy way. Address issues with the individual(s) involved in a private manner. Approach the discussion in a nonjudgmental but assertive manner. Ask questions and try to understand their side of the story. Work together to find a solution.

- Some people are uncomfortable with conflict. Get around that discomfort by acknowledging it and saying something like, "You might feel a little uncomfortable - I do too. But our relationship is important to me and I'd like to talk about..."[12]



4 Network with people inside and outside your organization. Ask people about their jobs and share a bit about what you do. Note connections and ways you could potentially help each other. Exchange contact information and be sure to follow up with them.

- Sometimes it can be inconvenient to exchange information in the moment. A business card with your information on it can make exchanging details much easier.[13]



5 Practice leading. Leadership can be defined as your ability to influence other people, oftentimes with regard to making decisions. As such, leadership skills can be used by any employee at any level in an organization. To improve your leadership skills:

- Observe your supervisor and note how that individual leads your team. Find positive things that person does and emulate them in your own work.
- Practice leading in small group discussions by asking your teammates questions and bringing quieter members into the conversation.^[14]
- Discipline yourself to display a positive attitude in difficult situations. Remain calm in moments of crisis.
- Talk about concerns one-on-one with your supervisor instead of in front of the entire team. Doing so will show respect and will set a good example for others.^[15]

Method 3 of 3: Demonstrating Enthusiasm and Ingenuity



1 Take initiative. Show responsibility and enthusiasm for your job by striving to go the extra mile. Finish your work without having to be reminded by your supervisor. When you have spare time, offer to help colleagues.

- Be polite when offering to help a colleague. Some might not want help. You might casually mention, "Hey Alice, I finished my work early and though I could lend you a hand."^[16]



2 Do tasks without being asked by someone else. Be aware of your surroundings. When you see something that needs to be done, do it. Even small things, like emptying a full garbage can or cleaning the break room when you've got some spare time on your hands can earn you points with your colleagues and supervisors.

- At team or departmental meetings, pay attention to the assignment of responsibilities. You may notice that one of your colleagues has a big project, which would be a great opportunity to offer your help with smaller tasks so they can focus on what's important.

[17]



3 Seek more challenging work. Strive to develop your technical skills. Learn more about your organization. Ask coworkers about their departments. Take a class, read a pertinent blog, or subscribe to a magazine in your field of work.

- There are many professional associations that put out magazines and newsletters. Search for these online and join them to broaden your professional awareness.
- There may be a certification or professional accreditation that is associated with your job. These can add a lot to your professional credibility, and can make you a more viable candidate for promotions.[18]



4 Improve your problem solving skills. When approaching any problem, it's important to be focused on the solution. Keep an open mind so that even unlikely solutions aren't written off. Use open language, like "what if" or "imagine if" to encourage your brain in finding creative solutions. Games that challenge problem solving can help here too. Some you might try include:[19]

- Chess
- Video and computer games[20]
- Card games (like Uno and Hearts)[21]
- Scrabble[22]



5 Boost your creativity. You might be surprised at the activities that can build your creativity. Walking, for example, will improve your creativity during the walk and for a short time afterwards.^[23] Collaborate with colleagues to generate ideas. Find inspiration in other places, like museums or industries other than your own.

- Although this might seem counter intuitive, by allowing your mind to wander and daydream, you'll receive a creative increase. When a problem is giving you difficulty, allow your mind to wander for 15 minutes or so, then return to it.^[24]



Expert Q&A

Question

What are the most important soft skills?



Devin Jones
Career Coach
Expert Answer

Focus on your own strengths. Strength finders are really helpful for developing your interpersonal skills. By taking the Clifton Strengths, Enneagram, or Myers-Briggs, you can then realize what your patterns are, lead with your strengths, and mitigate your weaknesses.

Helpful 1 Not Helpful 0

Question

What is the definition of a soft skill?



Devin Jones
Career Coach
Expert Answer

I call them interpersonal skills instead of soft skills, because that has a better connotation I think. But, interpersonal skills are actually what more and more employers are looking for. You can always teach a hard skill, but we need people who have skills like empathy, communication, active listening, teamwork, and collaboration. They're skills in emotional intelligence that help you be an effective team player on a team or in an organization.

Helpful 4 Not Helpful 0

Question

How can I find hidden soft skills?



Community Answer

Your hidden soft skill is something that you are confident in doing. Take time to look inside yourself and realize what you have been doing easily and without any difficulty - the skills that seem to just come to you are your hidden soft skills.

Helpful 48 Not Helpful 6

Question

Whenever I'm questioned at work by a supervisor and I explain myself in an honest manner I've been told I sound like I'm a blunt person. I dislike the label blunt. How can I answer without sounding blunt?



Community Answer

You just need to choose what to say or not. In your work place nobody intends to know what kind of person you are. Rather, they want to know whether you are able to finish the task or not. So instead of giving honest excuses, apologize for not making the task complete and try to explain them when and how it can be finished.

Helpful 24 Not Helpful 5

Question

My voice level is too low. This is a problem for me when I was giving presentations and attending interviews. Could you please suggest what I should do?



Community Answer

Try to aim your voice at the back of the room. This is often referred to as "projecting" and can greatly improve your volume. Make sure you're well hydrated; dehydration can make your throat raspy and decrease volume. Also, practice speaking before presentations to warm up your voice.

Helpful 15 Not Helpful 3

Question

How can gadgets help me to build soft skills?



Community Answer

They most likely can't. Since soft skills are primarily about how you interact with other people, gadgets cannot take the place of another person.

Helpful 9 Not Helpful 1

Question

How can I develop my personality to appear less shy?



Community Answer

Challenge yourself to do one thing each day, even if it is small. For example, maybe today you will smile at a stranger or say hello to someone new. The more you do this, the less shy you will become over time.

Helpful 15 Not Helpful 4

Question

How do I overcome my fears?



Community Answer

Gradually expose yourself to things you are afraid of. For example, if you're afraid of public speaking, start by speaking in front of small groups, and gradually work your way up to larger ones. The more you expose yourself to whatever you're afraid of, the less frightened you will be.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 0

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About This Article



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This article was co-authored by **Devin Jones**. Devin Jones is the creator of "The Soul Career," an online career incubator for women. She is certified in the CliftonStrengths assessment and works with women to clarify their purpose and create meaningful careers. Devin received her BA from Stanford University in 2013. This article has been viewed 462,637 times.

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