SOFT SKILLS AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN STUDENTS'LIVES

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Abstract
This paper discusses of the importance of soft skills in students' lives specially Engineers for getting employed. It discusses how soft skills complement hard skills. The study is based on classroom experiences where there is a mixture of students from Hindi and English medium schools. Providing soft skills is a very effective but there are certain challenges a trainer faced while conducting the classes. Soft skills fulfill an important role in shaping student's personality. It is of high importance for every student to acquire adequate skills beyond academic or technical knowledge so that they are employed by the end of the course. The paper list out few of the soft skills trait they need to work on in order fetch them a job.

Key Words: Soft Skills, Personality, Presentation, Nervousness and Shyness.

It had been years where soft skills are given much important for employability for the young technocrats in India. Soft skills are much talk about subject by many in Indian Institutes now. Focus was given to the development of hard skill but with changes in global business market, regional technocrats are having much difficulty in finding their dream job. Our student's in spite of having good degree at their hand are still not employed. In the last few years it has become very important that academic engineers are additionally trained in soft skills .They are sound with their hard skill but lack to execute their knowledge due to lack of speaking skill and self confident. With globalization and rapid changes in business the demands for good leaders and team spirit is of high demand. It is keeping this background in mind let's try to understand the definition of soft skills. The Wikipedia defines soft skill as "… a person's "EQ" (Emotional Intelligence Quotient), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, interpersonal skills, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills contrast to hard skills, which are generally easily quantifiable and measurable (e.g. software knowledge, basic plumbing skills)". Oxford dictionary online defines it as "personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people" Collins dictionary online defines it as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude". These traits are already imbibe within us. But many a times we fail to execute it. Thus comes in picture the challenges a trainer faced to nature these qualities during a short span of time.

Soft skills play a significant role in one's profession. They help to excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be ignored in this cutting age of ever-increasing global competition. Though human being is blessed with the power of speaking, yet the power can become a hindrance for some students when not employed at the appropriate time specially when looking out for job. Employability skills are very essential in the current global job market. Now a day's soft skills are given highest importance in campus interview. The seven soft skills are:
1. Communicative skills
2. Critical thinking and Problem Solving skills
3. Team work
4. Management Skills
5. Entrepreneurship skills
6. Moral values
7. Leadership skills

Though the listed seven categories skills are all important, I feel that we should modify what to give and develop with every individual student. The needs of every student differ from one person to another. Though, I generally find them shy to speak in front of people. But they do come up to me and expresses their eagerness to learn. The main focus of the trainer according to me is to motivate students to participate and nurture the following points:
a. Should make the students deliver their ideas clearly, effectively and with confidence either orally or in writing.
b. Should make the students practice active listening skills and respond after listening to a conversation from a video or radio.
c. They should be able to identify and analyze problems in difficult situation and justify their evaluation.
d. They should encourage building a good rapport, interacting and working effectively with their   fellow classmates

The current English course at the first year engineering degree in our college is helping them to some extend for their selection process. More thrust is given on role play, group discussion, seminar, presentation, questioning, brain storming, book reviews, interaction etc. Initially there are challenges but once a comfort zone is established between the trainer and the students it becomes much easier for the rest of the following sessions. The emphasis will be on learning by doing. Since the method of session is highly interactive, the students imbibe the skills and attributes in a gradual and subtle way over the period of time. Insignificant changes are bound to occur in their behavior and outlook, and these will make them more self-assured and confident later when they will go for job. Thus, making the changes in them will be more genuine and positive. These happen with every twenty to thirty students among the seventy students in a group. Soft skills training need not be confined only with English curriculum but can be extended to other subjects too. The entire teaching should be learner centered approach rather than teacher centered so that the class becomes very interactive and highly vibrant with students participation.

Effective communication and interpersonal skills are crucial to increase employment opportunities and to compete successfully in the business environment .The real key to the effectiveness of professionals is their ability to put their field knowledge into effective practice. Soft skills have a crucial role to play in enabling and empowerment of student's lives.

Another challenge is helping them how to overcome nervousness. It should be the main thrust of the whole session because this is the core problem for most of my students. The followings are few of the things I groom my students with to make them more comfortable. I help them to:
- Acknowledge their nervousness.
- Accept that you are uneasiness when you are asked to speak in front of an audience.
- Remember that nervousness is a natural emotion.
- List all their fears. And make them answer "WHY" they fear.
- Think positive. Say 'I' am ok .
- Don't compare yourself with others.
- Prepare ahead for presentation.
- Have an outline plan of your presentation.
- Never run away from class presentation.
- The only secret to good presentation is practice, practice and practice.
- Look at the mirror and keep on saying "I can do it" for ten to twenty times a day.

Around 300 of my students say that it is effective and they are able to overcome their nervousness. The study was done with 500 students comprising of both Hindi medium and English medium schools background. In first year B. Tech we have around 800 students in take every year. The students were very happy to see language laboratory for the first time in their lives. They are super excited to have classes in the language laboratory. Those who can speak in English are reluctant to participate in the class interactions. But I could see that those students who lack in English speaking are eager to learn. They are motivated, yet they are reluctant to participate. There are also some students who would try to bunk the classes whenever there is presentation class. When asked, "Why do you bunk the class?"
The common answer I get is that:
- They feel shy to speak in front of their classmate.
- They are so worried what comments their friends are going to made.
- They don't want others to laugh at them.
- They are too nervous to speak.
- They are worried that they will make a mistake.
- They have never spoken in front of audience.

Possible solutions to this type of situation might vary from place to places. What I tell my students is that:
- Please make mistake, but you need to speak.
- Make them realized that nobody is perfect.
- In order to learn they need to break their comfort zone of running away.
- Give three weeks ahead their presentation topics.
- Give them the liberty to choose their topic.
- Start with small talk.
- Making compulsory presentation as their internal assessment.

These few of the things I tried out with every batch. The feedback I got from them is encouraging. The effectiveness of the training session is enhanced through a two-way feedback. I made it mandatory to give feedback to individual students on their performance and to the class in general. In turn, the students also give feedback on the training sessions so that there is a room for improvement in both the ways. They are encouraged to give suggestions regarding the content and the delivery of the class sessions so that improvements can be made from time to time if necessary. But the truth is that in one semester they cannot masters themselves with communication skills. Yet, they are very satisfied with the communication classes. Many even suggested that they should have one more semester in their third year, so that they are train for their placement. We need to give extra effort if we want our regional engineers to excel in life. The best thing we can do is to help and assist them whenever they need us in the small way we can. Opening a separate center for English within the campus will do wonders for those students who cannot utter a sentence in English. Soft skill plays a very important in today's scenario. Communication skills session should be given the utmost priority by the policy maker if at all we want the employability rate to increase for our regional Engineers.

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