

In the Era of Globalisation, the Importance of Soft Skills and Professionalism

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Abstract

With the advent of globalisation, both government and private sector seek professionalism among their employees. For individuals who practice professionalism in their career, they understand that it encompasses soft skills in it. A complete mastery over soft skills enables an individual to shine in his/her career. There are people who mistake professionalism for the manner in which an individual performs in his/her profession. Likewise, communication skills are mistaken for employability skills. In a nutshell, professionalism cannot be identified with the position held by an individual. It includes attributes like what an individual does, in his/her character, how an individual is perceived by others and the way they conduct themselves. This paper tries to explain about the intricacies of the term professionalism and soft skills and the need to inculcate them to the learners.

Keywords: Employability skills, communication skills, soft skills, professionalism and globalisation.

Introduction

Buddha stated that “all composite things decay, strive diligently”. He made a prophetic statement as far as life is concerned; more so in education. In the era of cutthroat competition, getting an employment is much easier than getting along with an employment. Only the smartest individuals could thrive in their careers and they alone can make use of the countless opportunities which await us. In reality we do not come across smart individuals who can go places in their career, It is due to the failure of our educational system to teach them the real concept of Professionalism. In all possible means, it can be safely concluded that the present system of education is not effective in attuning our learners to the requirements of the industry.

As soon as an individual completes school education, he/she moves to the next level of education. In the current scenario, there are many who prefer professional education after their school education. They do so believing that it will help them in good stead in future. However, the reality is disappointing. Of late, both engineering and arts and science graduates prefer to pursue a career in software industries. This is due to the attraction in software industries. In this context, it is imperative to state that the National Employability Study 2011 carried out by Aspiring Mind Research came out with the shocking revelation that graduates from Tamil Nadu were the least employable in industries. Though this study was carried out by an agency from North India, the facts stated in it cannot be underestimated.

The study states that the centres of higher education learning in Tamil Nadu do not inculcate professionalism into the minds of their students. It is meaningless to generate graduates every year without necessary employability skills. It is due to a misconceived notion that the term employable skills and communication skills are one and the same. It is true that communication skills play a pivotal role in fetching decent employment. It is nothing but one of the necessary employable skills. Due to their misunderstanding, they learners are never sensitised to professionalism and instead they are taught profession.

Soft Skills and Professionalism

For producing employable graduates, all academic institutions need to be aware of the term professionalism and make it a part of its curricula. Whenever there is a discussion on professionalism, Soft skills cannot be isolated since both soft skills and professionalism complement each other. When you analyse the term professionalism, it is imperative to be a master of soft skills to be a true professional. The occupation each individual practices to eke out a living is called a profession whereas professionalism is not defined by the position held by an individual, but by inner character, the way he/she conducts herself, display of behaviour and the manner in which others perceive them and the image created...etc.,

The inner self or the character of an individual is displayed through his/her behaviour and technically it is called projecting the self. The outcome of an individual's knowledge determines one's character. It implies that the term self of character is a fine blend of knowledge and behaviour. An individual is known for the way he/she is noticed by others. Based on their observations, they form an opinion about him/her. It is here that soft skills have a role to play. They are distinct and different from hard skills. Hard skills constitute all the things a person has learned from childhood to till date. To be more precise, the knowledge acquired by a person becomes his/her hard skills. It is similar to the hardware and the software of a computer. The hardware constitutes the visible and the expensive physical aspects of a computer whereas the software includes the lesser expensive and invisible part of it. The vital aspect to be observed is that the visible and expensive hardware does not come into usage, if the invisible and lesser expensive part is not installed. It shows the necessity of this software in order to make the hardware part function. Now comes the pertinent question. In which way, this comparison proves to be relevant for realising the hard and the soft skills of a human being. At this juncture, it can only be stated that they have greater relevance.

As stated before, the knowledge acquired by an individual is supposed to be his/her hard skill. The manner in which it is displayed or shown out to the world is called soft skills. Here, the emphasis is on the term "manner". Since the manner in which something is done by a person shows his/her expertise in that specific field. In a nut shell, all actions of a human being is a soft skill, the manner of dressing, the style of walking, manner of talking...etc. Unless an individual understands to display or convey his/her expertise, there is no point in making use of their hard skills quite like hardware and software of a computer. The in depth study on soft skills and Professionalism enables in understanding that they conform each other. Hence, an individual's needs to be a true professional for to be a master of soft skills.

Five Important Soft Skills

The term soft skill is an umbrella term encompassing four of its kind. The capacity to settle an arithmetic challenge is a soft skill. But not all these sixty four skills are connected to professionalism. Since professionalism concerns only with the profession and the manner in which

an individual carries out his profession, the nexus between soft skills and professionalism can be focused on just five soft skills and the same are listed below:

1. Empathy – The ability to understand others.
2. Interpersonal communication skills – The ability to communicate to the self or thinking.
3. Intrapersonal communication skills – The ability to communicate to the world.
4. Negotiation skills – The ability to convince others.
5. Problem solving skills - The ability to solve problems.

In the beginning, among all the five soft skills, empathy comes foremost. It is the capability of an individual to understand the feelings of the others. It comes foremost in priority as it separates human beings. In all professions, empathy has a key role to play since the customer understanding, the colleagues and the employer happen to be a key aspect of any profession. By knowing their needs, a professional is able to render better service to them and in this manner; empathy has become an important soft skill for being a true professional.

After empathy come communication skills. It is a kind of interaction to exchange various sorts of information. All these messages carry certain structures to exchange, convince and play the role of a medium for individuals to foster relationships and assess other individuals. Therefore, developing effective communication is necessary to achieve these goals and maintain good reputations. In spite of being a written or oral communication, the capability to exchange information accurately is very much important. The manner in which the receiver understands the information will have a bearing on both conversation and relationship. In their profession, they can communicate in an effective manner with their colleagues and clients.

All employers are of the opinion that their employees lack communication skills. A worker having poor communication skill will have difficulty in exchanging information orally or graphically. The odds will be very much higher in situations where interpersonal skills are required. Relationships get ruined when there is difficulty in crafting and delivering messages in the manner in which they are intended. When there is a shortage of intrapersonal or interpersonal communication skills, miscommunication or misunderstanding of the conveyed message take place. Whenever communication takes place, intrapersonal communication comes first and it is followed by interpersonal communication next. It is because, intrapersonal communication talks about the art of thinking within. In all kinds of communication, the sender {speaker or writer} needs to give a thought about what he /she intends to convey. After taking a decision, the sender needs to choose the right mode of expression and it is where interpersonal communication comes into play. For to be a true professional, an individual needs to acquire the art of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication skills.

To surmount problems is a part and parcel of an individual's life. All of us come across problems in life. The enormity of the problem may vary from individual to individual. There are situations when problem solving becomes a question of survival. It again becomes a question of maintaining an individual's sanity. There is a need for problem solving techniques in all walks of life and profession. In all professions, there are problems in plenty and both employers and employees need to find ways and means in solving them. There are occasions when an individual has to be at his creative best to overcome certain problems. Therefore, acquiring problem solving skills is quiet essential for any individual to overcome any problems in life. Individuals with problem solving

technique display greater confidence in their profession and life. It enables them to make interpretations in an accurate manner and arrives at conclusions considering all valid points.

Individuals are confronted with problems in life. They have been problem solvers without even realizing it. Problem solving is a technique taken for granted by all individuals. All of us do it very commonly so that it is considered a natural ability of us. Hence, it is given a secondary importance. Familiarity breeds contempt. Likewise, the familiarity in problem solving is taken for granted and it is not given its due importance.

When someone gives a thought about the manner in which they solved problems while they were children, they will understand that they were more creative in their childhood. Later on, all of them employ the same tried and tested strategies rather than being innovative. The problem with them is that they take problem solving for granted. They do not want to spend time in solving problems, but they neither have the will nor the time for it.

Problem solving is an amazing process. It is for the individuals to carry it in this manner. All individuals are blessed with an innate ability to solve problems, but they need to view it as an art. When professionals are employed with better problem solving techniques, they go the extra distance in their career.

Negotiation is an aspect of problem-solving skills as several individuals consider problems to be as big as anything in this world. Negotiation is an attribute which is necessary to settle conflicts and arrive at a solution which is accepted by many. There cannot be any room for negotiation unless an individual learns to compromise to some extent and stop finding faults with other individuals.

Summation

All professionals need to acquire the art of negotiating to attain success in making deals, avoiding conflicts and in maintaining better relationships with the employees. All employees spend most of their time in their work place and hence it is important for them to be relaxed and tension free. This will enable them to be more focused with good concentration. Whenever there is a difference of opinion, there need not be any altercation. Instead, the confrontation can be settled across the table through negotiation. Maintaining smooth professional skills with all employees is the need of the hour.

Soft skills can also be called life skills. Individuals need to acquire them to be successful in their profession. Professionals without mastery of these five soft skills will have to cut a sorry figure in their profession. True professionals can be chiseled only with the aid of soft skills. For to be a good professional, it is essential to be a master of these five soft skills. Therefore, all educational institutions will have to give importance for them and try to inculcate them into the minds of their learners so that they become successful professionals in future.

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