

NewsObserver.com

[Next Story >](#)

The right process is key when dealing with employee problems

The View from HR

Soft skills are crucial to success in workplace

Published: January 26, 2013

By Bruce Clarke

The employee skills gaps talked about most are not technical, math or reading problems. Instead, employers' top concern is the lack of soft skills needed for success in almost every role.

Surprised? I was, too, when the soft skills gap drumbeat started a few years ago. Today's workplace requires everyone to work together more effectively than in the past.

Think of the difference between a set work station in a basic assembly line and the team assembly of more complex goods, or the teamwork required for solving problems in ever-changing consumer product and software offerings. Hard skills are necessary, but a lack of soft skills renders hard skills ineffective in practice.

We see self-defeating behaviors in ourselves and others every day. These things prevent career growth, income acceleration and job satisfaction. We also recognize good soft skills in people who get things done because others want to work with and for them.

Soft skills commonly needed in the workplace are planning, goal setting, time management, clear communication, accountability, conflict resolution, teamwork, coaching, adapting to other styles, handling change, building relationships, delegating, leading and using emotional intelligence.

Some are born with it

People are born with certain soft skill preferences and they adopt others in life. When these two sources conspire to create a person with, say, little understanding of good communication skills, a true glass ceiling will limit career growth and job impact.

For example, a common concern of middle-aged managers about young applicants is their lack of experience with face-to-face communication and group problem solving. They will not succeed in responsible roles by using text messaging at work. "Where will we find the next generation of effective teammates, team leaders and managers?" employers ask.

It is not just about young people. Older employees settled in a more predictable work environment but forced to adapt as our economy evolves face a similar soft skills gap between the needs of their work and their ability to deal with change.

Training often delayed

I blame employers in one key respect. Many talk about the lack of soft skills but are doing little to make things better. It seems when budgets are crunched and priorities set, the brushfire of the day or month pushes soft skills development out to some future time that never comes.

Yes, there is a lack of hard skills among too many applicants. Employers sometimes tell me that a high school diploma certifies nothing but some level of attendance. Community colleges unfortunately spend vast resources on teaching remedial reading and math. Plus, some employers need very specialized hard skills in short supply. Fine. But if you or your workplace are prevented from the next level of success because of the way individuals behave, interact (or do not interact) and communicate with each other, where is your plan? Get going.

Bruce Clarke, J.D., is president and CEO of CAI Inc., a human resource management firm, with locations in Raleigh and Greensboro, that helps organizations maximize employee engagement while minimizing employer liability. For more information, visit www.capital.org.

[Back to Top](#)

[< Previous Story](#)

Respect is key when dealing with faith in the workplace

[Next Story >](#)

The right process is key when dealing with employee problems

[Email Newsletters >](#)
[Manage newsletter subscriptions](#)
[Tablets >](#)
[Apps and services for tablet devices](#)
[Mobile >](#)
[Apps and services for your mobile phone](#)
[Social Media >](#)
[Get updates via Facebook and Twitter](#)
[e-Edition >](#)
[Your daily paper delivered to your computer](#)
[Home Delivery >](#)
[Manage your home delivery account](#)
[Digital Subscriptions >](#)
[Manage your online subscriptions](#)

© 2013 www.newsobserver.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.newsobserver.com>