

PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE

You need more than technical skills and knowledge to achieve business success, says **Joanna Gaudoin**

Typically, firms focus on their people's technical skills and abilities – this is especially true in the accounting profession.

These technical skills are vital. However, there are other professional skills that are just as crucial.

I've heard these skills called 'soft' but I believe 'people skills' is more accurate. These are the skills that are essential for developing, maintaining, and benefiting from professional relationships with your colleagues, superiors, suppliers and clients. When people neglect to develop and master these skills, there is a strong risk that individual careers stagnate and organisations don't perform to their full potential.

Perhaps you are cynical about the benefits of people skills. The evidence is now mounting up about their importance to success. As early as the 1930s, a study featured in Dale Carnegie's book *How to win friends and influence people* (well worth a read) looked at why the revenue and profitability of one engineering firm outperformed another – and 85% of the reasons were people related, in terms of internal leadership and managing clients. Just 15% was down to increased engineering ability.

Carnegie's research and book paved the way to remind us that even when it comes to business we are

not purely logical beings but emotional ones too. We need to relate to others at work – clients, prospective clients, colleagues, referrers – to be successful. The key is how people engage with us depends on their perception of us and how we interact with them.

This interaction can be a key competitive differentiator. After all, if we work in a well-known company, technical competence is expected. Your competitors probably have similar levels of technical competence; so potential clients are interested in what else you can offer.

Excelling in people skills gives you more than a competitive edge – it can make you more productive. The World Economic Forum recently published an article including research showing that emotional intelligence was responsible for 58% of an individual's job performance. With this sort of statistic, who can ignore the development of people skills? And as we see the advancement of artificial intelligence, the roles and individuals which remain will be those that are less

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easy to automate; building successful professional relationships certainly falls into that.

So, given how important people skills are to individual career success and to organisational success, what are you doing to develop your people skills and your team's? A *Forbes* article stated that 97% of employers believe they are crucial to success, yet just 25% believe they have them sorted.

You can start by building on the foundation of getting yourself known, liked and trusted in different professional scenarios.

To help you do this, here are eight key skills for you and your team to initially focus on.

1

PERSONAL IMPACT

Consider the impact you have on others and your personal confidence in different professional scenarios.



Whether we like it or not people form a perception of us. Learn how to master and control the key 'tools' of appearance, body language and voice, so that you create the impact you want.

2

MEETINGS

Whether leading or contributing we spend many hours in meetings with different goals. Make sure meetings you run contribute positively to relationship building and productivity.

3

NETWORKING

Networking supports internal productivity as well as external relationships. You can't build a network immediately, so start early and understand and master the key networking skills.

4

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Make sure you and your team engage positively with all those you need to. Have a strategy for this and engage with people how they want to be engaged with.

5

MANAGE YOUR TEAM EFFECTIVELY

Make teams productive and an asset rather than a burden. It's key that managers have clear goals and ways of working, make time to develop people and delegate effectively.

6

DEVELOP SENIOR RELATIONSHIPS

These are pivotal to make things happen and for your career to progress. These are the people that make decisions about organisational

priorities and who does what. You need a strategic plan to develop these relationships.

7

DEAL WITH NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Make sure you have the ability to hear this and act on it where necessary; equally, for those providing feedback you need to be clear. If negative feedback is not delivered appropriately and taken well, it can have long-lasting negative consequences.

8

NAVIGATE 'OFFICE POLITICS' POSITIVELY

It's impossible to obliterate it so master the key skills to navigate it well. These broadly fall into communication, influencing and networking. The organisational impact of not doing so is reduced productivity, trust and decision making. Negative office politics is one of the biggest causes of stress in the UK.

If you want to find out more about how to learn and master these, often neglected, essential people skills then listen to the full 50-minute webinar on this topic at tinyurl.com/BAM-50Min

You can also contact Joanna to discuss this more detail, including requesting the follow-up materials from the webinar. ●



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