

SOFT SKILLS – THE CHANGE MAKER IN THE NEW NORMAL



The future for business post COVID crisis is unknown, but what is clear from working during this pandemic is that remote work will remain as the world heads into more extended instability. The COVID crisis has taught business leaders that employees can work at home efficiently, despite the distractions of kids, pets, and living in chaos. People have become more agile and flexible to the constant changes in their environment. Some people have lost the long commute into the office and are using the extra hours to work or spend with family. People are not traveling and having more conversations with colleagues, clients, and friends that were hard to reach in the past. Technology has connected us through the uncertainty but technology is also disconnecting us. Brainstorming is happening less. People are not able to throw ideas back and forth at the conference table or water cooler. Technology has made us more effective, but innovation and creativity is suffering because people have lost the genuine human interaction. Leveraging cognitive diversity through human interaction is what energizes us and often leads to creative ideas.

At the onset of the coronavirus, people were in a state of shock, feeling anxious and did not know what to do. Then as time went on, people learned to cope with the stress and how to survive in our "new normal". However, we are now seeing the first signs of drained energy and loneliness due to missing human interaction. How can leaders re-energize and transform this into positive energy to bounce back even higher? The answer is using their soft skills. Noticing the subtle signs of a person's state of mind is easier to pick up from a face-to-face interaction than on a computer screen. Managers need to know when it's the right time to use their soft skills and switch between their emotional intelligence and their analytical side. Understanding a person through non-verbal communication takes much more awareness in a virtual space.

A pre-condition to surviving and prospering post-coronavirus for highly-competent managers and leaders is to possess essential soft skills. The challenge to management teams is that these soft skills are becoming harder and more difficult to emphasize as more interactions occur through a depersonalized computer screen. With screens

separating many of our interactions, people need genuine and honest conversations more than ever. Managers need to cultivate empathy and understand what the situation is like for the person in front of them as if it's their own. If managers are honest and transparent with their employees and letting them know what they don't know, and at the same time, safeguarding their well-being, they will be able to create a sense of security and trust. These feelings energize employees and deepen their engagement and commitment.

The ability to recognize and use soft skills appropriately takes training, especially for managers who are not aware of their leadership and communication style.

Cultivating essential soft skills is transformative:

- Managers become inspiring, dynamic leaders when becoming fully aware of themselves as a manager.
- Those who develop the communication skills that engage and motivate teams increase their trust, while having the fortitude to lead difficult conversations.
- By enhancing emotional intelligence and the art of listening to monitor their own and others emotions, they guide and influence behaviors, and gain the support that can break down barriers to innovation and creativity.
- Managers become highly effective collaborators and networkers across virtual teams, allowing them to work with and through others without formal power to get things done.

Soft skills contribute to the high levels of employee morale, motivation and productivity that will prove priceless in maintaining a productive work environment post-coronavirus. The use of soft skills will have a positive impact on business recovery by improving workplace productivity, employee retention, loyalty, and job satisfaction. These positive outcomes translate into an improved return on investment for organizations with a commitment to enrich their leadership's soft skill capacity.

Managers that possess and cultivate excellent soft skills will be the vital force in driving their colleagues to higher performance and help realize an earlier business upturn. Simultaneously, it is imperative that managers without positive social behaviors are influenced and inspired to reskill

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Nana von Bernuth

Author, professor and business coach with expertise in leadership, strategy and innovation, Nana von Bernuth, leads a 9-day immersive Achieving Management Excellence programme at CEDEP campus in a serene, safe setting in the forest of Fontainebleau. The programme is dedicated to managers and functional leaders wishing to develop a larger range of soft skills in a competitive globalised world. Whose success depends on engaging and connecting people and teams effectively across the organization in different cultures and regions



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