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SKILLS

With each professional experience, you should gain new skills. You should also gain skills in your classroom coursework throughout college. For example, you know how you (or your classmates) complain about group projects? Those group projects help cultivate your "soft skills" that will inevitably influence the type of coworker you become. Or maybe you don't understand how your knowledge or expertise in an area can be fairly assessed through only a midterm and final exam? This type of teaching style focuses on "hard skills" that measure your knowledge base.

Skills coupled with your experience are the two factors that land you a job. There are many people and scholars who argue that your skills alone can predict your ultimate success. This chapter will discuss the different skills needed to help you start and build your career in a mass communication industry. Let's start by talking about hard and soft skills, since these two seem to get the most attention. So, what is the difference between hard and soft skills?

HARD SKILLS

Hard skills are specific, teachable abilities that can be measured. Typical hard skills include math, reading, foreign language, and computer skills to name a few. Hard skills are quantifiable—thus, the reason that degrees and certificates are valued and required for jobs. A degree serves as the measure indicating that a person has successfully developed their hard skills in a particular area. Hard skills are often listed within job postings and on résumés to indicate what is expected and whether or not an applicant is qualified.

Hard skills require the use of the left brain, or logic center, and are measured through IQ. Hard skills are typically learned in school and through mediums like books. One advantage to hard skills is that they often have a direct path to success, and it is clear when one is progressing. For example, once you master algebra, you move on to geometry, then precalculus, then calculus, and so on. It is similar for learning a skill like web design or hypertext markup language (HTML). Web design and HTML do not require situational knowledge: You either have the

skills to do the job or you do not. The rules for hard skills remain the same no matter what. Another advantage of hard skills is that they can be learned through training, whereas soft skills are typically learned through trial and error. Hard skills are required for many careers in mass communication but are best accompanied by strong soft skills since most careers within mass communication are people-driven.

SOFT SKILLS

In contrast to hard skills, soft skills use the right brain, often referred to as the emotional center. They also cannot be measured, are not quantifiable, and operate with rules that change based on situations (Han, 2015). Soft skills can be cultivated within school but are mostly learned through experiences and trial and error—hence, the importance of participation in group projects, team involvement, extracurricular activities, and attendance at social events. Each one of these helps people learn, understand, and practice their soft skills. Often, soft skills are also listed on job applications along with hard skills but are harder for job candidates to demonstrate on paper. This is a main reason why interviews are such a vital part of getting a job. During an interview, your soft skills are being evaluated after determining that you have the relevant hard skills—at least as indicated on your résumé.

A major difference between hard and soft skills is that with soft skills, the rules are fluid. Think about how you behave when you're with your friends at a party, versus at work, versus at home with family. In each one of these situations, you demonstrate different aspects of communication. You may be more outgoing with your friends, more professional at work, and more emotional among family. You also likely dress differently and display different mannerisms in different situations as well. The way you adjust to your surroundings demonstrates the expertise of your soft skills. It is probable that you've met someone who does not seem to understand how to behave in certain situations, and this is likely because they have fewer soft skills than you. However, you might still be wondering what soft skills are. Here's a list for you (Han, 2013).

Self-Management Skills

These 10 skills address how you perceive yourself and others and how you manage your personal habits and emotions.

1. *Growth mind-set*. Be able to look at challenges as opportunities to grow and improve yourself.

2. *Self-awareness*. Understand what motivates, frustrates, angers, and inspires you to know how different situations affect your actions.

3. *Emotion regulation.* Be able to manage your emotions at work so that you can think clearly and objectively and act accordingly.

4. *Self-confidence.* Believe in yourself and your ability to accomplish things.

5. *Stress management.* Be able to stay healthy, calm, and balanced during challenging times. This includes knowing how to reduce your stress level to increase your productivity.

6. *Resilience.* Be able to bounce back from disappointments, setbacks, and failures and continue to move forward.

7. *Forgiveness.* Be able to forgive yourself and others so that you can move on and focus on your future goals.

8. *Persistence and perseverance.* Be able to remain dedicated despite challenges.

9. *Patience.* Be able to step back during a crisis to think clearly and take objective action.

10. *Perceptiveness.* Be able to pick up on unspoken cues and the emotional situations of others.

In addition to the 10 skills just discussed, people skills are essential. This is probably a term you've heard a lot of throughout your education. Statements like "it's not what you know, it's who you know" and other clichés about being good with people come to mind. But people skills are real, and they address how well you interact and work with other people. Generally, they are broken down into two types: (1) conventional and (2) tribal. Conventional skills are the skills you can find in most job descriptions and the skills you are typically assessed on during performance reviews. Tribal skills are the skills you won't find in job descriptions but are essential to your long-term career success. Here's a breakdown of the two types:

Conventional

1. *Communication skills.* Being able to actively listen and articulate your own ideas through written or spoken words

2. *Teamwork.* Being able to work effectively with people of different skills, backgrounds, personalities, and across industries

3. *Interpersonal relationships.* Being able to build trust, express empathy, and build relationships with people in your network

4. *Presentation skills.* Being able to effectively present your ideas and work to various audiences

5. *Meeting management.* Being able to lead effective, worthwhile meetings to reach productive results

6. *Facilitation.* Coordinating and soliciting opinions and feedback from various groups to find the best solution

7. *Sales.* Being able to get others to buy in to ideas, decisions, actions, or products

8. *Management.* Creating and motivating others of various skills and backgrounds

9. *Leadership.* Being able to define and communicate ideas that inspire others to follow through with dedication

10. *Mentoring or coaching.* Being able to provide constructive wisdom and guidance to help others further their careers

Tribal

1. *Managing upward.* Proactively managing your relationships with superiors to be positive and fruitful

2. *Self-promoting.* Subtly promoting your skills and work results to people of influence within your network

3. *Dealing with difficult personalities.* Being able to achieve results despite working with difficult people

4. *Handling difficult situations.* Being able to stay calm and objective despite challenges and unexpected events

5. *Navigating office politics.* Being able to understand and proactively and constructively deal with unspoken nuances in your workplace

6. *Influencing or persuading.* Being able to influence perspectives or decision-making while still allowing others to feel like they made up their own minds

7. *Negotiating.* Being able to understand the other side's motivations and leverage to reach a win-win result

8. *Networking.* Being able to be interested and engage in business conversations that motivate people to want to be in your network

The soft skills are what set people apart from others. You and another job candidate may be equal in terms of hard skills, but the reason one of you will get the job is most likely due to the development of your soft skills. While some people, especially those early in their careers, do not see the value in getting to know people, being nice, or socializing, those who embrace the development of soft skills see exponential improvement over time. When applying for jobs, the cover letter is your best opportunity to discuss your soft skills since typically these skills don't stand out on a traditional résumé.

Careers can be broken down into three main types: (1) careers that need mostly hard skills and few soft skills, (2) careers that need a roughly even mix of hard and soft skills, and (3) careers that need mostly soft skills. The careers that are primarily based on hard skills are technical careers, like a chemist. Careers that need a good mix of hard and soft skills are the more specialized careers within mass communication, like a web designer or producer. However, most careers in mass communication require mostly soft skills. Careers in mass communication are people-oriented. You have to understand people, read people, research people, and evaluate people for success in mass communication. Thus, having soft skills and some hard skills is vital for a career in mass communication. To evaluate whether or not soft skills are crucial to your career, answer these three questions (Han, 2015):

1. Are my abilities to work well and communicate with others essential to my performance review and promotion?

2. Are people in the same position as me well liked and promoted faster than me?

3. Does my ability to control my temperament at work affect my performance?

If all three of your answers are yes, then soft skills are very important to your career and you should spend time developing your soft skills.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Interpersonal skills, a broad and deep soft skill, are also important to your career success. Interpersonal communication is the communication that occurs between interdependent parties, who have some knowledge of each other (Altman & Taylor, 1973). For example, interpersonal communication occurs between employers and employees, supervisors and subordinates, coworkers and clients. Interpersonal communication is a robust area of study because it occurs using a variety of channels and can help explain everyday phenomena including how romantic relationships begin and end, conflict, family relationships, and intergenerational communication. While entire books are devoted to interpersonal skills within the workplace, there are three main areas you should be aware of: (1) emotional intelligence, (2) self-disclosure, and (3) workplace relationships.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, particularly within the workplace, is a hot topic among employers and supervisors right now. Emotional intelligence, commonly referred to as EQ, argues that success is strongly influenced by personal qualities such as perseverance, self-control, and skill in getting along with others (Deleon, 2015). Employees with higher EQ are better able to work in teams, adapt to change,

and remain flexible (Deleon, 2015). This is a primary reason why employers are putting so much emphasis on hiring employees with high EQ. The right hiring decisions can help preserve organizational culture and lead to more engaged and committed employees. Goleman (2005), who's written books about why EQ matters, presents five categories of emotional intelligence:

1. *Self-awareness.* A person who is self-aware understands their own strengths and weaknesses and how their actions affect others. People who are more self-aware are better able to handle and learn from constructive criticism.

2. *Self-regulation.* People high in self-regulation understand how to appropriately express and restrain their emotions, based on different situations.

3. *Motivation.* People with higher emotional intelligence tend to be more self-motivated. They are rarely motivated by material items and are very resilient and optimistic.

4. *Empathy.* Showing empathy and compassion helps people connect to each other on an emotional level. The ability to empathize helps people provide great service, so this is especially important in people-centric careers.

5. *People skills.* People who are emotionally intelligent can quickly build rapport with others and trust people who they work with since they enjoy and respect other people.

Self-Disclosure

In addition to emotional intelligence, people need to understand how much to share about themselves, to whom, and when. This is a concept referred to as self-disclosure. In the workplace, as opposed to within personal relationships, self-disclosures can be tricky because people want to maintain separation between their private and professional lives (Smith & Brunner, 2017). Self-disclosure refers to "interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something personal to another" (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006, p. 411), including revealing thoughts and feelings (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). Self-disclosure has multiple dimensions, including depth, which suggests self-disclosures range from trivial to intimate (Cozby, 1973). People often feel vulnerable revealing intimate disclosures (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Self-disclosing sensitive information at work may be particularly complex considering legal protections provided to the discloser (e.g., Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA], Electronic Communications Privacy Act [ECPA]), which could influence how people manage their private workplace self-disclosures.

Research findings indicate that several factors influence why people disclose personal information in the workplace, including organizational culture (Smith & Brunner, 2017). Some organizations embrace a culture where coworkers feel like friends or even family, whereas other cultures try to prohibit sharing personal information with coworkers or supervisors. People also consider their relationships with coworkers and supervisors when deciding what or how much to disclose and also do a cost–benefit analysis of the potential risks and benefits about sharing personal information. In the workplace, when people feel their expectations for privacy have been violated, they are likely to take corrective actions including reporting the violation to human resources (HR) and confronting the violator, which can lead to other relational issues at work (Smith & Brunner, 2017). Thus, workplace relationships and an understanding of the pros and cons of workplace relationships are essential to manage your communication. As a word of caution, be careful what you share online, especially if your coworkers and supervisors follow you. Simply because you are not physically at work or sharing something during off-hours does not make it exempt from influencing your workplace relationships.

Workplace Relationships

Workplace friendships are part of personal career building and are important for organizations. Workplace relationships help people find out relevant organizational information, but they also increase creativity and make time spent at work more enjoyable (Rawlins, 1992). Peer relationships, or those between coworkers, are the most common type of workplace relationship. Peer relationships provide employees with emotional support and an alternative to traditional mentor–mentee relationships. Additionally, peer relationships provide intrinsic rewards for employees, buffer stress, and reduce job dissatisfaction and turnover (Kram & Isabella, 1985). However, workplace relationships can create stress for employees and create tension when not managed properly (Bridge & Baxter, 1992).

A main differentiating factor between workplace friendships from other types of relationships is voluntariness (Rawlins, 1992). Friendship, even in the workplace, cannot be forced upon people the way a relationship between a supervisor and subordinate can be. Friendships and romantic relationships at work develop by choice. Several other factors including proximity, shared tasks, supervisor behavior, personal life, and similarities influence the development of workplace relationships (Allen, 1977; Brehm, 1985; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997; Fine, 1986; Odden & Sias, 1997). Sias and Cahill (1998) found that the development of workplace relationships, specifically friendships, experience three transitions: (1) from coworker or acquaintance to friend, (2) from friend to close friend, and (3) from close friend to almost best friend. These transitions were related to proximity, shared experiences, socializing, and the passage of time. Of particular relevance is the role that communication plays within workplace relationships since it is the workplace context that influences communication (Sias & Cahill,

1998). This information is relevant to you because if you are someone who needs friendship to feel comfortable and help you achieve success, you should pay close attention to the workplace culture when you are interviewing for a career in mass communication.

PERSONALITY

Another element that affects the success people can reach within their career is personality. Individual differences, including personality types, have been studied for decades and show that these individual differences do have significant impact on people's careers. As teleworking or working from home has become a requirement for many millennials and recent college graduates, scholars have started studying personality and teleworking to determine whether or not some personality types are better suited to remote working environments than others (see Smith, Patmos, & Pitts, 2015). So how is personality assessed, and what type of personality type are you?

The Big Five has had great success in explaining many aspects of life and career outcomes, such as subjective well-being, longevity, job performance, and leadership emergence and effectiveness (Judge, Ilies, Bono, & Gerhardt, 2002). The Big Five characteristics of personality encompass virtually all personality measures neatly into these factors: *openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness,* and *neuroticism* (Goldberg, 1990). The Big Five have been found to generalize across almost all cultures and appear to remain relatively stable over time (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). The Big Five, characterized next, are one of the most supported measures of personality. Understanding a person's personality can help determine the amount of success they will experience in certain jobs and is therefore why many employers make job candidates complete personality assessments prior to being hired. The Big Five is assessed using the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) scale, which can be found online.

Openness is characterized by divergent thinking and is strongly related to creativity (Judge et al., 2002). Furthermore, individuals who are high in openness are likely to have a rich and complex emotional life as well as be intellectually curious, behaviorally flexible, and nondogmatic in their attitudes (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Employees high in openness seek variety and tend to have more favorable attitudes toward learning, which may make them a satisfied teleworker (Clark, Karau, & Michalisin, 2012).

Conscientious people are associated with high levels of academic and vocational success due to their need for being well organized, scrupulous, and diligent (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Conscientiousness is also related to overall job performance; more conscientious employees tend to have better job performance evaluations than less conscientious employees (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Furthermore, conscientious people tend to be good leaders because of their tenacity and persistence (Goldberg, 1990).

Extraversion is a characteristic that is strongly related to social, energetic, and lively people (Judge et al., 2002). Extraverted people tend to prefer environments that are abundant with stimulation, social interactions, and activity (Clark et al., 2012).

Agreeable individuals are likely to be modest, cooperative, friendly, trustworthy, and helpful (Clark et al., 2012; Judge et al., 2002). Agreeableness is positively related to job performance, specifically in jobs that involve interpersonal interactions (Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). Furthermore, trust is an important component of teleworking success as well as cooperation: two traits that people high in agreeableness possess (Pratt, 1984).

The final component of the Big Five, neuroticism, is associated with a lack of emotional stability, insecurity, fear, and instability (Goldberg, 1990). People high in neuroticism are also described as anxious, depressed, or worried (Clark et al., 2012). Together, the Big Five can help both employers and employees alike find careers which emphasize their strengths and downplay their weaknesses based on the disposition of each person's personality.

CONCLUSION

In sum, skills are the true predictors of future career success, whether in mass communication or another industry. Learning what your skills are, how to improve weak skills, and match your skills to a career is essential to your personal success. Especially starting out in your career, taking time to inventory your skills can help set you apart from other job candidates and propel your career faster.