

Equipping Oneself in Order to Lead Others

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A significant loss exists within the organization due to a lack of manager training in effectively developing essential 'soft skills' in employees, leading to decreased team productivity, poor communication, and hindering career progression. This analysis proposes a comprehensive training program for managers to equip themselves with the necessary tools and techniques to foster critical soft skills within their teams, resulting in a more engaged and high-performing workforce, enhancing overall organizational success.

Mid-level managers need to understand the importance of foundational soft skills like effective communication, active listening clear expectations setting, providing constructive feedback, fostering a positive work environment, and recognizing achievements when working with entry-level employees, as these skills play a crucial role in guiding new hires through their onboarding process, building confidence, and promoting successful integration into the team.

Key points:

The Problem: Managers currently lack the skills to adequately train employees in soft skills like communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, impacting overall performance.

Impact: Poor soft skills lead to reduced customer satisfaction, internal conflict, and limited career advancement opportunities for employees.

The Solution: Implementation of a dedicated manager training program focusing on effective coaching techniques, feedback delivery, and identification of individual development needs related to soft skills.

Benefits: Improved employee morale, enhanced teamwork, increased customer satisfaction, and a more skilled workforce capable of handling complex challenges.

Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive manager training curriculum with practical exercises focused on key soft skills.
- Provide ongoing coaching and support to managers to reinforce learned skills.

- Establish performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program and measure improvements in soft skill development within the team.

Leadership Challenges

Managers are not just overseers of projects; they are leaders who set the tone for their teams. Soft skills such as empathy, motivation, and effective communication are indispensable for inspiring and guiding teams towards success. **A manager's inability to embody these qualities can lead to a lack of direction, decreased morale, and an overall decline in team productivity.**

When entry-level employees lack necessary soft skills, and their supervisors are not equipped to train them, it creates a significant barrier to their professional development, leading to poor **teamwork, communication issues, decreased productivity, and ultimately, potential difficulties in achieving job goals and impacting the overall team dynamics within the workplace**; essentially, the employee may struggle to effectively collaborate and contribute due to a lack of essential interpersonal skills that their manager is not able to effectively teach them.

Key soft skills mid-managers should focus on with entry-level employees.

Clear Communication

Clearly explaining tasks, providing detailed instructions, and ensuring open channels for questions to address any uncertainties new employees may have.

Active Listening

Paying close attention to employee concerns, feedback, and questions to understand their needs and address them appropriately.

Positive Reinforcement

Offering praise and recognition for accomplishments, even small ones, to motivate and encourage new employees.

Constructive Feedback

Providing regular feedback that is specific, actionable, and focused on improvement, delivered in a respectful manner.

Adaptability and Flexibility

Recognizing that entry-level employees may require more guidance and support, adjusting their approach based on individual learning styles and needs.

Teamwork and Collaboration

Encouraging team interaction, fostering a collaborative environment, and facilitating opportunities for new employees to learn from experienced colleagues.

Mentorship and Guidance

Providing dedicated mentorship to help new employees navigate the company culture, understand their role, and develop necessary skills.

Empathy and Emotional Intelligence

Understanding and responding to the emotions of new employees, creating a supportive and inclusive work environment.

Delegation and Empowerment

Assigning tasks appropriate to the employee's skill level, providing autonomy, and allowing them to take ownership of their work.

Why soft skills matter for mid-managers with entry-level employees.**Employee Retention**

A positive experience with supportive management during the onboarding phase can significantly increase employee retention rates.

Improved Performance

Effective soft skills can help new employees quickly adapt to their roles, learn efficiently, and contribute meaningfully to the team.

Positive Work Culture

Build strong relationships with entry-level employees through positive interactions contributes to a healthy and productive work environment.

Key considerations for mid-managers**Tailor approach**

Adapt communication style and feedback methods to suit individual employee needs.

Regular Check-ins

Schedule frequent meetings to monitor progress, address concerns and provide ongoing support.

Open communication

Encourage open dialogue and create a safe space for new employees to ask questions and voice concerns.

Soft Skills Crisis: 1 in 4 executives would not even think of hiring an entry-level Gen Z grad

One thing both bosses and workers can agree on: Entry-level workers are not cut out for the job. [Source: Fortune.com, Jane Their (2024)]

Fewer than half of workers (48%) and just 12% of mid-level executives think today's entry-level workers are adequately prepared for the workforce, according to a new report from General Assembly, a technology education provider.

The biggest factors driving this lack of confidence? Managers that were polled, feel new workforce entrants do not have the requisite soft skills—like communication, collaboration, and adaptability—needed to thrive at work.

“The entry-level employee pipeline is broken,” Jourdan Hathaway, General Assembly's chief business officer, wrote in a statement. “Companies must rethink how they source, train, and onboard employees.”

Key points about the report, General Assembly surveyed 1,180 workers across the U.S. and U.K., as well as 393 VPs or director-level managers.

One in four of those executives said they would not hire today's entry-level employees. About 23% of all employees, at all levels, said the same, including one in three baby boomers.

Missing the real value

Even the entry-level workers can tell they are missing something crucial.

Two in five (40%) of Gen Z respondents, many of whom are the new hires in question—say that lacking soft skills is a major shortcoming in their career advancement. Also high on the list, according to both executives and workers, are technical skills—and coming into work with the right attitude.

Then again, it is not entirely the younger workers' fault. Many spent their college years in pandemic lockdowns, hamstrung by canceled internships or fully remote roles, and thus missed opportunities for networking and in-person professional mentoring.

One in three executives—and a similar share of employees—agreed that companies do not provide adequate training for new hires, effectively setting them up for failure, or at least underperformance.

Among the companies that do set aside a budget for training stipends or funds, half said employees “sometimes, rarely, or never” use them. That is due to a lack of skill from mid-management, motivation, or time—or even the sense that they are not the problem.

A Harris Poll conducted exclusively for *Fortune* in January (2024) found that 82% of managers said their new Gen Z hires’ soft skills require more guidance, time, and training. They also think Gen Zers often have unrealistic workplace expectations—like speedy promotion timelines, ample room for flexibility, or consistent work-life balance—and they are harder to train in soft skills than in technical skills.

A September 2024 study by workplace education platform Pearson found that communication—the most in-demand soft skill—was mentioned in 110 million job listings, while data analysis—an AI skill—appeared in only nine million.

Plus, in a recent Deloitte study, workers put teamwork as their number-one valued skill, followed by communication and leadership. Only in fourth place did a more technical skill—coding—make the list, followed by data analysis.

Many Fortune 500 companies are already heeding the call. Microsoft, for one, has partnered with virtual education platform Coursera to offer workers courses and certificates in hard (data analysis) and soft (communication) skills alike. Accenture CEO Julie Sweet has prioritized continual learning from her first day on the job, and this year her company bought Udacity, an AI learning platform akin to Coursera, to build on that mission and prioritize upskilling.

Companies that put too much stock in technical training at the expense of “enduring human capabilities—like divergent thinking, emotional agility, [and] resilience—could end up impeding innovation and leaving employees ill-equipped to lead teams, adapt to market opportunities, and fully harness the potential of technology.

Key issues arise when entry-level employees lack necessary soft skills and supervisors are not equipped to train them

Communication breakdowns

Inability to clearly express ideas, actively listen to colleagues, and effectively convey information can lead to misunderstandings and project delays. [Source: (2002) InStride]

Teamwork challenges

Difficulty collaborating with others, taking initiative, or adapting to different working styles can negatively impact team cohesion and productivity.

Customer service issues

Lack of empathy, conflict resolution skills, and professionalism can lead to customer dissatisfaction and complaints when interacting with clients.

Low employee morale

Feeling unprepared or inadequate due to lacking soft skills can negatively impact an employee's confidence and job satisfaction. Supervisors may become frustrated trying to manage employees who lack basic soft skills, leading to increased stress and potential burnout.

Increased workload for managers

When supervisors need to spend extra time managing basic communication and interpersonal issues, it takes away from their ability to focus on their tasks and strategic initiatives.

Employers across the country, in every geography and every sector, currently face a severe labor shortage. Talent managers face enormous pressure to fill an unprecedented volume of entry-level positions – and quickly. While those managers scramble to meet the tremendous demand with supply, entry-level candidates often do not have the requisite technical or functional skills to succeed, or the soft skills required in a collaborative workplace.

These challenges leave employers with a crucial question: Can we teach our new hires the required skills required during onboarding?

Solutions to address the problem**Targeted training programs**

Consult experts in the field of leadership to develop specific soft skills training for entry-level employees. Focus on areas like active listening, conflict resolution, professional communication, and teamwork.

- Equip supervisors with the tools and knowledge to effectively coach and train new employees in soft skills development.

- Offer targeted training sessions on specific soft skills like communication, active listening, teamwork, and conflict resolution.
- With **hiring practices**, screen candidates not only for technical skills but also for potential soft skills during the interview process.

Mentorship and coaching

Pair new employees with experienced colleagues to provide guidance and support in developing soft skills on the job.

- Pair new employees with experienced colleagues who can function as mentors and role models for soft skill development.

Leadership development for supervisors

Train managers on effective coaching techniques, feedback delivery, and how to identify and address soft skill gaps in their team members.

- Equip supervisors with the tools and knowledge to effectively coach and train new employees in soft skills development.

Improved onboarding process

Incorporate soft skills development into the initial onboarding phase to set clear expectations and provide foundational training early on.

- Design a structured onboarding program that actively teaches essential soft skills through role-playing, feedback sessions, and mentoring.

Performance evaluations with soft skill focus

Regularly assess employee performance, including their soft skills, to identify areas for improvement and provide targeted feedback.

- Regularly provide constructive feedback to new employees, highlighting areas for improvement and recognizing positive behaviors.
- Incorporate soft skills assessment into employee performance reviews, allowing for targeted feedback and improvement plans.

Conclusion

In this exploration of the consequences of lacking soft skills in managers, we delve into the intricate interplay between technical expertise and interpersonal acumen. As we navigate the multifaceted landscape of the tech industry, it becomes evident that

investing in the development of soft skills is not just a supplementary endeavor but a critical component for achieving success and fostering a harmonious work environment.

Research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center has all concluded that 85% of job success comes from having well-developed soft skills and people skills, and only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills). These statistics were extrapolated from A Study of Engineering Education, authored by Charles Riborg Mann, and published in 1918 by the Carnegie Foundation. The cited figures come from the data on pages 106-107.

That is not a typo, it is correct – 1918. So, we have known for 100+ years that soft skills are critical to the success of any organization. *So why is that in another study by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) The State of the Industry Report (Green and McGill, 2011), U.S. employers spent 171.5 billion on employee learning and development in 2010, and 27.6% of those training dollars went to soft skills training?*

If soft skills are six times more important than hard skills for job success, why is $\frac{3}{4}$ of all training dollars going to hard skills?

Sources

LinkedIn's 2019 Global Talent Trends report

(2024) [The soft-\(crisis: 1 in 4 execs wouldn't even think of hiring an entry-level Gen Z grad](#)

[Entry-level employees often lack critical skills. Teaching them is a win-win. | InStride](#)

[Training First-Time Employees? Don't Forget Soft Skills](#) (SHRM, 2021)

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