

REPORT

Top Social Skills Needed in Organizations: The Social Skills that Employees See as Critical to Career Success



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Introduction

Do you understand how you are perceived by others in the workplace? Are you satisfied with your ability to get things done with new people in your organization? Do you regularly learn from people who are different than you? If so, then you have the social skills to be successful in your workplace.

The social skills found to be most important to career success are, by and large, missing from organizations today. This is because these social skills are not the topic of most corporate training and leadership programs.

However, there are simple techniques and practices that can help business professionals develop these social skills on their own. There are also techniques available to identify the social skill needs of your work group and organization.

This report shares the findings of a social secrets survey. Insights and recommendations to address the social skill deficiencies identified by the survey are also provided. Finally, this report shares techniques and practices to identify the social skill deficiencies in your work group or organization.



While we inherently know that social skills are important, we may not fully appreciate how to best develop these skills.

This research sought to better understand the social skills most important to career success. The findings presented are based on interviews with 26 attendees of the 2015 GreenBuild conference in Washington D.C.

The findings suggest that while others can magnify your career contributions, you first have to be worthy of being magnified from both a social and intellectual perspective.

The findings also show that the social skills most important to career success are not being addressed by employers today. This is surprising as the difference between leaders who derail in their career and those that soar to great heights is social skills (<http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/publications/lia/lia2105connection.pdf>). Perhaps the reason employers are not addressing social skills important to career success is because social skills appear in the second quadrant of Steve R. Covey's Importance-Urgency matrix: social skills are important to a career but not urgent.

Top 5 Social Secrets of Success: Keys to Connecting

The most energy from respondents (twenty percent of discrete responses) was around self-presentation or managing the image and reactions others have of you. This suggests that the image you portray to others is important to career success. Happily, this image is something that can be controlled and changed. It is not surprising that the image you portray to others factors big in your career success because, as one respondent said, "this is a people's world." The image components that respondents felt were most important to career success were exuding confidence, being approachable, and having presence.

The second social secret with lots of energy from respondents (sixteen percent of discrete responses) was interacting effectively with others. The importance of showing genuine interest in others as a basis for effective communication was a point of emphasis in these responses. Showing genuine interest is a hallmark of the most effective networkers. While self-presentation creates the conditions for others to want to get to know you, unless you show a genuine interest in wanting to get to know them too, then your efforts in self-presentation will go to waste.

The third social secret with lots of energy from respondents (fourteen percent of discrete responses) was adaptability. The responses under this category centered on being willing to learn and being able to communicate effectively with whomever you come into contact with. In fact, if you really like to learn, then you will find yourself drawn to people who are different than you because of the opportunity to learn something new.

The fourth and fifth social secrets each had the same amount of energy (twelve percent of discrete responses each). The fourth and fifth social secrets are working creatively with others and social influence. These two categories describe communication with a sense of purpose. Working creatively with others is about innovation or implementing a new idea to deliver value for an organization. Social influence is about meeting needs. The needs can be from the organization in which case social influence takes the form of effective change management. Alternatively, the needs can be from others in which case social influence takes the form of a servant-based approach to leadership and interaction (see <http://www.skipprichard.com/9-qualities-of-the-servant-leader/>).

The five social secrets identified in this research correlate with five of the ten truths for building extraordinary relationships presented by George C. Fraser in his book *Click*. Fraser has used his ten truths to build deep and valuable connections with thousands of people – practical evidence of the power of these social secrets.

Social Secret(s)	Fraser Truth
Self-presentation	Truth #1: Be Authentic
Interacting effectively with others	Truth #2: Communicate from the Heart
Adaptability	Truth #7: Tailor your Relationships
Working creatively with others and social influence	Truth #10: It Takes Teamwork to Make the Dream Work

Final Five Social Secrets to Success: Stuff of Training

The top five social secrets to success identified by survey respondents correlated with the networking skills presented in George Fraser's book [Click](#). Typically, organizations do not provide in-house training or resources for employees to develop good networking skills. However, organizations do typically provide training and resources to address the next five, or final five, social secrets of success.

Three of the final five social secrets, each at eight percent of the discrete responses, were leading/guiding others, self-management, and communicating clearly. The skills of leadership, mentoring (or guiding others), self-management, and communication are the focus of a plethora of training courses. These skills are also popular topics in social media such as in blog posts, podcasts (see some examples to the right), and tweets.

The last two of the final five social secrets were integrity and conflict resolution (two percent of the discrete responses each). The topic of integrity was a high priority for my last CEO at Bayer Corporation because lapses in integrity had cost the company billions of dollars in fines. The company put hot lines into place so that employees did not have to confront perpetrators of integrity violations but still could notify the organization of such violations. The skill of conflict resolution is a tricky one. Recent research shows that conflict resolution techniques that are effective for men in the workplace are not necessarily effective for women in the workplace.¹ Managers and executives can rely on human resource personnel for assistance in conflict resolution as needed.

¹ Laurie Weingart, Episode 13 of Science of Success: Social Secrets podcast: <http://scienceofsuccess.libsyn.com/podcast>



5 Leadership Questions
Barnabas Piper and T...



Innovation & Leadership
Ideation Collective



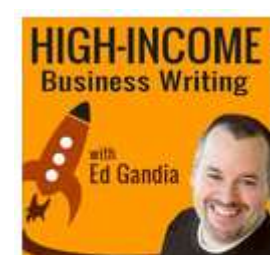
Coaching for Leaders - Talent Managemen...
Dave Stachowiak



The Rockstar Mentor Podcast
Sonya Paz



How To Be Awesome at Your Job
Pete Mockaitis



High-Income Business Writing: Freelance...
Ed Gandia: B2B Writer...



Be A Media Darling
Susan Harrow



Successful Mindset
Michael Budensiek En...

Social Skills Most Needed in Organizations: Beyond Training

The top three social skills reported as **most lacking** in the workplace by survey participants were social presentation, interacting effectively with others, and adaptability. These are also three of the top five social secrets identified as **most important** to career success only from a different perspective.

Taking a different perspective is a proven technique to deeper understanding. In his book *Zig Zag*, Dr. Keith Sawyer gives several examples of successful innovations that were the result of seeing the same thing in a new way. In other words, taking a new perspective provided a deeper understanding of the value offered by the innovation. Similarly, looking at what survey respondents cited as social skills **most lacking** in the workplace provides a deeper understanding of the top social secrets for success.

For interacting effectively with others, the importance of showing genuine interest is hampered by all the different communication channels currently available to workers. Respondents cited the improper use of email compared to phone conversations and in-person communication as a concern.

For the category of self-presentation, while confidence and approachability are important, there is a social context to keep in mind particularly for confidence. Confidence that is the result of unprofessional or selfish behavior turns people off and does not lead to career success in the long run. Confidence needs to be based on results that properly involved and recognized the contributions of others. Respondents cited the problems of caring more about the task or work than about people, withholding information, and unprofessional behavior as examples of ill-gotten confidence.

For the category of adaptability, the willingness to learn and communicate effectively can be hampered in a number of different ways. For example, the generation gap in the workplace can put older employees in the difficult position of not understanding the new technology and tools used by younger employees. Older employees who fear change will be at an even greater disadvantage when it comes to using new technology and tools in the workplace. There is also the challenge of arrogance in the workplace which can lead to work that is not meaningful or impactful. Adaptability is about addressing such social challenges in the workplace so that everybody wins, especially the organization.

Social Secret	Why Most Important	Insight from Lacking Perspective
Interacting effectively with others	Show genuine interest to grow and nurture your network.	Apply your genuine interest in others to all communication channels – not just in person.
Self-presentation	Be confident in who you are and in what you seek to contribute to the organization.	What you seek to contribute needs to be inclusive of all who can and are willing to help.
Adaptability	Show that you can work with all types of people and that you are open to learn from others.	Adjust your approach to take into account the challenges that others face such as fear of change, being in a different generation, and suffering from too much ego.

Branding to Align Passion with Career Success

Don't leave how others perceive you to chance. Self-presentation or managing the image and reactions others have of you is a distinguishing characteristic for career success. You can develop your brand from your personal mission just as an organization does. When your brand comes from your personal mission, your brand is tied to your passion which, in turn, produces the confidence and approachability that are so important to career success. A process I have used to develop a personal mission is as follows (this process was inspired by Dewitt Jones' video called "Celebrate What's Right with the World"):

- Spend time reflecting on your passions: what are the things you do that you can lose yourself in or that you really enjoy?
- Get to the essence or core of your passion: describe your passion in 6 words or less in a way that is compelling to you. These 6 words are your personal mission. For example, my personal mission is “igniting the power of human connection.”

Once you have your personal mission, you can develop your brand. One exercise to help develop your brand comes from Guy Kawasaki (see <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/The-art-of-innovation-Guy-Kawas>). The exercise is to decide the meaning you are making and develop your mantra. To do this, review your personal mission and reflect on what it is that you make possible that will be meaningful to others in some way. Back to my personal mission “igniting the power of human connection” as an example, I can help people see and harness the power of collaboration and show that a commitment to collaboration makes all things possible. Once you have decided on the meaning you are making, the next step is to develop a

mantra. A mantra is a 3-word statement of why you exist. Back to the meaning I am making, my mantra is “impact through collaboration.” With the meaning you are making and your mantra, you are now ready to decide what skills, behaviors, and attitudes are most important to conveying your brand to others. It is also helpful to list the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that are not consistent with your brand. Do your best to practice the top five to ten skills, behaviors, and attitudes consistent with your brand every day.

Another approach to try as a basis for your brand is Adam Leipzig’s approach to know your life purpose in 5 minutes (see Adam’s TED talk on this topic here: <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/How-to-Know-Your-Life-Purpose-i>). Adam’s approach involves answering a series of questions as follows:

- Who are you?
- What do you love to do?
- Who do you do it for?
- What do those people want and need?
- How do those people change or transform as a result of what you give them?
- What is the one thing you feel supremely qualified to teach people?

Finally, keep track of feedback from business colleagues on what it is like to work with you. Is the feedback consistent with your desired personal brand? Are you getting access to opportunities consistent with your personal brand? Based on the feedback, adjust your behaviors, your personal mission, and your personal brand to do the kind of work that fits with your passions and to be a valuable workplace contributor.

Learning to Fuel Creativity through Others

If you improve how you learn, then you may find that you like to learn and will be more open to learning from others! The willingness to learn from others is a key attribute to develop the characteristic of adaptability. If you love to learn, then you will find yourself drawn to people different than you because of the opportunity to learn.

I have developed a LEARN tool based on my experience for the 8 very different jobs I held over my 25-year corporate career with Bayer. These jobs were so different from each other that I had to learn while performing. As a result, I learned how to thrive on a steep learning curve. If interested, you can learn more about the LEARN tool here: <https://mkt.com/fulcrumconnection/item/learn-tool>

Dr. Keith Sawyer also talks about learning to improve your creativity in his book *Zig Zag*. In the book, Dr. Sawyer identifies four disciplines of learning as follows: practice deliberately, master your domain, learn forever, and balance specialty with generality. Practice deliberately is about getting the right level of challenge given your current skill in what you are trying to learn. You need enough challenge to learn but not so much that you get overly frustrated. Dr. Sawyer makes the point that a skilled teacher or coach can create deliberate practice for you when you are new to an area. Mastering your domain is about pursuing a deeper understanding. That is, the goal is to understand the meaning of what you are learning enough so that you can readily answer “why” questions about the domain. This type of understanding enables you to more easily apply your knowledge to new situations. Learn forever is about learning more so that you can make novel connections which, in turn, help you to be able to

solve all kinds of problems. To practice learning forever, you need to ask lots of why questions. These questions, in turn, spur you to explore new topics. You also need to use all of your senses and resources to find all the knowledge related to your problems. Balancing specialty with generality is about being what David and Tom Kelley of IDEO call “T-shaped.” The vertical bar of the “T” is your depth of expertise in one area while the horizontal bar is your less developed and more superficial awareness of a broad range of different fields. Balancing specialty with generality also comes from being a dabbler – dabbling in things you know nothing about. Dabbling is about acting on your curiosity.



The five steps in Fulcrum Connection’s LEARN Tool.

Collaborating to Maximize Contribution

Collaboration is the pinnacle of interacting effectively with others and includes the abilities to interact creatively with others and have social influence. You can learn more about collaborating by reading Keith Sawyer's book called [Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration](#).

Collaboration can be tricky business because it is not only about what you think and how you think. Collaboration is also about how you relate to others you are collaborating with and how you respond emotionally to the words, actions, and behaviors of your collaborators. And let's face it - we all have emotional and social baggage to deal with!

Fulcrum Connection LLC has developed a Team Collaboration Assessment tool that provides a safe and anonymous way to identify the unwritten rules needed to enable collaboration in a team. The assessment tool is based on the following proven frameworks: the [Speed of Trust](http://www.myspeedoftrust.com/) from Stephen M. Covey (<http://www.myspeedoftrust.com/>), the "Situational Outlook Questionnaire" (SOQ) from Creative Problem Solving Group of Buffalo (CPSB, <http://www.soqonline.net/>), and the "Values Tree of Collaboration" from Fulcrum Connection LLC (<http://fulcrumconnection.com/blog/values-tree-collaboration/>). If interested, you can access the Team Collaboration Assessment here: <https://mkt.com/fulcrumconnection/item/team-collaboration-assessment-1>

In addition, consider signing up for the Quadrant II newsletter at www.fulcrumconnection.com. The newsletter provides a bi-monthly opportunity for business and technical professionals to be aware of and try out a social skill based in scientific research.

10 Skills of Collaboration

Tasks Before the Collaboration:

- Plan for Intelligent Team Composition
- Frame the Value to Deliver to Important Others
- Set an Effective Group Goal/Objective

Behaviors During Collaboration:

- Practice Effective Social Interactions
- Engage Fully
- Be a Deliberate Learner
- Embrace Failure as Part of the Process

Processes During Collaboration

- Practice Task Focus
- Implement the ABC's of Teams
- Practice Level-Setting

Contact Dr. Valerie Patrick at 412-742-9675 or valerie.patrick@fulcrumconnection.com to learn more about the 10 skills of collaboration.

About the Author

Valerie Patrick, PhD

Called an “engagement mastermind,” Valerie teaches leaders and teams how to collaborate in ways that inform action and advance the mission of the organization.

Valerie, a Caltech Ph.D. Chemical Engineer and Certified Professional Facilitator, is an expert on the science and practice of human interaction in the workplace. Dr. Patrick is author of the Competent Collaborator blog (<http://fulcrumconnection.com/blog/competent-collaborator-blog/>) and host of the Science of Success: Social Secrets podcast (<http://scienceofsuccess.libsyn.com/podcast>). Valerie has spoken on and produced content for many topics including closing the gender leadership gap, improving creativity, social skills for career success, collaboration, change management, innovation, thriving on a steep learning curve, and environmental sustainability.



Valerie has 25 years of corporate experience leading technical and strategic initiatives of increasing scope to identify and pursue new sources of organizational value for both Bayer and Monsanto. Most recently, she served 4 years as Sustainability Coordinator and Strategist for Bayer North America, and 3 years in Bayer MaterialScience’s innovation organization where she led the Creative Center and Transportation Industry Innovations groups. Currently, Valerie is President of Fulcrum Connection LLC.

Valerie served as inaugural Chairperson of the ACCO (Association for Climate Change Officers) Board of Directors and now serves on ACCO’s Advisory Board. She received a Silver Facilitation Impact Award from the International Association of Facilitators in 2014 for her work with the University of Pennsylvania (sponsored by the U.S. DOE) to engage market actors in identifying ways to catalyze advanced energy retrofits for small- and medium-sized commercial buildings. Valerie is a Certified Professional Facilitator, an SOQ Qualified Climate Practitioner, a Trained Creative Problem Solving Facilitator, and a Certified Toastmaster.