Melba Duncan
‘Hot Skills’ Every EA Should Have in 2009 and Beyond

Plus
Identifying and Selling Your Soft Skills
Managing Human Performance at Work
Using Maps in Business
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Melba Duncan
On the ‘Hot’ Skills EAs Need For 2009 and Beyond.
Welcome to the last issue of PA Enterprise for 2008. None of us here at DeskDemon can believe the speed in which the year has gone and what an exciting one it's been at that.

Over the past 12 months, DeskDemon's readers have recognised the achievements and accomplishments of outstanding individuals who support the Nation’s bosses - the unsung heroes of the office. Nearly 100,000 of you voted nationally, casting almost 1 million votes (yes, that’s nearly a million votes!) for PAs, secretaries and administrators working in all points of the United Kingdom, from Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. And, in the end, it was Debbie Neal's accomplishments, communications skills and achievements that impressed YOU, her peers, the most. We are absolutely delighted to announce that Debbie Neal, PA to the CEO and COO of G4S as the winner of this prestigious award. You can read all about her role and achievements at www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/awards2007/winner. Thank you so much to everyone who nominated such exceptional PAs, secretaries and administrators and to everyone who voted.

In this final issue of the year, our cover interview is with a woman who started her working life as an assistant and progressed to author, trainer, speaker and recruiter of top flight Executive Assistants to the CEOs of the world’s largest companies including; Disney, Time Warner and Mastercard. An absolute must read, Melba Duncan, CEO of the Duncan Group, shares her knowledge and understanding of the CEO’s role, and provides ‘hot skills’ every EA should have in 2009, and beyond.

Continuing on the skills theme, if you are failing to recognise the importance of soft skills now required in most companies, you could be missing out on real opportunities. Kath Finney’s article, ‘Identifying And Selling Your Soft Skills,’ will help you show your potential employer or current boss that you have what it takes to climb the ladder. Plus, there’s more to business maps than meets the eye. In ‘Using Maps for Business’, David Carsten explains why wall maps are in demand amongst the Fortune 500 companies. Finally, Dr. Denis Boucher tells us that it’s very easy to create a work environment in which initiative, creativity and pleasure are absent. In ‘Eleven Strategies for Managing Human Performance at Work’, Dr. Boucher says that simple communications strategies can avoid just that.

So, here we are at the end of 2008 and our next issue will be in January. It remains for everyone here at DeskDemon to extend our very best wishes and a happy, stress free, holiday.
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Gift cards that give them what they really, really want

The Gift Card Centre Ltd., the online gift card superstore, has launched ‘WishCard’, an all-in-one gift card account which allows the recipient to go on an online shopping spree from the merchant of their choice, featured on its website.

Accounts are easy to set up. The company simply logs onto their bespoke ‘WishAccount’, inputs the recipient’s details and the amount they would like to reward. The ‘WishCard’ is then dispatched immediately by mail. On receipt, the recipient can visit TheGiftCardCentre.co.uk with their ‘WishCard’ credit, and select the gift cards of their choice from a large selection of merchants including Debenhams, iTunes, Spa Finder, Next, Ticketmaster, Virgin Experiences etc.

Contact: 0870 446 0216 or visit: www.thegiftcardcentre.co.uk

New Hands-Free Car Kit that doubles as a rear-view mirror

RXS: Redshift is launching a new kind of car kit in the UK. The Bluetooth Rear-View Mirror Hands-Free Car Kit is a neat piece of in-car mobile communications equipment which doubles as a rear-view mirror. It simply clips over your existing mirror, with no installation or wiring required. Because it is rechargeable, it does not require plugging into the lighter or in car power socket. Its microphone and speaker are almost invisibly integrated into the mirror surround, and the caller ID is displayed on the mirror itself so you don’t have to take your eyes off the road to see who is calling.

This product also comes with a small Bluetooth headset which sits neatly in the unit. If you want to continue talking when you get out of the car, you can simply detach the headset, switch off the engine and walk away – still talking.


Keep notes in order with new project book from Oxford Black n’ Red

The new Black n’ Red Project Book comes complete with everything you need to stay organised, from repositionable dividers to a handy integrated pocket for storing loose notes, CD’s and business cards. The Project Book, available in A4+ wirebound format, features a protective, wipe-clean, clear polypropylene cover and premium quality 90gsm paper.

Visit: www.hamelinpaperbrands.co.uk

New safety device for mobiles

British IT innovator, Virtuity, has released BackStopp Mobile, a device designed to obliterate the contents of lost or stolen mobile phones and other hand held devices.

Should a phone be lost or stolen, BackStopp Mobile uses a mobile’s own communications to track it down, almost anywhere in the world. Once the device has been traced, BackStopp sets to deleting all information that could prove of interest to villains of all descriptions. As soon as the data is wiped out it creates a report back at IHQ (or the office for most of us) detailing exactly what was erased, when, and can even pinpoint the location of the device.

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Teleflorist launches new gift range
After 60 years of taking your corporate flowers personally, the UK’s largest network of professional florists, Teleflorist, is now taking corporate gifts personally too.

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Get mobile broadband internet access – wherever you are.
The new T-Mobile Mobile Broadband USB stick provides quick and easy mobile internet access from a laptop wherever you are, which can be extremely useful for PAs, especially if you are required to work from a range of locations or who work flexible hours.

The device allows access to the internet through T-Mobile’s 3G network connection.
The T-Mobile Mobile Broadband USB Stick is available from free on a 24-month contract, with mobile data tariffs starting from £15 per month. The T-Mobile Mobile Broadband USB Stick is available in T-Mobile stores now and online at www.t-mobile.co.uk or Tel: 0845 412 2401

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Using Maps In Business - 10 Tips From The Experts

By David Carsten

This article, a prequel to my forthcoming 101 Map Uses, offers 10 productive ways businesses can use wall maps. Too often, business professionals equate maps with the online digital variety that provide directions, the Head Office, and homes for sale, all from the comfort of a computer, PDA, or mobile phone. Yet, millions of businesses use printed wall maps daily. Fortune 500 companies insist on using high quality printed maps in their day-to-day operations because there is simply no replacement for maps. While the digital map has its own uses, a well-designed printed map is by no means old school. To the contrary, wall maps keep up with the modern needs of business and are in high demand.

Wall maps serve a multitude of purposes, the least of which is decorative eye candy, although this is a distinct use that has more value than you may think. We’ll get to that in a minute. Printed maps are handled in the office from everyone from the CEO, sales manager, executive assistant, accountant, and lorry driver. This article is less for the professionals who already use maps, but for those who want to learn what the Fortune 500 already know.

1. Corporate Identity
A map sets the scene and provides a sense of place. These are instrumental forces for business moral. Companies, whose stores or service area are mapped and on display, ground the staff in the here and now, never losing track of the geographic identity of the company.

2. Display
A handsome or beautiful map displayed in a store or office environment is a positive reinforcement to customers and clients that the company is grounded, committed, and knowledgeable about the area. If the map reflects the company’s identity; it speaks a thousand words to customers who enjoy it. One such map that I recall was prominently framed in an office foyer. Virtually every visiting client that entered the office saw that map and made a compliment. This was a compliment to the map maker, but also to the company for having the good judgment and wisdom to have it created and displayed so prominently. The map depicted the company’s geographic service area in beautiful detail. It wasn’t a tourist map or something from the Better Business Bureau. The point of the map was not to demonstrate how clever the company is, but how knowledgeable they are of their service base and how invested they are in the communities they serve.

3. Store Locations
As a map maker, I get requests by medium and large companies to make them a map showing the locations of their stores. This may seem a mundane point, but more often than not, the map I make is the first map these companies have ever had that depicted the geographic location and relationship of their stores. There are a variety of online map tools that allow you to cobble together such a map, but they inevitably fall disastrously short of a wall size, detailed, and well-crafted map designed for the purpose.

4. Travel Time Distance
A company that makes deliveries, sales visits, or service calls needs to have some basic information handy: how long does it take to drive from the head office to a given location in the service area. A classic example is the
pizza delivery service, where on the wall in the pizza restaurant is a travel time distance map. The pizza delivery drivers consult the map to understand how long it should take them to reach their designated delivery, as well as where the delivery address is located. Travel time distance maps are not exclusively posted on the wall, but folded and kept handy in service vehicle cabs, such as in emergency response vehicles. From the location of an accident, an ambulance driver can quickly lookup the fastest route to drive to the hospital, which in mileage terms may not be to shortest route. Since travel time distance maps use actual traffic data for specific streets and highways, these maps are an exceptional tool.

5. Service and Sales Area Delineation
Briefly mentioned earlier, service and sales area maps are vital to certain company’s day-to-day operations, but also useful in strategic planning, which will be covered soon. Each and every company strives to improve efficiency in the following categories: resources, operations, and staff time. One way to use maps to improve business efficiency is to accurately delineate the service or sales area and use this as a road map. This map will then guide future decisions and resource allocation in an informed and consistent manner.

6. Customer Demographics
Demographic data have long been used by companies to know their customer base better. The United State Census Bureau routinely collects detailed census data and numerous private companies collect business related demographics. Demographic data help companies better target product and service development, customer support, and marketing strategies. Often, these data are presented with graphs, pie charts, and tables. In contrast, a wall map displaying customer demographic data within a company’s service area is a much more powerful tool as it accomplishes the following functions:

- quantifies the demographics within critical geographic blocks, such as service area, post codes, census blocks, neighbourhoods, counties, etc.,
- shows the relationship between demographics and store density, service area reach, and competitor store density or service areas, and others.

7. Trend Analysis
Businesses always want to know what the future will hold. How will consumer demographics change? Which neighbourhoods are changing? Where will there be opportunities? Maps can answer these questions when benefited from Geographic Information Systems (GIS), software that analyses data and geography together, including demographic data, land use plans, development plans, consumer spending by city block, and with precision. Using GIS in trend analysis for businesses is a strong field, and one that has many obvious benefits.

8. New Store Selection
Most businesses plans have a geographic component inherent in them: open more stores, expand service area, develop new markets, or simply adapt to changes in demographics. All of these objectives require a wall map for definition and planning. Though most importantly, these objectives cannot be accomplished without GIS and a knowledgeable GIS analyst consultant.

9. Strategic Planning
All businesses undergo strategic planning on a regular or ad hoc basis. Strategic planning involves an honest evaluation of the past, present, and future aspects of the company and its business model. Wall maps, and especially GIS, are instrumental in informing the business strategic planning in the above mentioned ways: corporate identity, store locations, service area delineation, travel time distance analysis (operational efficiency), new store or site selection, and customer demographic and trend analysis. Often companies incorporate an entire GIS process and presentation map series in their strategic planning sessions.

10. Marketing
Knowing where to spend limited marketing budget, especially with regards to direct mail or location targeted advertisement, is a very popular use of GIS and wall maps in business. Maps are a critical starting point for geographic targeted marketing where demographic data, post codes, mailing address locations are just some of the data used to develop location specific marketing campaigns.

Putting It All Together To receive the full value and competitive advantage of wall maps, incorporate all of the ten uses together in your business’ daily practice and corporate culture. Simply stated, maps excite people’s creativity and ambition. Maps inform. Maps expand our comprehension of complex relationships often missed by mundane graphs and tables. Incorporate maps into your business today. You will be glad you did.

I hoped you’ve enjoyed this article. To download free wall maps for businesses, visit Maponomy. For GIS consulting in these areas, contact Geointel.
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Melba Duncan should know what the top CEOs are looking for in an Executive Assistant. After all, she has found the perfect EA for the CEOs of Disney, Mastercard and Time Warner amongst many others. We asked this author, public speaker, trainer and recruitment expert to the world’s largest organisations to tell us about the ‘hot skills’ every EA should have in 2009 and beyond.

Question: Can you tell us a bit about your background and what you do now?

For 10 years, I was the Executive Assistant to Peter G. Peterson, Chairman of The Blackstone Group, former Chairman and CEO of Lehman Brothers Kuhn Loeb, and former Secretary of Commerce. Previous to this position, for nine years, I was Assistant to Sanford C. Bernstein, Chairman and CEO of Sanford C. Bernstein & Co., Inc., a New York Stock Exchange member firm. At Bernstein, I was elected Corporate Secretary and became a shareholder. I began my career as a filing clerk for Continental Assurance Company.

In 1985, with the support of Peter G. Peterson and Russell S. Reynolds (Founder of the prestigious executive recruiting firm, Russell Reynolds Associates), I founded The Duncan Group. We are a retained search and consulting firm, specialising in four practice areas: recruitment of Chiefs of Staff and senior level assistants, organisational consulting, coaching and executive level training boot camps for Professional Assistants. The Duncan Group has emerged as a major catalyst, reflecting its long-term commitment to professionalising the role of the Executive Assistant. Most recently, the company is featured in Management Principles and Practices for Tomorrow’s Leaders, Revised 3rd Edition, by Gary Dessler, Florida International University (Houghton Mifflin 2007).

I am the author of three books: How to Succeed in Business as an Executive Assistant (Macmillan, 1990),

Question: You must see and talk to many top talented administrative professionals every day. What are ‘hot skills’ in 2008 that make one EA stand out over others? The “hot skills” in 2008 and beyond are the skills that support Indispensability. It is necessary to be a good worker. It is better to be a good worker in an important position. It is best to be an indispensable worker in the right role. This is particularly indicative of the role of the Executive Assistant.

For Executive Assistants, and for each and every contributor to organisations who will thrive in the coming years, the key word is Indispensability. People are seldom thought of as indispensable; rather, the idea of “indispensable” is most often assigned to the role they play or the position they occupy.

Techniques honed by EAs will become even more important to executives and to the business organisation’s success. A new perspective, a new optimism, and a new respect for the position of Executive Assistant are taking hold.

Opportunities abound well beyond traditional executive care: there is now a blurring of the lines between strategic administrative support, role-related leadership and management responsibilities. The following points are defining the most indispensable skills of the 21st Century Executive Assistant. Executive Assistants who successfully master these skills will distinguish themselves from others in their field:

• Technological transformation, a multi-cultural, multi-generational workforce and growing globalization

...are the Megatrends that are transforming the daily routine, the social status and the economic rewards of EAs. Business leaders are looking for talent inside their organisations as they strive to match their employees’ experience, skills, aptitudes and aspirations to the evolving strategic needs of business. This is an ideal state of affairs for Executive Assistants to exert their influence, through their ability to generate ideas and demonstrate their greatly-increased knowledge about organisational functioning, to exercise their cross-cultural communication, and to have their global social and interpersonal skills contribute to effective collaboration.

• EAs will continue to play a central role in supporting executives’ efforts to manage the extraordinary transitions that await executives in coming years. Knowledgeable allocation of time, which is evidence of their ability to integrate excellence in project, process and information management, is among Executive Assistants’ most precious skills.

• To attain the level of true Executive/Executive Assistant partnership, as a Value-Added Colleague. EAs must continue to adapt to change and to build on their foundation skills of computer literacy, problem-solving, priority management and focused attention to detail, in order to effectively orchestrate the most mundane task to the most strategic assignment from beginning to end, with speed and accuracy.

• Increasingly, Executive Assistants’ success is based on their ability to apply intelligence, common sense, intuitive judgments, innovative thinking, specialised skills and creativity to the challenges encountered - while learning and applying new knowledge - every step of the way.

• EAs will excel in this new world of work because they will drive their own growth. They enjoy and thrive on new learning, on the self-management focus, the opportunity for independent decision-making and increased autonomy, and the inherent challenge to shepherd the mundane and the mighty to a satisfactory conclusion.

• Corporate redesign and information technology place Executive Assistants as close to the front lines of decision-making and change as the executives they support. Everything that crosses their desks and computer monitors reflects a new pace of doing business in a global, technological, customer-driven world of intense competition and innovation. As “knowledge workers”, Executive Assistants will advance their influence and positioning by keeping up with these changes and trends while performing knowledge-intensive tasks.

• Successful EAs will be identified by their Personal Attributes, their mastery of indispensable skills, and three core characteristics: Accountability, Trust and Adaptability. Accountability is evaluated in terms of character, dedication and performance. Trust preserves integrity. Adaptability is the art of creating appropriate solutions to respond to new circumstances. These are the foundation attributes; these are the skills of courage and influence, and are essential for measuring personal credibility and the intention to deliver and do the right thing. These competencies are the foundation for highly productive relationships between executives and their assistants.

Combined with these factors are the advanced skills of Creative Systems Management, to meet technological advances; Global Interpersonal Skills, to successfully manage the dynamics of multi-generational and multi-cultural influences; Innovative Problem
solving Skills to excel in a “do more with less economy”; and Leadership practices for sustainability in changing environments.

**Question: How can EAs keep up on these skills?**

The challenge is to have open minds in order to work differently within a changing workplace culture, to accept new ways of thinking, and to be flexible to give up deeply held beliefs. Stamina and a powerful commitment to continuous improvement are of critical importance.

To keep up with fast-moving executives, it will be necessary for Executive Assistants to strategically position themselves by leveraging their capabilities with advanced technological accomplishment, improved productivity and innovative solutions.

Over the next decade, mastering these practices will be necessary for those forward-thinking Executive Assistants who aim to thrive in their organisations. The following elements are the building blocks to acquiring and maintaining what I refer to as Indispensable Talent: remaining mission-critical and future-focused, embracing multi-disciplinary learning, developing innovative problem-solving skills, adapting knowledge and skills to organisational culture using transferable leadership practices for sustainability in changing environments, making no assumptions, and mastering the ability to process innovation.

The work of the Assistant is surrounded by change on many fronts; we are now at the critical point where we can and should transform hiring executives’ understanding of this position as technological advances and globalization redefine its core processes and functions.

In my discussions with Executive Assistants, we look at the motivating factors, career development strategies and specific innovation actions necessary to establish sustainable differentiation in the work of the Assistant.

In these discussions, instead of focusing on the threat of change, we describe the potential offered by change. Let me suggest three short-term objectives: First: Seize new opportunities, and make a habit of doing so. Second: Develop new professional capacities. If the skills you have today are exactly the same skills as the ones you had a year ago, you are not growing. Finally, refine your current skills.

**Question: Do you see these skills changing in the future? How do you think top Executive Assistants’ positions will evolve?**

Supported by collaborative and strategic support skills and personal characteristics of perseverance, patience and personal responsibility, the Executive Assistant position will evolve from technical and administrative support to that of business partner: a strong business ally with a real share in the purpose and mission of the organisation, someone who is called upon to fill several different roles. This dramatic shift creates the new relationship as Value-Added Colleague: the Executive/Executive Assistant Partnership.

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By adopting strategies to master integrative workplace issues and by focusing their efforts on a continuous quest for self-improvement, they will make an extraordinary thing occur: they will be launching toward dramatic advancement: Management and Leadership. The transformed role for global success is realised in their transition from support to leadership, to management, with the Executive/EA partnership as their destination.

There are two ways to properly describe the evolution of this profession. One resides in higher levels of responsibility, which I refer to as Unlimited Roles with Infinite Responsibilities, in which Executive Assistants offer structure, through the management of day-to-day routines; innovation, where they cope with change, identify important issues and evaluate solutions, and support, by working in partnership with the Executive to achieve common goals. The other kind, which I refer to as Continuous Roles, is associated with the proper recognition of this role as a partnership relationship. These overlapping roles require outstanding, even memorable performance as strategic support specialists; managers; communication experts; value-added-colleagues, and leaders.

As a Strategic Support Specialist, you accept the requirements of the support role. You execute efficiently. You do more than is expected. You provide support that is required for the Executive to achieve his/her best. As manager, you possess strong analytical abilities, you are able to see the big picture, yet track the operations minutiae. You are competent, self-confident, tough-minded and time-sensitive. As a communication expert, you serve as liaison, translate key messages, ask the right questions, hear and listen well. As value-added colleague – business partner – you cultivate a solid, trusting, respectful relationship, through openness, consistency, honesty and humour; you support the Executive’s vision. As a leader, character is your #1 attribute. You push through obstacles, finish what you started, build commitment through collaboration; you are results oriented. You are open to change; you know that there is usually no one “right answer.” You exercise judgment in decision-making, developing group cooperation and teamwork.

**Question: What advice can you give Executive Assistants who want to work as a Chairman -level (C-level) Assistant?**

Assume responsibility to work in partnership with Executives to achieve common goals. Provide expert administrative and technical support, and keep your skills competitive. Your primary focus is mastering the following intelligence: mental agility and brain management; speed and accuracy with a compulsive attention to detail; ability to establish and follow through to completion on tasks; flexibility; global communication and interpersonal competence; analytical, decision-making and problem-solving skills; management and leadership point of view; and the ability to drive results.

Underlying this list is one all-important element: Attitude – that of doing more than expected. A client of mine explains it this way: “An exemplary Assistant is technology proficient, has common sense, and does not make mistakes in judgment. By that I mean that he/she does not lack the ability to diagnose a situation, does not reveal information that should remain in confidence, does not lack an understanding of boundaries, does not act outside of established procedures and policies, and does not argue a point of view.” The Indispensable Executive Assistant has the critical skills of innovation, integrates technology, has independence of mind and is willing to challenge ordinary thinking and the status quo.” A great Executive Assistant must be a good defender of agreed-upon processes.

C-level Assistants know that mutual expectations must be established through open communication for a successful relationship to develop. I am reminded of a telegram sent by a Theatre Producer to George Bernard Shaw: “Send manuscript. If good, will send cheque.” Shaw replied: “Send cheque. If good, will send manuscript.” A solid C-level relationship is not based on a stand-off, or one-upmanship attitude.

C-level Assistants accept the accountability and responsibility to execute efficiently. C-level Assistants know that what is most important is the ability to acknowledge a mistake and to make sure that it is not repeated.

C-level Assistants know that the ability to self-manage is the source of personal power. It forces us to squarely confront our own limitations and motives and to accept the challenge of working to improve our own qualities. This begins with the desire to grow in all areas of our lives: intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual. This requires a work/life balance strategy of good health habits and an exercise routine for stamina, focus and flexibility; time set aside each day for activities you enjoy, and a commitment to spiritual growth to restore harmony.

Paul Hawken, Environmentalist, Entrepreneur and Author, puts it this way: “Always leave enough time in your life to do something that makes you happy, satisfied, and even joyous. That has more of an effect on economic well-being than any other single factor.” Think: Power. Strength. Innovation.

This position is here to stay. Make the most of it…for you and for the person you support. Remember, Indispensability is less about your doing everything; rather, it is about having your vision, skills and influence generate through others.
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The “context” in which we find ourselves affects our reactions, the resources we call upon, our thinking skills and the strategies we use to solve problems or achieve objectives. Context is a theory (mostly unconscious) we develop concerning the world or some event. Our beliefs, our education, the goals we pursue in life and the strategies we implement to achieve these goals shape our personality and the way we experience the world. Based on our real-life experiences, we build our own theory of the world, its events and the people we meet. The interpretation of what we experience becomes a special context to which we relate our thoughts, feelings, emotions, actions and reactions. And so we take for granted that each event is immutable and that it necessarily entails the same thoughts and emotions... every time.

Because of this we act and react according to the significance (context) we attribute to an event, not to the event itself. We almost always forget that an event may be interpreted in a number of ways, caught as we are in the turmoil of our thoughts and emotions relating to this event. Therefore, the context sets its own limits and most of the time, the solution to a problem is found outside these limits.

It becomes unfortunately very easy to create a work environment in which pleasure, creativity and initiative are absent. Managers need only position themselves, either directly or indirectly, as one who always has the last word and demands that everything be done their way, always criticizing the work of subordinates. This attitude kills in employees all desire to excel because the work environment does not encourage it. Fostering excellence, initiative, creativity, pleasure, problem solving ability, involvement, etc. can be done through simple communication strategies. The purpose of these strategies is to enable employees to achieve their full potential and to let them know that they can benefit from your support at all times.

Here are eleven communication strategies designed to help you manage your employees’ potential effectively.

1. Create positive expectations
When dealing with a project or job, create positive expectations by stirring your team’s (or your own) interest. Put emphasis on the interesting aspects of the project but without denying the difficulties that will be encountered. Creating positive expectations is the main foundation of success.
This is also true from a therapeutic point of view. In fact, it seems that the more a person considers he/she can draw human benefits from participating in a therapeutic process, the more the treatment will have a positive effect on that person. What makes work so different?

2. Create an atmosphere of cooperation and get involved
While a project is under way, make sure the entire team works together on any problem that needs solving. Never abandon your team to its own devices. Support turns out to be an essential element of success. When faced with a difficulty, your employees must be able to trust you enough to turn to you for support. This way, there will be no secrets on their part, no lousy tricks and no useless, destructive gossip about people.

3. Define the process that will lead to success
The execution of a project and its deadlines are important, but the “process” by which we attain the final objective is the essential element of success. Never lose sight of the steps that lead to the completion of a project. The wider the scope of a project is, the clearer the steps to its completion must be for all involved.

4. Isolate each problem in time with regard to a specific situation
When you experience a problem, do not generalise by thinking that “everything is going wrong” and that you will never see the end of your project (or task). A problem exists in relation to a special situation and a specific time. Understanding this rule will prevent you from extending the problem to the entire approach inherent to the project and it will be easier for you to find a solution.

5. Think about what you say
There is often an underlying message in the words we say. Therefore, it is important that this second message should not indirectly limit the potential of the people who cooperate with you.

6. Regularly assess your strategies
When using a strategy for a second time fails again to yield results, try to see that your strategy is now part of the problem. Move on to another strategy.

7. Increase the decisional latitude of your employees as you increase their responsibilities
Stress causes more havoc when a person is given a lot of responsibilities but almost no right to make any decisions.

8. Respect your physical and psychological limitations
Employees under stress who are always on the go are the least efficient psychologically. Knowing how to relax is a major asset and knowing how to switch off is a guarantee of performance.

9. Collect as much information as possible
Your point of view is not the only one, just as the point of view of any other does not necessarily have force of law. By not accepting the comments and opinions of others you lose a lot of effectiveness. If you rely only on the opinion of an “expert”... you may lose a great deal.

10. Ask questions instead of making statements
This is an excellent way to look at a situation (or a person) from another angle. This way, you will not impose your vision but will create more ways of looking at the situation or of understanding it.

11. Give feedback to promote learning
Once the project is over, take the time to make a survey of the benefits you derived from it (here I am not necessarily referring to money). This step promotes the integration of the new knowledge acquired and its subsequent use.
These eleven strategies are not the only ones that may be used to alter the context in which we live and work. The question is to rather consider them as a basis for implementation which will help you develop your own strategies.

At this point, you probably now understand fairly well that our vision of the world may be the only thing that can hope to remain stable. In this apparent stability, we constantly find information that has become familiar to us and we feel safe and in control. However, in a given situation there is much more information than we allow ourselves to see. It is this manipulation, this modification of the context that leads us to a much more colourful and stimulating world. At first we are thrust into the unknown to some degree, but the benefits far outweigh the risks.

We will one day have to face the fact that experience is not the number of the years spent doing the same thing. In short, every gesture, every word, every intonation and attitude affects our behaviour and the attitude of those around us. They set limits within which our mind works in order to find the solution to a problem or situation. However, what happens when the solution is found within the mental limitations “within which” we function? The answer is simple: stress, fatigue, a feeling of failure, anger, etc., all types of behaviour that increasingly interfere with our ability to think. Whether the question is to manage the human potential of a team or our own, know-how and strategy are two elements essential in achieving this full potential. Now, let’s have a look at these two elements.

When faced with a problem, a stressful situation or work that requires creativity, the first thing we should question is our way of doing and interpreting things. However, we very rarely realize quickly enough that the solution is indeed “between our ears”, in the way we think.

For example, if you say: “I will never be able to do this”, without ever realizing it, you right away begin to focus on all the elements that are likely to prove your point of view. But if you say: “How can I carry out this project?” you immediately and naturally begin searching for the necessary resources to carry your project through. Say to one of your employees: “Your work is lousy!”, or the opposite: “Good job, but tell me, do you think you could improve the section concerning...?” Which of these sentences do you think will have the best impact?

Most of the time, there is a more subtle but very different message in what we say or think. Thus, you may set limits for yourself that will lead you to failure. The statement “If I haven’t finished this work by next Wednesday then it’s over” leaves you little latitude, because after Wednesday comes failure, even if Wednesday is not really a deadline. Nonetheless, if you say to yourself “I wonder if I will need two or three weeks to do this important work”, you will avoid having to struggle with an illusory deadline to reach success. You are banking everything on success and not on the time in order to assess this success. Subtle, isn’t it? But how powerful!

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Identifying and Selling Your Soft Skills

By Kath Finney

Has your professional training kept you up to date with the skills you need as you progress through your career? You may have undertaken lots of training and be at the forefront of issues and developments within your area of expertise, but highly successful professionals must also possess ‘soft’ skills, which are becoming increasingly sought after within most professions.

Many of us worry about whether we will have good jobs in the future. So how does this relate to you? Academic or technical abilities are not the sole means to higher-level opportunities for most people. To climb the ladder you need to be able to clearly and concisely share your professional expertise with your.

If you are failing to recognise the growing importance of soft skills you could be missing out on excellent opportunities, so identify which skills you have by considering what you do well and how you approach certain situations and problems.

What attributes are regarded as ‘soft’ skills?
Soft skills can often seem so basic they are overlooked, but employers are increasingly searching for more than a qualification:

Interpersonal skills:
These include the ability to lead, motivate and delegate. They are important at every level of organisational responsibility and should always be evident. Being the best in a particular area is not always enough to succeed unless you can combine this with the ability to convince others that what you are doing is important.

Consider a time when you utilised your interpersonal skills to effectively communicate your ideas to others and obtained their agreement, or when you developed a relationship with a co-worker that you disliked in order to succeed for your company.

Team working:
There are two issues a team must consider as a group. Firstly, and most commonly addressed is the task at hand and problems that might be involved in completing it. The second and most overlooked consideration is the process of the teamwork itself and what procedures will ensure the group works cohesively. By acknowledging both of these issues you will be able to clarify group objectives and enhance your team working capabilities.

Lack of evidence that you can work effectively as part of a team is a sure-fire way to eliminate you from the recruitment process. You can demonstrate your team-working skills by recalling, for example, a successful project that you were a part of, what your role within it was and why the project was a success.

Communication skills:
The ability to communicate ideas to others effectively is an absolutely essential requirement for many hiring managers. Speaking clearly and coherently will allow effective verbal communication with others. Bear in mind that how you speak is more influential to the person that you are communicating with than what you actually say, so think about your body language and tone of voice when you are talking. The ability to present comprehensive written ideas will enable you to put forward professional documentation of your thoughts and is a highly regarded skill.

Communication is a two-way process so listening is therefore an essential aspect. Listening is more than just...
hearing what is being said. Effective listening encourages others to listen to you and respond to what you say. If communication skills are an area that you feel you could improve on, set about identifying ways in which you could develop them.

How do I identify my soft skills?
Think about which soft skills you use in your current job - what would your manager say were your strengths? These personal traits make you unique. Maybe you never miss a deadline or perhaps you have a great attitude. Ask friends, family or colleagues to write down your good and not-so-good traits and have a look at consistencies in their responses.

Look into the skills and experiences that would be required in the type of job you are seeking. You can do this by contacting a recruitment consultancy that places people in the particular role you are interested in and asking what the fundamental requirements of this role are.

Transferable skills
If you are looking to apply for jobs that are a bit different from your previous roles, you may be put off because you feel you have no previous relevant experience. While in the strictest sense it could be true you have no exact experience, there may be aspects of the role you have done in the past, but in a different context. Skills you have learnt and developed in one situation that could be used in a different situation are referred to as ‘transferable skills’. Having identified these skills, you can see which would apply to the job you are considering - transferable skills can demonstrate more experience than you might think.

Providing evidence of your skills
The demonstration of your key skills should be something that you do through your CV initially, then follow on throughout the interviewing process and should then be ongoing through your working career. Demonstrate your strengths by finding an example of when you used a certain skill. Think about the what’s, when’s, why’s and how’s of every situation and this should help to communicate your selling points and enhance your credibility.

Developing new skills
Having identified certain skills that you need to improve and develop to match job criteria, you should then develop a plan, identifying your goal and the steps needed to achieve it. Keep the steps small and manageable and put them in a timeframe, defining how you will know when you have reached your goal to measure your success.

Finally, continue to challenge new soft skill sets. Research tells us that continual learning keeps our brains active and therefore our minds healthy. Few jobs exist that do not require learning new skills regularly and everyone can improve certain areas of their soft skills capabilities.

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We’re all thinking about the environment these days, and doing our best to be more energy efficient. Fortunately, there are lots of ways to go a shade greener in everyday office life.

As part of its Greener, Safer, Smarter* campaign, ACCO Brands is promoting its GBC range of laminators and pouches, which are not only more energy efficient but will save you precious time as well.

For example, the entire range of GBC SureFlow and HighSpeed laminators automatically shut down after an hour of non-use. It’s a great energy saver, and one you don’t even have to think about!

GBC’s HighSpeed laminators are around 40% faster than standard machines. This new technology not only saves you time but saves energy too, as the machine is running for less time. For maximum speed and efficiency, use GBC’s unique HighSpeed pouches, which provide a high quality gloss finish up to 30% faster than standard pouches.

For more information on the GBC range, go to www.gbc europe.com

* The Greener, Safer, Smarter campaign is an ACCO brands initiative aimed at all purchasers of stationery and office products. Selected retailers are running special offers and promotions to the end of the year on a wide range of ACCO branded products designed to help you Go Greener, Be Safer and Work Smarter. Just log on to www.greenersafersmarter.com for more details.

**Tips to Try**

- Gloss laminating pouches make colours more vibrant while matt pouches create a smart, non-reflective effect.
- Always feed the sealed end of the pouch into the machine first. This will ensure a wrinkle-free finish and help to prevent the pouch from jamming.
- If you’re not sure of the correct temperature setting to use, try a lower option first. You can always feed the pouch through again if necessary, but your document could wrinkle if you set the temperature too high to start with.
- Laminators are great for home and hobby use too. Try laminating favourite recipes, photographs, drawings and household appliance instructions.
- For more professional-looking posters and signs, consider GBC Peel ‘N’ Stick laminating pouches. Available in A4 or A3, gloss or matt, or A5 gloss only, these pouches have a self-adhesive back for easy mounting on any surface.

Remember lamination is usually permanent, so think carefully before laminating original or valuable documents. Alternatively, use GBC Retrievable pouches if you think you might change your mind!
Happy Holidays—2008
From Everyone At DeskDemon