

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1125 Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills

It's probably been 30 years since I first heard the terms "hard skills" and "soft skills." Little did I know then that one day it would be the foundation of my work. Hard skills and soft skills — which is most important? I'm Jerry Roberts, and today let's dig into that question, next, on The Extra Point.

Let's start the conversation of hard skills and soft skills by giving some examples.

Hard skills are: Operating heavy equipment, making presentations, conducting research, computer programming, auto repair, and any specific competencies needed to perform a task or position.

Soft skills include: The ability to communicate, time optimization, critical thinking, creative thinking, persuasion, collaboration, active listening, problem-solving, conflict resolution, patience, self-awareness, motivating others, getting along with coworkers, working in teams, supervisory and leadership capabilities, and that's not a complete list. All of these things are about playing nice with people.

Hard skills are easily measurable. You know if someone can fix an engine, or not. They can effectively use a software program, or not. They can operate equipment, build something, make the aircon blow cold again — or not. You will know right away if the individual is competent enough to handle the job.

With soft skills, it's not so easy to figure out if the worker has what it takes to manage a team. There are a lot of "moving parts" to a supervisory position, and it takes longer to determine how things are likely to go.

We've had a couple of job fairs recently, and there will be more. These events are a bit of a lottery for employers. They plunk their money down and buy a table, encourage people to apply for their open positions, then try to find

reasons to disqualify most of them, in order to settle on who they hope has the right blend of hard skills and soft skills, and who will be the answer to their current needs.

Once in a while, they'll make a great score as just the right person will come to them, and they'll scoop them up before someone else does. That's a good day. More often than not, HR managers will tell you — if they're being honest — that they just don't know.

The general practice is to hire for hard skills first, without much thought about how well the person will fit into the company and its culture.

The guy tells us he can turn a wrench and he's worked at XYZ Wrenchturners, Inc., so we go with that and offer the job. We don't know if he made the place better because of his sparkling personality, or he had a serious attitude issue and tore it apart. We hope we can ask the right questions in the interview, that will get responses to give us a clue if we should offer the job.

In over 25 years of working in the training and development field, I can tell you that when a company succeeds, it's common for leaders to give credit to highly-skilled workers who deliver great products and services, and treat customers like family," etc.

You don't hear anybody mentioning how well they manage conflict, or communicate, or get along with each other, or any of that other stuff I mentioned earlier.

Here's a dose of reality. Soft skills will tell the story of how well your company does in the long run, especially in the area of retention.

It's well known that when a worker leaves a job, it's often because of a bad relationship with their manager.
(Con't.)

You've heard me say it before: People don't leave companies, they leave managers. They also leave toxic workplace cultures.

When employers fire a worker, it's usually not because he/she can't handle the technical side of the job. It's due to behavioral trouble. They lack in the soft skills needed to function well in the organization. Keeping them around might lead to other workers leaving.

Hard skills are important. It's why customers come to you. You need to make sure you can deliver what they're after.

Soft skills are even more important. Without them, work too often becomes a pain in the backside, and you wind up losing too many of the qualified people you need to provide for those customers.

One more dose of reality. Virtually all of the problems, conflict, and workplace miseries you will encounter are not because people can't do their jobs...but because people lack the soft skills.

Food for thought.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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