

SOFT SKILLS: A STEP TOWARDS SUCCESS

Shilpa Shukla

(Institute research fellow)
e:Indian.sshilpa@gmail.com
Mob: 9451371066

Prof. Niroj Banerji

(Professor)
e:banerjiniroj123@gmail.com
Mob: 7388744182

*Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology, Allahabad.*

A new India is emerging .This is an India with an ascending economic trajectory, rising foreign exchange reserve, global recognition for our technological competence, and about 20 million people of India origin abroad .The Business process outsourcing (BPO) market includes a wide range of services such as design, architecture, management, legal services, accounting and drug development, Quietly but with breathtaking speed, India and its millions of world-class engineering, business and medical graduates are becoming enmeshed in America's New Economy in way most of us barely imagine .(Business week, 8th December 2005).

Indian ranks high in areas such as quality of work, ethics soft skills, the rules of formal relation or polite social behavior among people, in a class of society or a profession, are like a double edged tool which can be used for healing as well as wounding .Wielding the etiquette at the right time and right place works wonders for people, especially the professional one, for it is a world of specified codes. Gaffers are liable to bring awkward moments Savior-faire can help one get an extra edge .Common courtesies like, greeting, politeness, respect, concern, etc,. Which establish trust and credibility, are by all means timeless. However, the adherence to them keeps on fluctuating, sometimes too drastically.

The code might sound outlandish when learnt or initially implemented but not without long-lasting and enriching results. However this world of professional delicacies might be quite precarious and unpleasant when these codes are given a tilted took. This paper attempts to focus on the importance, and judicious use. However, an overdose or duplicated use of it can defeat the very purpose of it which can be easily tackled by sensible and timely reaction.

The agonizing moments after the failure to deal with a person or a situation are strong enough to make one feel frustrated and dejected. The reason lies not in the social inability, for academic expertise is not the only thing required to proceed and be a part of the working culture. Soft skills should be used by all means as they reflect the finer side of the nature. To have a natural and spontaneous response, right course action has to be there; digression are likely to bring in sufferings. Sigmund Freud in his article "Civilization and its discontents" also feels that the suffering comes as a result of "The inadequacy of the regulation which adjust the mutual relationships of human being in the family, the state and society". During their voyages of discovery when European came in contact with primitives, they had a mistaken view of their manners and customs, assuming them to be much below their own refinement. Though it changed with the passage of time, it took centuries to dim that view. When races could be so easily mistaken by the apparent look, why not individuals? The intensity gets accentuated in this competitive world of professionalism where anyone can be taken in by this façade of refined sensibilities.

Keeping up with the accepted code of manners, people should be duly taking care of social etiquette: seniors should be properly greeted, the greetings of juniors should be properly acknowledged, peer should be properly received. In other words, a practice that is going to make one extremely popular with all the age groups "The basis of professional etiquette stands on the ethics of respecting other individual in your workplace and displaying courteous behaviors" towards others. A warm response of greeting makes the day of the

other person whereas a nonchalant and wavy acknowledgment, more so a frown forehead, may bring down the spirits of the other person. Not only the smile but also the politeness of the voice works wonders for the professionals. When a message is conveyed in polite terms, it is immediately accepted but when the pitch is high and expressions dry, then the resistance starts burgeoning. In this world of hierarchy employees can be made to obey the orders but the wholehearted efforts and the easeful respect are to be earned, which no order can do.

It is not that the people should be sensible enough but they should be properly dressed also. **Dressing**, from fulfilling the basic human need has extended itself to expressing one's personality. A part from the basic rules that the clothes should be neat and clean, and properly ironed suitable for the specific occasion, etc. clothes should match with your physique position and personality. Wear clothes that enhance the aura of the personality; clothes should not be allowed the power to overrule the person and put her/him in the background.

Etiquette might not be the true reflection of your moral values but they do reflect the side of your personality; however, their absence makes very conspicuous the dearth of refinement, an essentiality for admiration, attraction and appreciation. However well-read, polite or confident the people might be but when they sense that they are not familiar with the refined and accepted way of delicacies they fail to feel at home with the ambience. Once they become acquainted with these simple but essential codes, they get benefited in numerous ways. They not only learn to dress up nicely but also succeed in revealing their status, temperament, liking attitude, etc. Indirectly their dress code helps them express themselves nonverbally and that too with considerable impact.

Once people start feeling comfortable with the dressing sense, they get infused with the confidence to carry out their social dealings with *éclat*. Undoubtedly, possession of etiquette finally coupled with mature execution

increase the comfort level of the person. Naturally, a cool and composed person turns out to be temptingly irresistible. However, the picture might turn out to be slightly different when a person in order to be the centre of the attention, prefers to dilly –dally with the sophistication of accepted norms of etiquette.

Sometimes, the other people starts considering you a person of the loose values which might turn out to be pretty precarious for your much – cherished esteem. At no cost, etiquette should be the substitute of honor subtle and powerful attribute. The character may or may not be noticed for the first time but there are certain aspect of personality that grab immediate attention .Hence, professionals are to be very cautious with their appearance in public.

Face, the index of the mind, is to be as clean as possible. The need to touch the parts of the face is to be curbed and overcome by all means .To the person who indulges in this kind of pleasure touching the part of the face might not sound absurd, but it presents the another side of your personality which lacks refinement. Be more cautious, if you are the person to be photographed at such occasions. Something done in the fraction of a second gets concrete shape in the snaps and public display of it makes it intensely glaring. Once it gets printed, it becomes a life long document which can not be undone. So to overcome coarseness way is to be learnt to be perfectly at ease with the face, comprising forehead, nose, eyes, chin, cheeks and chin helps people to reflect the refinement of manners. To begin with, corrugating the forehead while listening to others might put them in an awkward position as it indirectly expresses the boredom as well as the absence of refinement. Similarly, blinking the eyes too much, looking blankly, staring at people or not at all looking at them might be the reason of embarrassment for them which as a result might raise questions about your intentions too .A puckered nose is obviously an undesirable facial expression as it seems to highlight open displeasure, an expression negative enough to raise suspicion. Similarly, puckered lips or extension of lips without any movement of cheeks is strong enough to make others smile mockingly.

When face comes in contact with hands, then most of the times, it forces others to question. The real intention of such gesture. Taking out the waste of the eyes, ears and nose in front of others is also not at all a pleasant sight. Similarly; biting nails is sure indication of not only your nervousness but also the lack of refinement.

Though there are certain things over which control can be exercised but **involuntary body reaction** are beyond that type of chiseling. True, human being fails to exercise their power over sneeze hiccups, belching, yawn, etc. and a person like Benjamin Franklin has written a book entitled **Fart proudly** but professionalism expects one to maintain a specific code, even with the involuntary reaction. Sneeze is to be properly followed by “excuse me” or “sorry” tag. Another thing, when you sneeze, the spittle should not be landing on others. Have a handkerchief with you; cover the nose properly so that you can be saved from the embarrassment. When belching, the sound is more loud and distracting when it is done a open mouth. To make it worse, sometimes the smell is too foul. To save the parties from being uncomfortable, keep the mouth closed and let the air pass through the nose. It yields two profits; first, the sound is much mild and second the smell is almost nil.

Bad odours are strong enough for the people to invoke the desire not only to maintain a respectable distance from you but also not to talk to you unless the necessity arises. Even when the distance between the two is much less, try to cover the mouth with hand. However, when people yawn, whether they cover their mouth with their hands or not, it is never met with the approval as it seems to denote boredom. Taking tea, drinking water and washing the face do help people to overcome yawning to a great extent. Take the opportunity to apply anyone of the above mentioned measures rather than let people feel bad and neglected.

Another thing that seems to hurt people at the drop of the hat is the tone of the voice. True, quality of voice is beyond change but adaptation can be brought in to improve the effect. The quality of voice, an intrinsic individual trademark, can be used to convey delicacies, attention and reverence. Like facial expression, voice tone is also a potent traitor, anger; frustration, dejection etc. are strong enough to make the audience feel diffident. Raised volume and pitch are to be trained properly so as not to hurt the finer sensibilities of the other party. If the intention is not to hurt others and then people are hurt it causes uneasiness to the speaker. Little efforts to put a check on tone and pitch can make one appear sensible and considerate to others. A balanced voice, tone inadvertently reflects sincerity and concern.

Voice is a powerful tool to put even ruffled people at ease. However, if the **voice** is not deep, sonorous, resonate, pleasant, soft and twinkling, then one should work properly to avoid any scope of miscommunication. Nasalized, squeaky, grating, hoarse, shrilling voice can put the audience ill at ease. One good way to lessen the ill effect of this type of voice quality is to seek help of proper pace, pause and pronunciation. These features will not only make the message clear but also give the impression of being in perfect control. Voice, a tool that can help the speaker win over others, is to be put to maximum use for making people feel special and properly attended to.

When people are introduced for the first time, the first thing that spills magic is voice, the next thing that elates people is **receptive handshake**. Shake hands properly; come and slightly bend forward to receive the other person. Normally, lower ranked people are introduced first, if you are being introduced to higher ranked person to offer his hand first. If you are sitting, stand to greet other person; If you are talking to other persons and introduced to someone in between, always say “excuse me” to the other party before started talking to the newly introduced person. People get easily floored by humility, Robin also

speaks on the same line when he says, “one of the traits I respect most people is humility”.

Codes play an important role in professional gathering as they have the power to reflect the finer side of the personality. **Listening** attentively and uninterruptedly is one such aspect of your personality that brings you instant appreciation. Those who listen assiduously to others are blessed with an advantage to earn instantaneously respect from others. Interrupting while others are speaking are not the healthy sign of maturity. The best way is to be patient listener and let the other person finish first. If clarification is required or additions are to be made, do it when other person has finished. Keep nodding or continue giving verbal approval when the other person is speaking. Even if the other person gets biased or take a stance, maintain your composure; keep it in the mind it is not your business to rectify people’s personal opinions.

In professional gatherings, people should be very pointed so as to avoid indulgence in irrelevant topics and **sensitive issues**. Personal problems are to be avoided; people are not interested in sagging details and sobbing sagas. Family matters are not meant for professional discussions. Make an extra effort to sustain the level of sobriety even when the people tend to lose their composure and bank on wry and dry expressions. There is no need on your part to answer all the queries put by the other party. Instead, politely the talk can be shifted to something light and interesting by referring to or involving other people present there. A calm and composed voice is a sure shot tool to help one avoid these types of unpleasant encounters.

One of the most important aspects related to etiquette is the way you talk about other people working with you. Many a time, in an effort to show the supremacy of their work, people indulge in fault – finding tactics, a device that never works because by highlighting the faults of others, people can never flaunt their working abilities. Slaves to human vagaries, people involuntarily show a

different side of their personality just to invite the indifference of others. Be **focused** when you refer to the other persons. It is better not to quote anybody than to quote somebody for faults. If you think the work done by you is superior, purely focus on your work with no direct or indirect reference to the others. Those people who do not show any interest in back – biting are liked a lot. In fact, it enhances their level of interest, though not always acknowledged directly but always appreciated instinctively. When people give an ample proof of their mental maturity, obviously these people automatically become brand ambassadors of their representative companies. By taking care of some seemingly small but important aspects people earn immense respect.

Though professional world is a coded world yet there are agreed – upon but **unspoken binding** which are to be religiously followed. Professional world demands punctuality at the workplace. When amidst the meetings, Switch off the mobile, if someone urgent call is expected, keep the mobile on silent or vibrant ring tone. If urgency demands you to talk during the meeting, take permission, go outside, and finish the call as soon as possible and come back. When back, quickly trace the trial of the meeting. Resist the temptation to talk to one another when meeting is going on. Similarly, the habit of looking into the diaries of others in order to find out what they have written or noted down is to be curbed by all means. If clarification is required, raise the hand and seek it directly from the person concerned. Cultivate the habit of overlooking trifling sounds and religiously avoid laughing out loud. If you forget the name of anybody and situation demands you to address the person, ask the name and politely say that you are sorry for not being able to recollect the name. Make the juniors feel comfortable by not being too stiff but do not take the liberty to be too informal with the seniors' courtesies to feel one with the group. “Not to mention it is far easier to simply say “No thank you” and “good bye” than getting worked up and feeling guilty later on.”

Everything has its positive and negatives; etiquette can also have some of the drastic side effects. Society has set up certain yardsticks to maintain decorum and order for sufficient handling of social affairs. Those people who maintain these codes are respected and liked by many. In order to be liked and respected by others, some people tend to set their life style strictly according to these codes which tend to sap their originality. There is no need to blindly follow what others do or say because diversity makes the circle complete. So retain your own liking, disliking, ambitions, dreams, fear etc .to remain in touch with your original self. The way you allow the clothes speaks and earn respect for you, similarly allow your self to earn a place for yourself. If people follow others blindly, it might lead to unhealthy development in the society. Carl Jung is specifically in his observation regarding this out of the way practice for societal approval:

It arose when people come to know about the mechanism of the neuroses, which threaten to undermine the modicum of happiness enjoyed by civilized men. It was discovered that a person become neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of cultural ideas, and it was inferred from this that the abolition or reduction of those demands would result in a return to possibilities of happiness.

To sum up, etiquette, the agreed upon rules for maintaining social harmony are essential part of human life. Knowledge about these codes is the first stage. After knowledge implementation takes place which again is guided by many factors. True, people should follow the specified code system but it should be properly adapted to suit the individual healthy needs. Blind adherence to them can be deadly as it might defeat the very purpose of it. Codes are to be followed to be one with the others but certainly not to be away from your own self.

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