

Workspace Affects Soft Skills

My inspiration for writing comes from a lot of sources. This month, it came from a client who sent me a Forbes article written by Dan Schawbel titled, "10 Workplace Trends You'll See in 2018." The number one trend Schawbel predicted for 2018 was that more human interaction would be encouraged by leaders.

Successful leaders have strong soft skills as well as technical and intellectual skills. Soft skills are your people or interpersonal skills. Studies have shown that employees are more committed, satisfied and productive when they work in an environment where they have personal connection and friendships with the people they work with. That environment is influenced as much by the workspace as it is the culture.

While Millennials and Gen-Z were raised in the digital era, studies have shown that at work, they choose in-person conversations. The new digital era has increased our reliance on technology, but also increased a need for workers to be flexible to complete non-routine tasks and to be creative to solve problems in a team-oriented environment. One way that companies are adapting to these new realities and encouraging conversation is with a shift from remote-working programs to facilities designed around collaboration and information sharing. Google, Apple and Facebook are leading that change from the cubicle designed office space to one that encourages cross-communication within teams and across departments. The physical working environment heavily influences employee productivity and is a factor in attracting top talent.

According to a 2017 study conducted by Ipsos, 76 percent of millennials feel somewhat or very strongly that office design and aesthetic influences their impression of

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a company and 70 percent of all respondents who work in an office environment say that they wished their workplace would consider a design upgrade. When was the last time you evaluated the way your company uses its space or how individual teams use the workspace they have?

Improving Soft Skills

As leaders, you need to evaluate ways you can improve your soft skills and encourage your employees to work on them as well. As managers, it comes naturally to work on high-order thinking soft skills like problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making. We tend to focus on these skills because we have seen direct success from projects where someone identified an issue and took information from multiple sources and determine the optimal outcome given those options. Companies need to provide training in soft skills, invest in emerging leader programs and encourage mentoring to become more successful and efficient.

Social skills – Interpersonal contact is the base of most social skills and it starts with respecting others, using appropriate behavior and resolving conflict positively. As the pace of work continues to increase, patience often seems elusive. Learning patience and empathy starts with keeping in perspective that you are not the only person in any given situation. To be an effective leader, you must be aware of how another person's thoughts, feelings or opinions fit into the situation at hand. You also need to understand your leadership style and recognize the different styles and approaches of others. Focusing on social skills means turning off auto-pilot and being present and engaged with the people around you.

Communication – We communicate with others orally, in writing, non-verbally and with our listening skills. They are the most commonly sought-after skills by employers and ones we need to be teaching employees from management down to entry-level employees. One of the first places you can focus is on improving your

listening skills. Most of us let our minds wander when other people are speaking because most people talk about 125 words per minute while we think four times faster than that. Research shows this results in us not remembering 50-75% of what we hear. Practice being an active listener by paying closer attention to what is being said without thinking of a response. When it is your turn to respond, pause before you speak so you can take a moment to choose your words and their effect. Also, ask questions to gain deeper understanding, and paraphrase back, before making your own point, to make sure you understood the other's point. As Stephen Covey said, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood" is a great philosophy for listening.

Self-Control / Time Management – Our internal controls drive how well we manage our time, direct and focus our attention, control our behaviors, and manage our emotions. One place to start improving these skills is to consciously think about how you are spending your time. Identify work you can possibly drop, delegate, redesign, outsource or postpone. Look for ways you can shift the balance of your work and free up 30 minutes each day to prioritize your immediate and important deadlines. You can achieve remarkable results by adding a start/stop/continue component into your schedule.

Self-awareness / Self-confidence – Being self-aware and understanding your beliefs is relayed to others in how we project our self-confidence and self-esteem and is necessary to perform well in your job. Balancing your self-confidence with self-awareness is key to people liking you. Developing self-awareness helps orient you to what you need to learn and what areas you need to improve and lets you take better advantage of negative and positive feedback from others. Developing self-

confidence gives you the confidence to feel good about yourself in new situations and feel at ease communicating with new people which can translate into better relationships with others. Cultivating a better understanding of who you are, your values, your strengths and the things you need to work on is a lifelong process.

Enhancing your 'soft' skills and your environment to help you better lead, manage and work with the various generations will help provide the flexibility to be successful in today's challenging business world. Harmony is here to help you with organizational development consulting, professional development program and individual coaching. If you're ready to take your organization/department or yourself to a new level of effectiveness and efficiency give us a call for a complimentary consultation at 901-272-7390 or bburtch@harmonycc.net.



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Schedule of Public Courses

The following courses are being offered to the public by Harmony Coaching & Consulting. Click on the associated link for more information on the program or to register.

Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
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TBD Summer 2018

