

Investing in Soft Skills is Investing in You and Those You Serve



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You have tremendous power to affect the behavior of the people with and for whom you work. It is your personal approach that creates the climate and your daily mood that creates the weather patterns where you work.”

Haim Ginott, an educator and psychologist, developed this statement to help individuals understand the power they have. As a counselor for more than 30 years, this statement, for me, highlights the potential we have to impact those with whom we interact. Most importantly, it is our personal approach that impacts others, either positively or negatively. It is our approach that is the foundation for trust, a core philosophy of both the SHIP and SMP programs.

Think for a moment of a time when you have gone to a professional for assistance and felt as if they were distracted, not paying attention to your story, or just rude. Now think of a time when you felt respected and listened to. Most of us have, at one time or another, experienced both of these. More often than not, their personal approach, not their technical knowledge, defined the experience.

Understanding the difference between technical skills (hard skills) and personal approach (soft skills) is especially important for those in the helping professions. Why? Because every interaction we have with a volunteer or beneficiary is far more than just the act of disseminating information. We are building relationships and creating experiences that help those we are working with feel listened to, respected, and safe. We are building trust. This, in turn, enables us to be more effective at doing our job.

Despite the term “soft skills,” there is nothing abstract or unmeasurable about them. In a given situation with two people having similar technical skills, the difference in performance is that of soft skills development.

It has been my experience over the years that a great deal of time and resources are spent on training and supervising hard skills with

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little investment into soft skills development. Hard skills are critical, but as mentioned above, outcomes are often driven by the degree of soft skills. It is not so much the what but the how.

No matter how seasoned of a professional you are, whether just starting out or with years of experience, you should always invest in improving your ability to more effectively and efficiently build a relationship with those you serve. I would like to suggest that with regularity, each of us pick a soft skill to develop or improve upon. The list below is a good place to begin.

- Self-reflection/bias/self-awareness
- Engagement
- Empathy
- Active listening
- Flexibility
- Effective use of humor

We are all very busy, and time is precious. However, investing your time developing or improving these skills will save you time in the long run and ensure better outcomes for beneficiaries. It is not easy. It takes time and commitment. Decide which one you will work on, do your research, and develop a plan. From years of experience, every time I learned a new skill or improved upon one, I always felt better about the work I did. More importantly, those I worked with benefited as well. →

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

*Resources from the webinar **Using Soft Skills to Enhance Medicare Counseling** are available in the SHIP and SMP Resource libraries. Use keywords "Soft Skills."*