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Horizons

People Skills: A Must for the Changing World



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“Our people are the difference,” is the advertisement tagline for Lubbock, USA-based Mighty Wash car wash chain. People make the difference in a society, emphasizing the importance of skills needed to live and be successful in the world such as collegiality, leadership, and effective communication. It is critically important that children right from elementary school days are imparted social skills such as living in a multicultural society, reasoning, and respectful communication, to name a few.

Given the ongoing global stressful scenarios, whether it is the war in Europe or lower consumer confidence due to sluggish economic growth, it is evident that proper and timely communication with stakeholders will do the trick. Can such social skills be taught formally? Yes and No! However, an easy way of imbibing these skills is through acquiring and following role models, as students tend to follow their peers rather than parents' guidance.

Art of communication, developing leadership attributes and more importantly learning to be collegial will guide us towards growth.

Seeking a Role Model and Following

To be successful, we come under constant stress of being compared right from younger days. However, this situation can be turned into a positive one, if we pick up a role model of one's liking and learn positive attributes from role models who are leaders in their own way. The culture of following and even worshipping them is in many societies. The well-read Indian epic text Ramayana begins with eulogizing a role model Sri Rama. More importantly the classic text begins with a great social lesson, "art of effective communication." The text begins as a conversation between the writer Sage Valmiki and the teacher, Sage Narada. Such pearls of wisdom are found in many texts that are read in many cultures.



Dr Tosha Dupras

Positive role models are successful people in chosen fields that serve as motivators. "Motivating behavior includes deep listening and recognizing individual communication styles," opined Dr. Tosha Dupras, Dean of College of Arts and Sciences at Texas Tech University. As role models are in public domain, they endeavor their best to conduct and communicate well. "Being the positive person with a very approachable personality, no matter the size of the task or issue, cultivates strong team player confidence around the office. Positive attitudes are contagious around the living space," aptly stated Brad Thomas, IT Specialist at Texas Tech University A way to be successful is to pick someone with a positive attitude as a motivator and influencer.



Dr Manickavasagam

For students, teachers are influencers and play a vital role in development. Invariably, everyone in their life would encounter some influencer, it is up to us to utilize them in a positive way. I had been blessed to have met Dr. Manickavasagam Sundaram, MD, Ph.D., who practices medicine in Lakeridge Hospitals, Oshawa, Canada, when our paths crossed during doctoral studies at the University of Leeds, U.K. His life is a lesson for me and others, which motivates me till this day to move forward in my life. Having come from a remote village in South India, by sheer confidence, desire to excel and self-motivation Manickavasagam has climbed the rungs of the professional ladder. Many a times I have listened to him motivating me during my stressful PhD days using philosophical motivational songs by Tamil poet Kannadasan. Not only the sayings motivated me, but also the aspect by which Dr. Manickavasagam goes out of the way to communicate with others using likeable songs, and anecdotes is worth pointing. Another aspect I learnt is how to navigate complex issues in society and professional space. Dr. Manickavasagam Sundaram always advises, “do not let others know what you think immediately.” What a sage advice! If we guard our thoughts before we spill it out, many complications can be averted. In other words, being diplomatic and conveying thoughts without confrontation is the best communication and management lesson. He practices in positive sense what the Chinese Thirty-six Stratagems, “Deceive the heavens to cross the ocean,” relays. Such acts are worth watching and practicing enabling us to be successful communicators and diplomats.

Communication is a skill and an art. “Communication is key to conflict resolution – listening to all parties involved to understand the root of the conflict, and then seeking a common ground to try to reach a resolution,” opined Tosha Dupras. Communication can be learnt by watching positive people in the family, neighborhood and the society-at-large.

Colleagues at work are often best source for knowledge and support. A valuable colleague will not only focus on his/her growth, but will providing an enriching workplace. Interesting views were shared by Brad Thomas, who stated, “I try to consider how I can be more valuable around the workplace. By being an enabler and supporter, it will not just give me job security but will make others appreciate me or make their job easier.”

Skills for Successful Career

Being an effective and impartial leader is important in project management and professional life. Leader needs to be a motivator and influencer. “To motivate their colleagues, a leader should be an effective communicator, both individually and to the group, and should lead through example,” stated Dr. Tosha Dupras. Being there with colleagues and showing up in meetings and activities matter. “One must take their job as a passion no matter what job it is,

provided we have accepted it. By doing a job with sincerity, peers will recognize, and rewards will follow,” pointed Ms. Lori Gibler, Assistant Director for Information Technology at The Institute of Environmental & Human Health at Texas Tech University. In the present-day scenarios with multiple stressful situations, team leaders have a greater role to play. “Staying composed and calm is essential, along with effective communication and listening, so that everyone can express their experiences and concerns. An effective leader will also provide support and resources and will take action to help resolve the situation,” noted Tosha Dupras.

An important attitude in our society and in profession is to get along with folks. “Being easy to work with is by far the most important thing within colleagues at a job. It is easier to serve alongside each other by being mentally flexible,” advised Brad Thomas.



Losses and barriers must be turned into successful pathways, agrees Brad Thomas. Citing his career when he started working as graphic designer for a phone directory company, technological developments washed out the phone directory companies, Brad acquired IT skills and used the barriers as steppingstones towards a successful career at Texas Tech University. “I was motivated by what hurt me at first to end up being helpful with my career,” said Brad Thomas.

As is evident from the views of those highlighted in this article, we can learn a lot from our living and working spaces. Every day is a beautiful day which comes with new experience. Lifelong learning helps us in many ways. We learn by watching those around us and by seeing what happens around us.

One can accomplish a lot by reasoning with people and not being argumentative—an important people skill indeed! Attitude is our choice. Particularly, as most of us spend more time outside our homes, friendly approaches help. Brad Thomas interestingly notes, “I am in workplace for a majority of my “awake hours”, so I might as well enjoy my time, and be a “friendly neighbor.” That’s positive way to move along!

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