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Finding Your Edge - by Casey Gillespie**Where Do You Stand?**

How do you fare in social situations? Hmm, that's what I was afraid of. We all know people that are social geniuses. They have that incredible ability to say the right thing, have impeccable charm, always maintain good eye contact, and of course have flawless body language. We hate them. Well, not really-we just want to be like them. How can they influence people and have this amazing ability to make others bend over backwards for them? It's just not right.

Now, I'm not saying that I believe the rumor that IT people are less adept than the rest of the population when it comes to social skills-I'm just telling you what I have heard. I do know, however, that with a little training and practice of your own, you too can become savvier in social situations

Why You Want 'Em

Soft skills refers to everything from your ability as a salesperson, to how you write a business letter-consequently two of the areas that the mere mention of can cause panic in most independent professionals. Just remember that soft skills really aren't that important unless you interact with colleagues, present and potential clients, staffing firms, have any

kind of face-to-face meetings, written correspondence (either the traditional way or email), or ever talk on the phone. So, if you never do any of these things, stop reading right now.

However, if you do participate in any of the above-mentioned activities, you should consider what kind of professional impression you are making. The professional impression you make on your clients will determine what kind of confidence they'll have in your technical skills, as well as your ability to draw up a contract.

Identifying With the Masses



There are two areas that most people could use improvement in. The first is salesmanship. How do you feel about cold-calling clients? I'm guessing that, like most people, you hate it. People are afraid of sounding foolish. They have anxiety about starting a conversation or coming across as too pushy. Unfortunately, if you let your fears get the best of you, the person on the other end of the phone line will be able to sense that.

The second most common soft skill anxiety that people suffer from is writing. Some people actually put off correspondence (some times indefinitely), or err on the side of formality so that the message is never correctly communicated.

The good news is that you can get help with both your salesmanship and business writing skills.

Getting the Help You Know You Need



Many training companies and local colleges offer basic courses in sales training. They will cover the art of cold-calling clients, as well as other things like closing the deal or handling customer complaints.

Getting assistance with writing anxiety is a little more involved, but as it turns out, is also very rewarding. Again, you could look to training companies and colleges in your area, but other options include using templates from a self-help guide, or searching and downloading templates from the web. However, templates are not going to improve your skills in the long run—you will have to rely on (inexpensive) writing courses for business professionals for that.

What You Don't Know Will Hurt You



It's easy to seek help for your soft skills...if you're aware of your weaknesses. It's a lot tougher to improve the things that you don't know you are flubbing up. First, find a trusted colleague, friend, or family member and ask for their insight. Ask them to be completely honest in disclosing what it is that you lack in social situations. Explain to them that you need complete honesty if you are going to make your best possible impression with business contacts. It might turn out that you just need to work on your eye contact or sounding more upbeat. Take

this feedback seriously, and then practice, practice, practice. More often than not, the mere fact that you are aware of your shortcomings will force you to deal with them.

So until next week comrades, remember: you don't have to be a social victim-there are options out there.

Casey Gillespie

"Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it" ~Abraham Lincoln

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