

'Essential skills' are key to success

By Tara Puckey

While your knowledge of the law is a must-have to run a practice, essential skills are key to running a *successful* practice. According to research with Fortune 500 CEOs by the Stanford Research Institute International, 75 percent of long-term job success depends on people skills while 25 percent depends on technical knowledge.

These skills go by different names: soft skills, essential skills, people skills. No matter the name, there's a growing recognition that elements like leadership, culture, authenticity – the list goes on and on – are required for success. A recent survey by LinkedIn showed that 57 percent of employers feel their employees need more soft than hard skills. In response, organizations and companies are doubling down on their efforts to teach current and future leaders more about the traits and skills necessary to strengthen the foundation of any business – the people.

As an attorney, your foundation is broad. Honing essential skills allows you to better connect with employees, clients and the communities you serve, all things that ultimately create a lasting practice. However, it's often a difficult transition

from the traditional focus on billable hours, leveraging, business development and profits to an investment in what many consider to be more basic skills.

Learning to thrive in the essential-skills arena takes more than just a quick read of the latest leadership best-seller. Investing in training and self-development courses is high on the ROI list, and it all starts with a deep understanding of leadership and some of the traits and skills needed to put it into practice *for* your practice:

Emotional intelligence: Hand in hand with authenticity, emotional intelligence allows leaders to connect with others in a meaningful way. Showing empathy, understanding and managing emotions, and mastering a keen perception of relationships are all essential qualities that allow leaders to develop strong and loyal circles.

Visionary: Building – and implementing – a strategic vision for your practice isn't just some nice thought on your website. It should drive every decision you make, every employee you hire, and every case you take. Without it, it's challenging to make educated decisions about what you want your practice to look like in the future and nearly impossible to figure out how to get there.

Agility and flexibility: Future workplace changes are happening at a breakneck pace. In fact, the half-life of a learned skill is just five years, meaning that much of what you learned 10 years ago is obsolete and half of what you learned five years ago is irrelevant. Because of that, it's essential that leaders anticipate a variety of shifts in the workplace and not view change as a burden but as an opportunity to grow and innovate.

Collaborative: Leaders in the workplace are stepping out from behind their C-suite doors and learning that productivity is tied to a collaborative spirit. A

heavy focus on professional development and deep understanding of employee strengths and weaknesses are both necessary to boost growth of both staff and the practice overall.

Authentic: Long gone are the days where work and personal lives were buttoned up and separate. Today coworkers and clients thrive on building personal, authentic relationships with each other. Showing up in a consistent way that demonstrates your values and morals, and finding a variety of ways to connect personally, will go a long way in establishing loyal employees and clients.

Culturally intelligent: As the country grows more diverse, employees, service providers and clients will reflect that diversity in a variety of ways. A successful practice requires leadership adept at appreciating and leveraging differences, understanding individual perspectives, and building a welcoming environment and culture for all.

Tech savvy: Artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, blockchain and big data – technology is moving at a rapid pace, creating big ripples of change throughout every industry, including our legal system. The ability to understand what technology can do for your practice is essential, and a curiosity about what's coming next is key. 🔄



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