Improving Your Soft Skills
Agenda

- Improving Your Soft Skills
  - How to Improve Your Soft Skills
  - Building Productive Relationships
  - Challenging and Improving the Process
Work has both a “Hard” and a “Soft” Part.

The “Hard” part has to do with all the technical things.

The “Soft” part has to do with all the people who do the technical things.
For most of us, our formal education has concerned itself with the “Hard” part.

The “Hard” part is easy.

It’s the “Soft” part that is hard!
We do know what to do -
“It may be common sense, but it is not common practice.”
Source unknown
Can you improve your soft skills?
Three Ways to Learn Soft Skills –

- Learn by doing
- Learn through others
- Formal education
Learn By Doing

- Challenging experiences!
- Reflect on your experience
  - What worked?
  - What was right about it?
  - How could you have done better?

WARNING
Challenges Ahead
Learn Through Others

- Observe others
  - Role models
- “Teachers”
  - Coaches
  - Mentors
Benefits of Mentoring

How much of an impact does coaching or mentoring have on career success?

Source: Development Dimension International, Global Leadership Forecast of 4,561 respondents from 42 countries.
Formal Education

- Education
  - classes
  - seminars
  - workshops
  - reading
  - surfing the net

- Assessments
Some Ways to Measure Progress

- Have an HR person (or someone you feel comfortable with) interview your direct reports
- Take an assessment (self and/or observer) every 6-12 months
- Get informal feedback from peers
- Other?
Sample Leadership Assessments

- Leadership Practices Inventory - Kouzes & Posner
- Checkpoint 360 - Profiles International
- MAPP - The Orris Center, Inc.
- Leadership Effectiveness Profile - HRD Press Online
- The LeaderScope - Cook & Company
- Women’s Leadership Style Survey - The Leading Edge
- 360 Leadership Assessments - Franklin Covey
People perform the work

Teamwork requires relationships
Developing productive relationships between “team” members is the first key to leading a high performance team.
Research done by Profact (Carl Larson’s company) analyzed 100 social science research studies on factors that would improve team productivity.
As a team, take 10 minutes and:

Share a “best practice” for getting a team to open up. This can be a best practice you have used, has been used on you, you observed, or read about, or you just know.
Where does respect and trust come into the equation?

- Openness: Up to 37%
- Affection: Up to 30%
- Knowledge: Up to 21%
- Connection: Up to 16%
Other Employees

The Project Team

Boss(s)

Subcontractor(s)

Technical

The Customer

Administrative

Operations

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Challenging the Process

Don’t be afraid to question, if we don’t question we don’t grow.

Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.
Creating a Positive Work Model

Our Typical Work Model:
work hard, go to the office early, stay late, come home exhausted, always meet deadlines, and...

...look for what’s wrong, so we can point it out and they can fix it!
Because of this, our learned approach to improvement is:

Look for what is wrong or broken.

Point it out and have it fixed!
What if our approach was to:

- Look for and celebrate what’s currently working
- Describe what would be the ideal
- Focus on filling the void

“Breaking the Rules, Removing the Obstacles to Effortless High Performance”, Kurt Wright
Look for and celebrate what’s currently working

- What does the new CEO do first?
- Do they look around the organization for what is working?
- Do they look around for what is broken?
Describe what would be the ideal

- How do you “help” your boss give a better performance review?
- Here is what I liked about the review
- Here is what would have made it even better
Focus on filling the void

• Based on where you “are” and where you want “to be”, what can you do to close the gap?
• Don’t look for a silver bullet, look for small steps that will move you closer to the ideal one step at a time

Fix the problem, not the blame!
As a team, take 10 minutes and:

What you like about this approach to improvement.

How would mistakes be viewed if you were to use this approach to improvement.
Change Attitude and Thinking by:

- Looking for and celebrating what’s currently working
- Describing what would be the ideal
- Focusing on filling the void

Getting knocked down in LIFE is a GIVEN. Getting UP and moving FORWARD is a CHOICE. ~Zig Ziglar
Focusing Energy

At any moment we can have positive or negative thought patterns running through our mind.

*Enlightened Leadership* (Getting to the Heart of Change), Ed Oakley and Doug Krug, Simon and Schuster, 1991
How we primarily focus our thought patterns will cause us to be proactive or reactive in our thinking.
Reactive thinking

Reasons (why, why, why, ....)

What's not working?
What's wrong?
How are you going to “fix” it?
Who is to blame?

Proactive thinking

Results

What's working?
What's right?
How can we make it even better?

“Enlightened Leadership"
Ed Oakley and Doug Krug
Reactive thinkers see change or crisis as danger.

Proactive thinkers see change or crisis as opportunity.
Both views are right...

...which view you take will have a profound effect on your energy level.

Even when given a negative view you can describe it as positive and get rather than lose energy.
By understanding and focusing on this (the positives),

1

2 we get to this

3

We can still have the same number of negatives, they just aren’t as big now!
Effective Questions

The leader doesn't need to know all the answers...

...the leader only needs to know the questions which are effective in helping others to discover the answers they already have.

“Enlightened Leadership”
Ed Oakley and Doug Krug
The questions we ask of ourselves and others are very much like switches to creativity...

We have the ability to throw the switch into either the "on" or the "off" position.
Questions which can be answered without the possibility of making a mistake throw our switches into the "on" position and allow us to apply our intuition. Questions in this form are called...

...Effective Questions.
Effective questions are any positive-focused questions which allow you to explore your intuition, examine patterns, and develop ideal solutions from the integration of many parts.

Examples:

- “What 2 or 3 things are currently working?”
- “What can you/we do differently to improve?”
- “How can we turn this into an opportunity?”
- “How can we make this a win/win?”
Effective Questions – What and How

- What can be done to minimize the impact?
- How do you feel about your progress?
- What are the keys things that need to occur to achieve your objectives?
- How can you build on your current successes?
- What can we do to start to turn the project around?
- What do you need from management to help you be successful?
Ask **what** and **how**, not **why** if you want proactive answers.

The **why** questions move us to the left side of our brain and can cause us to limit our response and be reactive.
Conclusion

- We can improve our soft skills – practice
- There is a process to building productive relationships
- Use the 3-step approach to improvement
- Focus on the positive
- Ask effective questions
Soft Skills -

“If you care it shows, if you don’t care it shows.”

Marc Hanson
Questions / Open Discussion

Thank you for attending