Soft Skills Are Just as Important as Technical Skills and Knowledge

There are two types of skill sets which students need to develop: hard skills and soft skills. Both are extremely critical when working with and caring for patients. Hard skills are the hands-on, technical, and procedural skills you learn in labs and clinicals which allow you to perform your job effectively. They include things like taking vital signs, administering medication, providing wound care, inserting catheters, drawing blood, and running lab tests.

Soft skills are the social skills you need to communicate effectively and get along in the workplace. Soft skills include “personality traits, positivity, cordiality, work ethic, dependability, workplace etiquette, behavioral competence, emotional intelligence, reliability, communication style, personal habits, optimistic attitude, interaction, and unspoken social graces that come together to render someone a desirable employee” (“Hard and soft skills,” 2016, para. 8). Soft skills are so important in nursing and the health care environment that they are sometimes seen as more valuable than hard skills and technical knowledge. The thought is that technical skills can be taught more easily than soft skills, which tend to be personal characteristics or skills that have been developed over a period of time (Hard and soft skills," 2016). Employers are very aware of their value.

Soft skills that are especially critical for nurses and lab technicians include excellent communication and interpersonal interaction skills, leadership abilities, professionalism, flexibility, a positive attitude, the ability to work well under pressure, and a sense of commitment. Employers also want employees that are team players, creative thinkers, and problem solvers. Here are some reasons why these soft skills are important for you to have.

**Communication**
It’s important that you are able to listen, understand, and give instructions. When communicating with patients and colleagues, you need to get your point across without being forceful or uncompromising. Unlike most other professions, you also need to be able to handle face-to-face and phone interactions with patients, family, and friends that can be accompanied by tears, anger, and even violence. You should also be comfortable voicing your opinions in an appropriate manner to someone in a position of authority even when you disagree, especially when it involves patient care (Liebrecht, n.d.).

**Interpersonal Interaction**
When interacting with patients, be sure to make and maintain eye contact, be aware of your patient’s and your own facial and body language, listen to your patient and not just hear what they’ve said, and be positive and friendly (Liebrecht, n.d.). Patients report that the better the interactions are with their nurses the more they are satisfied with the care they’ve received.

**Work Ethic and Commitment**
Managers look for employees who are reliable, dedicated, hardworking, and cooperative because these things increase productivity and strengthen their team. They are also looking for people with strong character who are diligent, honest, trustworthy, and have a strong work ethic; these qualities are important for all those who interact with patients. According to the National Soft Skills Association (2016), employers want employees who are committed and need very little supervision or motivation to do their best and get the job done.

**Leadership Skills**
Leadership qualities are valued by employers; they look for people who lead by example, are constantly looking to improve, are self-motivated and positive, show initiative, and know when to follow directions. Set a good example for those around you to follow, and you’ll be seen as a leader (National Soft Skills Association, 2016).
Flexibility and Attitude

In healthcare facilities, a patient’s condition can change quickly as can the duties you perform. This requires you to be adaptable and flexible. It’s important that you take things in stride while remaining positive and upbeat; doing so will make your patients comfortable and more positive as well (National Soft Skills Association, 2016).

Being a Team Player

A good team player works with others to achieve the team’s goals, so you need to be willing to listen to others, be open and honest, and offer helpful suggestions. You may need to jump in to help fellow employees when you have the time; if you do, there’s a good chance that others will do the same for you. In general, most people don’t mind helping people who are willing to help others.

Creativity and Problem-Solving Skills

The ability to apply both logic and creativity to solve problems is a highly valued trait as well. If you’re the kind of person who tries to see the solution as well as the problem, you’ll be a great employee (National Soft Skills Association, 2016). Good critical thinking skills and the ability to think outside the box are necessary and make you more productive.

Ability to Work Under Pressure

Healthcare workers find themselves in a high stress environment much of the time they are at work. How you handle yourself when you’re under pressure says a lot about you. You should be able to decide quickly which approach will achieve the best results and then get the job done; you need to be using critical thinking skills as you do so. Employers want to know you can put stress aside and focus on the task in front of you (National Soft Skills Association, 2016).

These are just some of the many soft skills that effective nurses and lab technicians have and use along with their technical skills. They are especially important because of the environment in which they work and the kinds of clients with which they interact. If you don’t have some of these critical soft skills, you can and should work on developing them. Certain ones are easier to improve upon, while others may be more difficult, but a positive attitude and confidence in your abilities can go a long way.

If you have these skills, be sure to highlight them on your resume and application forms, and develop interesting examples of when you’ve used them in your work or personal life to talk about when interviewing for jobs (National Soft Skills Association, 2016). Keeping up with school work, a job, and/or children requires you to be good at managing your time, working under pressure, being creative, and communicating well. These skills are necessary for nurses and lab technicians too, so make sure to let potential employers know this.

It’s important to communicate your passion for what you do whenever you can. Managers are seeking employees who don’t consider their job just a paycheck, and you never know when you might be speaking with someone that can see your passion and be in a position to further your career.

You are being taught the technical skills necessary to provide patient care, but it’s just as or more important that you develop or sharpen the soft skills necessary to take patient care and interactions to the next level. When competing for jobs with others with the same education and training, your soft skills may well be what sets you apart. Keep in mind that technical skills can be taught more easily than soft skills, so take some time to evaluate and develop your soft skills.

References

