



Noncognitive Skills Play Important Role in Student Success

Defining Noncognitive Skills

Noncognitive, or soft skills, have become a point of emphasis for both educational leaders and business executives. Most people agree soft skills play a greater role in student and career success than previously realized. College administrators want to know how to teach these skills, and future employers want their applicants to have them. Disagreement arises when it comes to a definition on which people can agree. While InsideTrack's coaching methodology, which continues to evolve, doesn't align with a particular definition, its core elements: knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs address various soft skills. More behavioral in nature than a "hard" skill such as typing or math, they include time management, persistence, teamwork and adaptability. Coaches discover their students' core beliefs and then build out knowledge, skills and attitudes where necessary.

Evaluating a student's core belief is an important start to assessing soft skills, said InsideTrack Coach Kate Mills. She determines this in part by asking questions such as: What keeps you going after getting a bad grade? Are you able to ask for help? How do you manage your time?

"I want to understand where that belief comes from, the skills a student already has in place, and what they use currently so I can better understand where the gaps are."

Kate Mills, InsideTrack Coach

The next step is to fill in those gaps by helping students develop habits for success. Mills also stressed the importance of celebrating success which helps enforce future positive behavior.

If your student manages one stressful situation well, then he or she will more likely tackle the next one the same way. Mills said students can use developed skills from academia in other parts of their lives and vice versa. Time management plays as important a role in building strong study habits as it does in conducting a job search, managing multiple projects simultaneously at work or juggling kids' after-school activities. Employers expressed concern that many job seekers lack the necessary noncognitive skills so critical for achieving goals in school, at work and in life.

"While there are many factors that come into play here, it is a fact that some less-qualified candidates are chosen over more-qualified candidates simply because they have stronger soft skills than their more-qualified counterparts."

Jessica Simko, in a Careerealism article

This same article listed the six most critical soft skills as:

- Honesty and integrity
- Strong work ethic
- Emotional intelligence
- Self-motivated
- High energy/positive attitude
- Team player

How it works

At its most basic, InsideTrack's coaching model aims to help students improve their ability to learn and succeed in school and in life. The core methodology, comprised of knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs, combines cognitive and noncognitive skills, enabling students to navigate academic and/or career situations and have tools to handle future predicaments. The student stories below illustrate how seamlessly we have integrated soft skills into our coaching strategy.



Knowledge — Planning/Problem Solving

Unsure of his career goals, Jared* found this contributed to his ability to handle some day-to-day issues. As a low-income student, he got buried in financial minutiae, needing a deposit of \$200 and having a flag on his FAFSA form. The details impacted his commitment and resilience. His coach helped him learn how to let go of career uncertainty and how to find helpful resources. He received a waiver on his deposit and fixed his financial aid form with a phone conversation.

Skills — Communication

David*, like many other college students, hates team projects. A high achiever, he doesn't like to depend on others for his grades. As he faced another team project with a random group of students, he found himself completing all the work alone and shared his frustration with his coach. His coach reminded him that as a business management student he will likely face similar situations in the work environment. Coaching helped David shift his perspective about the intention of team projects and challenged him to communicate with and motivate his team. He identified the need to emphasize deadlines and the importance of each part of the assignment as his keys to success.

Attitudes — Persistence

An adult student, Rob* struggled with numerous issues including caring for an autistic child and health concerns after a recent surgery. He had to ask for one extension after his operation but felt embarrassed and depressed about asking for another when he didn't heal as expected. Having a sounding board helped him rediscover his persistence to pursue his goals. He opted to take only one class at a time in future to avoid school and other responsibilities overwhelming him.

Beliefs — Confidence

Michael* used GI Bill funds to earn a degree following his military service. While this put him in a strong position to attain future career goals, he struggled to translate his military skills to fit the requirements of the civilian jobs for which he applied. Michael got discouraged about what he had to offer and if anyone would hire him. His coach spent time learning about his military experience and helped him understand the transferrable skills to his new career. This guidance gave him the confidence about what he brought to the table and changed the way he communicated his skills to future employers.

* Names have been changed