Building an Effective Soft Skills Training Program

A Guide for Talent Development & Human Resources Professionals

emergenetics®
INTERNATIONAL

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PART 01

What are soft skills?

If you search the term

soft skills   🔍

online, it is defined by Google as

"personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people."

At the heart, soft skills are all about people skills. They are the abilities that allow you to navigate your environment, work well with others, perform and achieve goals.

While many interpersonal skills can be considered "soft skills," they most commonly include:

Communication

Teamwork

Problem solving

Critical thinking

Emotional intelligence

Conflict management

Persuasion

Professionalism

These interpersonal skills are essential for success in the workplace, yet talent development professionals often face challenges in getting support for soft skills training as well as effectively implementing and sustaining these programs.
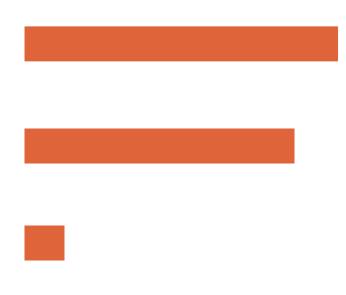
How can you help employees build soft skills to support your organization's success?

Read on to learn how to promote soft skills to your organization's leaders and use Emergenetics® to create a strong, sustainable training program.

Why are soft skills critical to business?

Whenever you plan to take time out of your employees' days for training, it's important to understand why the training is worth it.

Managers and leaders are validating the impact of soft skills at work:

77% of employers
believe that soft skills are equally important to hard skills in the workplace *(Career Builder).*

67% of HR managers
say they would hire a candidate with strong soft skills even if their technical abilities were lacking.

Just 9% of HR managers
would hire someone with strong technical credentials but weak soft skills *(International Association of Administrative Professionals, OfficeTeam and HR.com).*

Employees are also interested in building their own interpersonal aptitudes:

In a survey of more than 4,000 professionals, **the number one priority** for developing talent is soft skills training *(LinkedIn's 2018 Workplace Learning Report).*

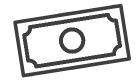**75%** of long-term job success relies on soft skills *(BizLibrary)*.

76% percent of workers are looking for career growth *(Clear Company).*

80% of workers agree that being given the opportunity to learn new skills at work would make them more interested and engaged in their jobs *(TLNT.com).*

Quite honestly, businesses can't afford to overlook soft skills:

Miscommunication costs companies of 100 employees an average of **$420,000 per year** *(SHRM).*

Soft skills training in areas like communication and problem-solving boosts productivity and retention **by 12%.** This type of training delivers a **250% return on investment** based on higher productivity and retention *(Boston College, Harvard University and the University of Michigan).*

Managers who incorporate a range of soft talents into their leadership approach can increase their team's performance by as much as **30%** *(Hay Group).*
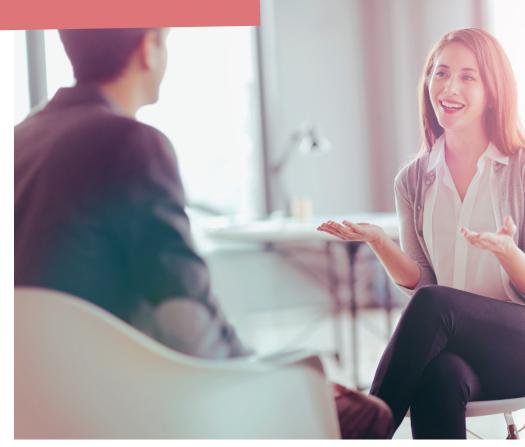
The reasons to invest in soft skills are staggering, so what holds talent development professionals back?

What challenges do talent development professionals face in promoting soft skills?

As with any training program, talent development professionals need to balance a variety of organizational challenges, such as:

- Volume of training needed
- Employee time constraints
- Resource allocation
- Budget availability
- Return on investment

HISTORICALLY, talent development and human resources teams have been encouraged to prioritize hard skills over soft skills because the outcomes of technical training are seemingly easier to quantify. So for executives that focus on impact – as well as active employees who want to get the most out of their work hours – hard skills often take priority.

However, attitudes are shifting as

leaders, managers and employees are interested in making soft skills a top priority this year

(LinkedIn's 2018 Workplace Learning Report).

As talent development professionals address this need in 2018 and beyond, they should be cognizant of two additional challenges that come along with implementing soft skills training:

1 / HELPING INDIVIDUALS UNDERSTAND WHEN TO APPLY THESE APTITUDES.

In technical training, there is typically an obvious time to implement learnings. For example, let's say your employees were trained on a process for accepting new vendors. When employees start to engage a vendor, they have a clear signal to use their training.

Employees do not necessarily have unambiguous signals to use soft skills training, so talent development teams need to find ways to help employees understand when and how to employ their learnings.

2 / ENCOURAGING FEEDBACK.

Providing real-time, constructive feedback on employees' soft skills helps them connect behavior to performance, encouraging them to remember and apply their training. Help managers overcome the challenge of finding the best time and space to deliver ongoing advice.

How do you start implementing soft skills training?

To be successful, you need to understand your organization's goals and effectively evaluate your options.

1/ IDENTIFY EXISTING BUSINESS CHALLENGES.

The most successful talent development programs are tied to core business challenges or opportunities. Consider what you are trying to solve with your training programs.

Some organizations may notice large-scale challenges that could be addressed with soft skills training like:

- Missed deadlines
- Poor internal or external communication
- Conflict within teams
- Customer service issues
- Negative leadership or management reviews

Other companies may simply receive requests from leadership and employees to:

- Deliver leadership development programming
- Strengthen team performance and problem solving
- Create a more collaborative, supportive culture
- Drive employee engagement and retention

Be clear about what challenges your team plans to address through the development of soft skills.

2/ EVALUATE WHAT PROGRAMS HAVE OR HAVE NOT WORKED IN THE PAST.

Work with your fellow talent development or human resource team members to identify programs that have been successful and why they were successful. Use these questions as thought starters:

- What are you trying to achieve?

- What soft skill trainings, if any, have you implemented before?

- What types of trainings do your employees most enjoy and get the most out of?

- What types of programs work best in your company? Two-hour, half-day or full-day programs? In-person or eLearning courses? A combination?

- What training pace works best for your employees?

- What strategies have worked in the past to keep trainings top-of-mind after they have concluded?

- What would success look like for this program in the short-term and long-term?

3/ RESEARCH OPTIONS.

Now that you have an understanding of what challenges you want to solve and what types of trainings have worked in the past, you can begin evaluating workshops and programs.

As you research your options, make sure to ask your potential partners how they have helped businesses address the challenges and opportunities you see within your organization.

4/ FORMULATE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS AND BUILD YOUR CASE.

After you've conducted your research and made your selection, start building your business case and be sure to answer the following questions:

- What business challenges will be addressed with this program?
- What data supports the effectiveness of the training?
- How does it fit into your organization's strategic initiatives?
- How will you communicate about the training, roll it out and sustain it?
- What are the project timelines and milestones?
- Who will be involved?
- How will you measure success?
- How will you adjust course?

5 / GET APPROVAL AND BEGIN IMPLEMENTATION.

Once you receive support for your soft skills initiative, use your business case to create an action plan for implementation. Consider the why, how, who and what, and gain momentum for the program among leadership, managers and staff.
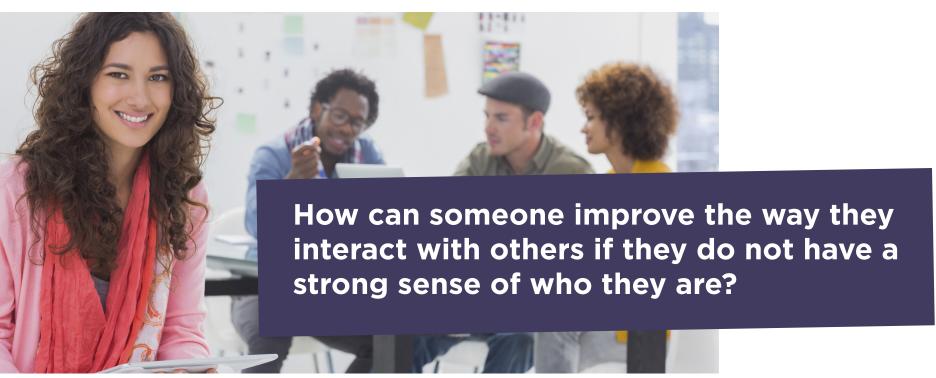
6 / EVALUATE.

After you've implemented your solution, the work isn't done. Set metrics and make sure that you regularly assess the program. Report on the success you have seen as well as any changes you are making to optimize the trainings so that management teams continue to see the value of your program.

What is the Emergenetics approach to building soft skills?

It starts with self-awareness.

To strengthen an employee's interpersonal skills, the first thing they need is to develop a better understanding of themselves.

How can someone improve the way they interact with others if they do not have a strong sense of who they are?

Our approach begins by supporting employees on their journey to self-awareness through the Emergenetics Profile.

Backed by decades of statistical analysis, the Profile uncovers how employees' minds work by revealing their preferences for four Thinking Attributes (Analytical, Structural, Social and Conceptual) and three Behavioral Attributes (Expressiveness, Assertiveness and Flexibility).

For context, here is a snapshot of each of the seven Attributes:

Analytical — Combines rational thought with abstract ideas. Those with an Analytical preference tend to be logical problem solvers and interested in the "why" behind it all.

Structural — Combines sequential thought with practical ideas. People with this preference like guidelines and details and bring order to chaos.

Social — Combines intuitive thought with love of people. Those with a Social preference tend to be relational and empathic to others.

Conceptual — Combines intuitive thought with abstract ideas. Conceptual thinkers are imaginative and like the big picture.

Expressiveness — The amount of participation with others and the world around you. First-third Expressiveness tends to be more introspective, while third-third Expressiveness tends to be talkative. Second-third Expressiveness depends on the situation.

Assertiveness — The style and pace with which you advance thoughts, feelings and beliefs. First-third Assertiveness tends to be peacekeeping and prefers a gentle pace, while third-third Assertiveness may be more direct and driving. Second-third Assertiveness depends on the situation.

Flexibility — A person's willingness to accommodate the thoughts, actions and feelings of others. First-third Flexibility prefers to stay focused and firm, while third-third Flexibility welcomes change and loves options. Second-third Flexibility depends on the situation.

When employees understand how they tend to think and behave, they gain insights into themselves, their gifts, how they like to process information and the way they prefer to communicate. They also begin to understand how to best work with each Emergenetics Attribute, setting the stage for strong soft skills development.

Ongoing Practice

While self-awareness is the starting point, building soft skills takes sustained practice, so we offer a number of practical tools that use the Emergenetics Attributes to help employees, leaders and teams strengthen their soft talents, including our:

MEETING OF THE MINDS WORKSHOP, which helps individuals and teams realize the importance of each Attribute and identify ways to better interact and work together.

POWER OF WE WORKSHOPS, which help intact teams address a number of soft skills, including respecting differences, building trust, accelerating performance and supporting innovation and problem solving.

INDUSTRY LEADING MOBILE APP, which gives employees customized tips to improve collaboration and communication with colleagues.

ATTRIBUTES IN ACTION TOOLS, which provide tips to managers and employees to help them be more effective in their jobs, such as communicating to the different Attributes, giving feedback, managing disagreements and delivering recognition.

By using Emergenetics' experiential workshops and practical tools, employees significantly improve their soft skills.

What does that look like over the course of one year, two years and three years?

Based on your organization's goals, needs and size, the specific programs you use and how quickly you go through each stage will differ. Here is a look at how you can apply Emergenetics to affect change through soft skills development in your company.

1 / Year One
Build the foundation for soft skills through self-awareness.

STRATEGY:

Your first year begins with a focus on building self-awareness across your organization and helping all employees appreciate differing perspectives. Only after employees understand themselves can they consider how their thinking and behavioral preferences impact their work with others.

Understanding the way they typically approach situations and how others may do so differently will help employees see the power of cognitive diversity and recognize that they may need to adapt their styles to improve communication and collaboration.

PROGRAMS:

As you build the foundation, we recommend that you certify at least one member of your talent development team in Emergenetics, so you have in-house expert(s) who can lead Emergenetics programs, optimize them for your company's goals and help staff build interpersonal skills.

Get your company leaders involved first to maximize buy-in before expanding to staff. Have your leadership team take our Profile assessment and experience a Meeting of the Minds, so they understand the experience employees will have and begin realizing the benefits in their own work with each other.

Schedule additional Meeting of the Minds with managers and expand to staff to allow for a purposeful introduction of Emergenetics.

As you grow your program's reach, employees at all levels will understand their preferred ways of thinking and behaving as well as identify the needs and gifts of each Emergenetics Attribute. This understanding builds employee soft skills by helping them gain a foundation to improve communication, teamwork and emotional intelligence.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

Provide personalized Tip Sheets, which offer communication strategies based on an individual's Profile, to employees and encourage staff to read their Narrative Reports to gain deeper insights into their own leadership styles and communication needs.

Encourage staff to post their Profiles next to their desk so the Attributes remain top of mind and staff remember the preferences of their colleagues so they can consider how best to approach each other.

Prompt employees to download the Emergenetics+ app and connect with co-workers, so they can get customized tips to improve communication with one another.

By incorporating these tools into your employees' everyday work, they begin to apply their soft skills.

MEASURING IMPACT:

Use survey data to understand the impact of Meeting of the Minds. To simplify the reporting process, we offer a survey that all Emergenetics Associates and clients can use.

Consider implementing pre- and post-tests to assess how individuals retain information from the workshops and understand the program's impact on soft skills like communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, persuasion and others.

2 / Year Two
Strengthen soft skills within your teams.

STRATEGY:

Once employees have an understanding of who they are, they can turn their attention to how to enhance their interactions with teammates and colleagues.

The Meeting of the Minds helps employees recognize the needs of each thinking and behavioral Attribute and provides insights on how to improve communication and teamwork amongst all Attributes. However, managers and staff still need help making the soft skills they learn through Emergenetics part of their daily interactions.

Start year two by focusing on building soft skills within teams.

PROGRAMS:

While new staff members continue to take the Profile and participate in Meeting of the Minds, in the second year you may start selecting relevant Power of WE workshops to address common team challenges. Topics include:

- Accelerating Team Performance
- Building Trust
- Managing Change
- Respecting Differences
- Fostering Innovation
- Crafting Team Norms

Teams learn how each Attribute approaches these topics and develop soft skills such as problem solving, communication, conflict resolution, teamwork and more through the lens of Emergenetics. In each workshop, teams develop personal and group action plans that put their soft skills to the test to maximize their work together.

Through Power of WE, Meeting of the Minds and the Profile, your staff will improve individual and team interactions, supporting stronger relationships, teamwork, problem solving and communication.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS:

Provide managers with Tip Sheet Booklets for details on their team members' Profiles and how best to work with each other. These booklets can also help individual team members improve collaboration.

Use Emergenetics to improve interactions, product rollouts, customer service and even product development by encouraging teams to:

approach every project through the Emergenetics Profile template.

Doing so ensures that every thinking and behavioral Attribute is considered, resulting in better solutions and more successful implementation.

Help your leaders create WEteams, which is a group of individuals that have every thinking preference and a range of behavioral preferences represented. By bringing together cognitively diverse groups – and using Tip Sheets, the Emergenetics+ app and Attributes in Action tools to support collaboration and communication – you will start to see improved problem solving.

After year two, your teams will be better equipped to effectively work together.

MEASURING IMPACT:

Survey data from Meeting of the Minds will continue to remain relevant. To assess success within teams, collect survey data on your Power of WE workshops and review metrics like meeting deadlines and productivity to see how WEteams are operating.

You may also consider tracking team projects before and after implementing the Power of WE sessions to learn how these trainings have impacted productivity, timelines and budget tracking.

3 / Year Three
Drive self-sustaining soft skills programs within your organization.

STRATEGY:

By year three, individual employees and corporate teams have a strong foundation for interpersonal skills, and your talent development team has laid the ground work for self-sustaining soft skills programs.

Continue to support all levels of your organization by maintaining your foundational Emergenetics tools (like the Profile, Meeting of the Minds and Emergenetics+) for all new hires to ensure that staff understand themselves and have the tools to strengthen interpersonal skills. As teams change and grow, use Power of WE to support their continued development.

Now that your talent development team is well versed in Emergenetics principles, you can bring the Attributes into your leadership development and coaching programs to help upcoming leaders and managers lead more effective teams.

PROGRAMS:

To ensure sustainability of your programs, certify additional Emergenetics Associates within your organization as your initiatives grow.

Continue working with intact teams on their challenges through Power of WE. Use the Emergenetics Profile and Meeting of the Minds to support your onboarding efforts so that all new employees gain self-awareness and an appreciation for cognitive diversity, which are the building blocks for strong soft skills.

Weave Emergenetics into your management and leadership development programs. As you build your next generation of leaders in your company, work through one-on-one coaching and group sessions to help managers use the Emergenetics Attributes in Action tools to employ soft skills and strengthen their leadership.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS:

Make interpersonal skills a focus for onboarding by having all new hires take the Emergenetics Profile and participate in a Meeting of the Minds.

Encourage staff to download the Emergenetics+ app, and provide updated Tip Sheets and Tip Sheet Booklets to teams as they grow and change. This will foster continuity in your soft skills training by delivering targeted, practical communication tips.

Use Attributes in Action tools to develop one-on-one coaching sessions with managers and support leadership development workshops. These tools will guide your programs and help managers and leaders develop the soft talents they need to lead teams and manage their one-on-ones. Topics include:

- Communicating effectively
- Giving feedback
- Resolving disagreements
- Setting goals
- Delivering recognition
- Presenting

These programs will help address the fact that

44% of employers

believe today's job candidates lack the necessary soft skills to be successful on the job.

MEASURING IMPACT:

In addition to your Meeting of the Minds and Power of WE surveys, track pre- and post-assessments of new hires to evaluate how confident employees feel in using soft skills.

Use management reviews and performance reports as a benchmark for how soft skills have evolved and how to judge the effectiveness of your coaching and leadership development programs.

As you look to the future of your talent development programs, our team is available to support your vision and help strategize about programming, trainings or tools that can help your employees master soft skills and support other talent development initiatives.

By making Emergenetics part of how you onboard and train individuals, teams and leaders, you will see significant improvement in the way your employees interact with one another, manage communication and problem solve, resulting in a powerful return on investment for your organization.

How can you sell soft skills to your executive leadership team?

If you're excited about building up employees' soft skills, one of your first milestones will be selling your training program to your executives.

In an ideal world, your leadership team will be a WEteam, with every Emergenetics Attribute represented. However, even if your executives are not a perfect WEteam, you should still use the Emergenetics template to guide your pitch.

After all, once you get the OK from leadership, you'll need to share it with the whole company, and you are bound to see all of the behavioral and thinking preferences represented there.

Use this template as a starting point for engaging leadership in your soft skills training proposal.

Analytical

Analytical thinkers are interested in hearing about the data behind your solution and how it will impact the bottom line.

Refer to Chapter 1 of this eBook for stats about how soft skills are critical to career progression, the cost of miscommunication and the ROI.

Ask for help from your partners to show ROI. For example, our Emergenetics team can provide case studies and survey data demonstrating the impact of our solutions.

Conceptual

Conceptual thinkers are imaginative and visionary. They tend to love new ideas.

Tie the training into your organization's vision and share how your program will help your employees achieve it.

Talk about the exciting possibilities for the organization brought about by these trainings.

Structural

Structural thinkers are interested in learning how this solution is going to work and how it will be practical.

Provide them with an overview of the implementation plan and timeline for your program.

Describe how your soft skills training will be applicable and practical.

Social

Social thinkers are empathic and want to know how this solution will impact people.

Talk about how your soft skills trainings will support employees and leaders in their development.

Describe how it will foster stronger relationships within and between teams.

💬 Expressiveness

Some people prefer to process information internally while others prefer to do so externally.

Invite individuals to provide feedback about your program via email.

Provide an option where individuals can come speak with you directly.

🚗 Assertiveness

Some of your staff will want to keep a steady pace, while others may be more inclined to race towards the finish line.

Provide a realistic timeline for your implementation plan.

Include some stretch goals to support on-time or faster completion.

🪧 Flexibility

Some of your team members will be thrilled to learn about new programs while others may be interested in maintaining the status quo.

Provide an explanation for why you feel a different approach to soft skills training is necessary.

Offer some thoughts on areas where you'd like to reflect on other approaches to your proposed solution.

PART 08

Next Steps

Now is the time to assess your existing training programs and make changes to support soft skills development for employees so that you can achieve better organizational results.

You may be convinced, but where do you start?

1/ Consider what business opportunities or challenges you feel could be addressed by strengthening your employees' soft skills.

2/ Identify the outcomes you are looking for.

3/ Consider the process you need to go through to evaluate your options.

4/ Determine who needs to be involved to make this happen.

5/ Consider how those individuals prefer to be communicated with.

6/ Set a timeline for your activities.

7/ Get started on evaluating your options.

Building an effective training program to support soft skills within your organization will strengthen your employee development, providing you with more effective leaders and team members as well as more productive teams, delivering better results for your organization.

If you're interested in speaking to one of our team members about how Emergenetics' approach to soft skills can support your talent development needs, connect with us at 303.660.7920 or <u>softskills@emergenetics.com.</u>