

# Developing Soft Skills for Future Hospitality Leaders: A Case Study

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## Management Dilemma

Sara considered herself to be a good assistant manager for her restaurant. The restaurant is part of a large, corporate chain. This restaurant chain has definitive policies on performance appraisals, and has a performance appraisal that is hierarchical, where it is based on simple goals for hourly personnel, and gets to be more complex with each and every managerial level. The performance appraisal has objective and subjective components, and is designed to help all members of the chain restaurant. The restaurant chain places value in customer service, and even has a customer loyalty program that tells management how satisfied the customers are, and how likely they are to return. The chain restaurant thus places emphasis on soft skill development. When it comes time to fill open positions, the restaurant first looks for internal candidates. The restaurant chain also believes in external recruiting, but mainly for beginning management level positions.

The general manager has given Sara positive feedback on each of the technical skills involved in her job. Her strengths were controlling labor and food costs, sanitation, and especially customer service. The identified weaknesses were Sara's concern. These included time management, creative problem solving, and subordinate relations. Sara's concern was that she did not recognize these as weaknesses, so she asked the general manager for help. Sara was referred to the human resource department to help with self-awareness, self-assessment, self-management, and development of soft skills. Sara is given the task of studying the idea of soft skills, and the following paragraphs will help Sara with the task of developing her own soft skill competencies. This self-development plan will enable Sara to become the complete manager, and get her ready for advancement within the company.

## Teaching Objectives

1. Describe the differences between hard and soft skills
2. Identify the five key factors that make up soft skills and the 33 specific skills these include
3. Describe the workplace benefits when soft skills are present among employees
4. Apply the five factors of soft skills to a hospitality business setting
5. Analyze the human resource functions that allow for soft skill

development

6. Assess your soft skills using the five factors model
7. Formulate your plan for improving personal soft skills for your professional development

## Introduction

Companies select from their pool of applicants those they consider to be the best fit for their organizations. Though most companies still assess the capabilities of the applicants by testing, others are not always concerned with the technical skills of their entry level managers because they have already in place a training program that will equip them to be compliant with company standards. However, most companies will select the applicant with the soft skills needed to be viable within the environment of their organization.

Companies spend billions of dollars on the training and the identification of hard and soft skills. Plus companies also spend on methods to develop the skills that help maximize these dollars. According to Roberts (2000), U.S. businesses spend \$62 billion a year on training programs. According to Roehl and Swerdlow (1999), the largest companies in the U.S. spend an average of 2% of their total time on training, while Japanese and German companies spend 10% of their time on training. Recruiters wish to match the right individual to their organization in the hope of ensuring retention. By identifying essential soft skills, recruiters will be more successful with matching the best applicant with their vacant position.

Definitions of the terms hard skills and soft skills have been proposed by many authors (for example Clark, 1993; Wellington, 2005; and Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, & Lay, 2002). Hard skills are normally associated with technical aspects of performing a job. These skills usually require the acquisition of knowledge, and are primarily cognitive in nature, and are influenced by an individual's intelligence quotient score. Soft skills are defined as the interpersonal, human, people, or behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace (Kantrowitz, 2005; Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, & Lay, 2002). The terms hard and soft skills have developed over the years as a way of identifying characteristics and skills needed to be successful in management positions.

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## Background—Soft Skills in the Workplace

Katz (1974) placed the skills required by effective managers into three categories, technical, human, and conceptual. Technical skills are detail-oriented skills that are required of entry-level managers. An example is calculating food cost in a restaurant. Human skills are those interpersonal skills needed to be able to manage a group of people or interact in a one-on-one format. Team building and communication skills are examples of human skills. Conceptual skills are the planning and visioning skills needed by managers. Decision-making and forecasting are examples of conceptual skills (Katz, 1974).

Sandwith (1993) identified five competency domains for management training: (a) conceptual/creative, (b) leadership, (c) interpersonal, (d) administrative, and (e) technical. These domains are similar to the categories identified by Katz (1974). The conceptual/creative domain corresponds to the conceptual skills category, the technical and administrative domains correspond to the technical skills category, and the leadership and interpersonal domains correspond to the human skills category.

The terms hard skills and soft skills are based on these categories and domains. Hard skills correspond to the skills in the technical and administrative categories and soft skills correspond to the skills in the human, conceptual, leadership, and interpersonal categories. Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, and Lay (2002) classified the competencies of superior managers identified by Spencer and Spencer (1993) as hard skills or soft skills. Only three of the twenty competencies were classified as hard skills (analytical thinking, conceptual thinking, and technical expertise) with the remaining seventeen classified as soft skills. The categories of the soft skills include: achievement and action, impact and influence, managerial (team management and developing others), and personal effectiveness (Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, & Lay, 2002). Finally, many times researchers refer to soft skills as competencies.

## Soft Skills in Hospitality Management

The identification of competencies needed by hospitality managers has been investigated since the 1980's. Tas (1988) reported a list of 36 competencies required for management trainees. These competencies were divided into essential, considerable importance, and moderate importance. In the essential category, the six competencies were all related to soft skills needed to develop good working relationships with customers and employees. In 1994, Okeiyi, Finley, and Postel, included soft skills as essential competencies for food and beverage managers. In a study to determine competencies needed by hospitality and tourism graduates, Mayo and Thomas-Haysbert (2005) found that communication skills and the ability to manage and motivate subordinates were ranked as two of the most important skills.

Johnson, Ghiselli, Shea, and Roberts (2011) reviewed the literature over the past 25 years and identified the changes in competencies required for managers in the U.S. lodging and food/beverage industries. Competencies that have remained on the list of required skills include the soft skills of communication, customer focus, interpersonal skills, and leadership.

Gursoy, Rahman, and Swanger (2012) identified changes between 2004 and 2009 in industry professionals' expectations for hospitality schools. Industry professionals were asked to rate the importance of subject matter areas for hospitality curricula. Leadership, a soft skill, was ranked the highest in the 2009 survey.

Soft skills were also identified as important by Sisson and Adams (2013). The authors surveyed recent program graduates to identify competencies that were essential for entry level managers. Sisson and Adams reviewed 20 articles on competencies required for hospitality managers that had been published between 1994 and 2011 as a source for the competencies used in the survey. The 33 competencies identified in the literature were divided into 3 categories: hard skills, soft skills, and mixed skills. The hard skills category included 13 competencies. The soft skills category included 16 competencies. The mixed category included 4 competencies that were viewed as requiring both hard and soft skills. The authors reported 12 of the 14 skills rated as essential were classified as soft skills. The top 5 essential skills included the soft skills of developing positive customer relations, working effectively with peers, professional demeanor, and leadership. Sisson and Adams investigated the differences between the ratings given by 3 groups of managers. The categories for the 3 groups were food and beverage, lodging, and meetings and events management. No significant differences between the 3 groups were found for competencies rated as essential. Significant differences were found between the groups for the 8 competencies related to supervising employees. In all cases, food and beverage managers rated the competencies as more important than meetings and events managers (Sisson & Adams, 2013).

In addition to these studies, competencies needed for managers in the hospitality industry have been identified for club managers (Perdue, Ninemeier, & Woods, 2002), information technology managers at the hotel property level (Cobanoglu, Pelin, & Poorani, 2006), hospitality managers at different organizational levels (Kay & Russette, 2000), in the United Kingdom (Baum, 1990), in Spain (Agut, Grau, & Peiro, 2003), and in Australia (Dimmock, Breen, & Walo, 2003).

## Soft Skill Results

In prior studies, the researchers developed a list of competencies based on the review of literature. Using the literature review, the researchers and a Delphi panel of HR professionals identified 116 competencies. The competencies were then combined into 7 catego-

ries of soft skills: 1) communication (C), 2) performance management (PM), 3) self-management (SM), 4) leadership (L), 5) interpersonal (IP), 6) political/cultural (PC), and 7) counterproductive (CP) (Weber, Crawford, Rivera, & Finley, 2010). After an exploratory factor analysis, the 116 competencies were placed into 5 factors representing a total of 33 competencies (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013).

The first factor was labeled team developer. The soft skills included in this factor relate to an entry level manager's ability to create trust and rapport with the employees while cooperating, listening, and ultimately creating a team environment by working as a team member. Teamwork is essential in hospitality. Although there are many different departments and work groups within a hospitality organization, they must all work together in order to meet and exceed the needs of the guest (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013).

The second factor was labeled coach. This factor assesses an entry level manager's ability to develop staff members through training, evaluation of performance, recognition of others, and motivation. Coaching is important in the hospitality industry as it is an industry plagued with high turnover (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013). Krell (2012) states that the annual turnover rate averages 15% across all industries, but companies in the accommodation and food/beverage industries have the highest annual turnover rate of 35%, followed by the arts at 27%, and health care having 20% turnover. Coaching and developing staff has been shown to improve commitment and job satisfaction while decreasing one's intent to leave the organization (Krell, 2012).

The third factor was labeled destroyer. This factor includes the negative skills that can be brought in with an entry level manager. These soft skills can create a negative work environment which has been shown to impact absenteeism as well as job satisfaction. There has been a lengthy debate regarding the primary determinants of job satisfaction and subsequent turnover (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013). Some researchers believe that structural or organizational characteristics of the job are the primary determinants (Kulik, Oldham, & Hackman, 1987) while others believe that personal or individual characteristics of the workers are more important (Hackman & Lawler, 1971). Employees are less likely to respond in a positive manner to a manager that micro-manages, acts aggressively, or makes inappropriate comments.

The fourth factor was labeled problem handler. This factor focuses on an entry level manager's ability to respond to situations in a favorable or appropriate manner. In an industry that is focused on service and perception, this soft skill is essential. An entry level manager that can manage impressions, who can be culturally adept, and who can respond to customers in a productive manner is an asset to any hospitality company (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013).

The final factor was labeled influencer. This factor focuses on the ability of an entry level manager to see the bigger picture and to work with employees to achieve results. This is done through the use

of creativity/influence and is shared with other employees through feedback for improvement and enhancement of the employee's performance. The importance of influencing the work of others to achieve results is a key component of this factor (Weber, Crawford, Lee, & Dennison, 2013). See the Appendix for the model.

## Conclusion

Many hospitality recruiters hire for personality. Part of this personality that recruiters want is the individual's soft skills. As managers advance within the organization, the individual soft skills become more important. Self-confidence, bolstered by self-awareness and self-management, is important at upper levels of management. Personal abilities form the basis of motivation, drive, and behaviors that are needed for success. As managers move along in the hierarchy, decision making and critical thinking skills are required. These types of skills are less programmed. Successful hospitality managers need to practice these skills every day.

Today's hospitality manager must have a variety of tools to achieve personal goals, as well as organizational goals. Therefore, the manager must develop themselves, achieve tasks, and establish the team. Interpersonal soft skills are the basis for these goals. With soft skill development, communication will improve. Leadership, team building, and empowering others are soft skills that are used to develop a team that will deliver excellent customer service.

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**APPENDIX**

**Soft Skills Model**

Using the following, assess your performance for each soft skill by rating it from 1 to 5, with 1 being poor performance, 3 being average performance, and 5 being excellent performance.

Soft Skills	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Team Developer:</b>					
I act with integrity.					
I act straightforward and honestly.					
I follow through on commitments.					
I inspire trust through honesty.					
I act courteously and respectfully.					
I admit mistakes.					
I cooperate with others.					
I develop rapport.					
I hear other points of view.					
I listen to concerns.					
I promote a team environment.					
I am a team player.					
I show interest in others.					
<b>Coach:</b>					
I articulate expectations.					
I coach/train others.					
I develop others.					
I evaluate performance.					
I identify talent.					
I motivate others.					
I recognize peoples' efforts.					
I delegate duties to others.					
<b>Destroyer:</b>					
I act aggressively.					
I gain power to influence others.					
I make inappropriate comments.					
I micromanage projects.					
I talk before thinking.					
I under/overestimate my own skill.					
<b>Problem Handler:</b>					
I manage impressions.					
I modify my reaction to cultures.					
I respond to upset customers					
<b>Influencer:</b>					
I act creatively and try new ideas.					
I give feedback effectively.					
I influence others					