

Foreword from Industry

A recent report by a global research firm has indicated that the Indian IT industry is targeting multifold growth in exports in the next couple of years. This directly translates to an estimated demand of 850,000 IT professionals and 1.4 million ITeS-BPO personnel. Since Indian academia adds close to 3.5 million graduates and postgraduates every year, on the face of it, this does not seem to be a major challenge. But a large number of these young professionals are not adequately equipped to face the highly competitive and very demanding corporate world of today. Most of their focus in the technology domain remains limited to working as a one-man army reproducing what they read, with little emphasis on application and creativity. This makes it very difficult for them to work in teams. There is a need to polish their skills with respect to disciplines like documentation, systematic processes and all-round excellence.

In my view, the above problem of people not being able to work in teams and not being able to write or follow documentation is a symptom of a more deep-rooted problem—that of a lack of proper imparting of soft skills in aspiring students. We in the corporate sector want the students to be ‘industry ready’. By that I mean that they should be able to get into a job and be able to contribute right from day one—they should hit the road running. That is not happening today. The main ingredient missing in the making of a perfect professional is that of non-existence of what goes by the generic term ‘soft skills’.

It is in this context that this book *The ACE of Soft Skills* is very relevant, and addresses some of the core issues we need to retrain our students and professionals in. It is rare to find a book that provides in one place a compendium of all relevant skills, starting ground up from the basic attitude and going through the layers of communication and etiquette. From the industry perspective, I think some of the most relevant aspects that caught my eye in this book are the following:

- ▶ As we move towards globally distributed teams, which is more a norm than an exception in the IT and BPO sectors, it is essential that the Indian employees should know how to cope with and appreciate *diversity*.
- ▶ As India makes more advances in the BPO space, it is likely that the Indian professionals may be performing activities that are essential for business success, but may not be considered glamorous. This calls for the Indian employees to get a panoramic ‘big picture’, understand and value their contribution to the bigger cause and *take pride* in their contribution.

- ▶ Yet another demand placed by the geographic distribution of teams is that the team members must be able to communicate using multiple media like the *phone, e-mail, blogs and tweets*. For a country in which telephones have become mainstream only in the last decade or less, and Internet penetration is still not comparable to other industrialized countries, these are not skills that are very familiar and seldom taught in colleges.
- ▶ The Indian IT industry has moved from a pure resource model to a highly respected integrated team model, where the Indian engineers today work shoulder-to-shoulder with their counterparts from the USA and other countries. This requires them to interact in a sense of mutual respect, rather than act in a subservient, subordinate mode. This requires the soft skills of *effective communication* and embellishing with polished *etiquette*.
- ▶ As Indian professionals work with the more demanding and highly empowered professionals from other cultures like the ones from the USA, they should learn to be more assertive and know how to *make meaningful commitments and be able to say 'no'* when necessary.
- ▶ Finally, if you think I am being too narrowly focused on the IT and BPO segments, consider this: With its growing domestic market and increased wealth building of the middle class, international business houses like manufacturing companies, airlines, retail stores, fast-food chains and financial services companies are increasing and widening their presence in India. Employees in these segments are also going through the same effects of globalization and require the same skills to be able to communicate with, visit and to gel with people from other cultures. It is fair to say that these skills are very unique in that these are absolutely essential irrespective of which profession they are in.

The HCL Enterprise has always been contributing to improving skills of students as well as its employees. We have launched the HCL Career Development Centers (HCL CDC), where we place a significant emphasis on making the aspirants 'industry ready', employable professionals of which imparting the necessary soft skills is an essential part. Our efforts in helping career development would not bear full fruit unless people who have rich practical experience come forward to share their experiences with the community. It is indeed fitting that two seasoned professionals who come from very strong multicultural and multidisciplinary industry backgrounds are writing this book. What is more, their simple, easy-to-read style, adorned by practical examples brings to life realistic scenarios that one faces.

I am sure this book will be an indispensable addition to anyone who wants to get a real perspective on soft skills and aims to go further in his or her career. I wish the authors all the best in repeating and exceeding the success of their earlier books.

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