



# Soft skills, IT's bottomline booster

Shombit Sengupta

**Driving \$60 billion of the arguable \$800+ billion global IT business, India with 2 million IT professionals has certainly flourished in the demand-led market with good management offering low cost as prime benefit, and the ability to handle large-scale operations. High technical skill-set is the frame that carries the business, but without soft skills the delivery remains a skeleton with no flesh. Tomorrow's route to acquire better brand value and retrieve better bottomline is anchoring soft skills at the core.**

## **Tech Savvy engineers ! Behave according to different cultures**

Tech-savvy engineers travel the world delivering IT services, but far too often they are oblivious of how to behave in different cultures. This lack of understanding can mar many a business transaction. In a neck-to-neck competition, if the Indian manager shakes a woman client's hand with his gloves on, the discordant feeling can be a major reason to lose the contract. The apprehension could be, "How will we handle cultural differences in future?"



## **Make engineers culturally fit**

It's certainly not fair for organisations to leave employees to pick up, interpret and perform in culturally divergent environments. Just as technical training is not negotiable, so must an engineer be made culturally fit with relevant soft skills; mere learning how to correctly hold a fork and knife at the dining table is a hygiene factor.

Gender equality is a big topic in the West, yet it is culturally right to hold a door open for a woman to pass through. Undoubtedly Indians are very polite, but soft skills and politeness are totally different subjects. Our tendency to push through in India does not even allow people to properly exit a public toilet, train or bus, we rush in before others can vacate

that space. In the service industry, soft skills and subtlety create 60% selling value, the balance 40% is technicality used to deliver the service.

In a country where service doesn't have high admiration culturally, soft skills can be picked up only by hardcore training. To buy an on-the-spot ticket in most airports, you have to stand outside. When counter attendants dillydally, I've sometimes asked them what they think of how their slow service is affecting customers sweating outside when they are in air-conditioned comfort.

Of course they haven't designed the counters,

but are they sensitive to customer service? Unfortunately, their nonplussed expression conveys that such a thought has never crossed their minds.

unemployment is rife in Europe. So people should not perceive your being there as depriving local people of jobs. Display your individual identity here, your value differentiation at work, that you're



*Wearing a monkey cap over a suit is not appropriate attire for the Western workplace. You need soft skills to understand their cultural code*

India's IT industry can get a tremendous bottomline and image boost if highly processed soft skills coaching becomes corporate priority. Wearing a monkey cap over a formal suit in winter in a Western developed country is not a representation of soft skills; nor is having some religious sign on the forehead at the workplace. The client may wear casual clothing as per his country's culture, but the servicing partner should not follow suit. A corporate dress code will better define the onsite engineer and his company's seriousness. It's not good manners to bring traditional smelling food to eat at the worktable. That can disturb your client's corporate and social culture although they may not express it upfront. When located onsite at the client's premises, you become the face and brand of your company. Don't become a temporary immigrant who huddles in his own community, but mix freely in their cultural and business environment. Americans nowadays talk of the US becoming an export rather than an importing country, and

not a number the client has contracted for from a foreign IT services provider.

Your onsite posting is a huge opportunity to enjoy a foreign country stay with a strong mentality of integration. This learning will add more value to your CV than your work experience. Here are 20 soft skills areas to process and productize in the IT industry.

## 20 soft skill formulae

You have to be adept at (1) integrating with foreign colleagues onsite and (2) confident in spoken language. Have (3) congenial attitude and behavior, (4) manners that address the clients in their societal context, and (5) the right workplace attire to always appear elegant. In terms of work execution you have to learn how to (6) understand a client's deeper business activities to avoid jarring him with lack of knowledge, (7) make a client speak elaborately to encash valuable insights, (8) gauge a senior client's personal sensitivities to better bond with him, (9) address clients in their

own business language, and (10) thereby achieve deal making. You need soft skills to deliver the nitty gritty of daily work such as (11) the client's team facilitating action adherence to get your work done smoothly, (12) interacting with multiple nationalities, (13) understanding and interpreting technicalities with a palatable story, (14) getting a business delivery package empowered to become higher than its basic substance, and (15) for crisis management. Soft skills pop up in gender matters,

(16) how to interact with women colleagues, and (17) if you are a woman, how to handle men in the world of business.

For your own pleasure, comfort and recognition, soft skills are important in how to (18) be integrated, not have an immigrant's feeling of being an outsider, (19) be perceived as a leader in your profession, and (20) acquire admiration for diverse activities.

## Share your culture outside the workplace

You can always invite your host country clients and friends to celebrate India's festivals, dress traditionally and use your religious rituals. Your guests will be thrilled to learn of your culture. But the workplace cannot accept this. In India's high economic disparity, and diversity in culture, religion, language and geography, soft skills

grooming is not part of our social fiber. Not many people would thank an auto-rickshaw driver, nor would they expect him to say thanks. The West is so exuberant about soft skills because they have consciously abolished slavery and respect the service sector. When you are working for them, you have no choice but to follow their decorum.



## Soft skills will heighten your business value

Indian IT companies have some soft skills training, but does that make you persuasive enough to convert business during a high value business pitch? Relevant soft skills coaching

will improve marketing and sales relationships and reverse Indian companies being perceived as basic "order takers" to becoming proactive strategic partners to global clients.



Shining Consulting Pvt., Ltd.  
17, Visveswariya Industrial Area,  
Mahadevapura 2nd Stage,  
Bengaluru - 560 048, India.

Tel : 91-80-4127 6999 / 81  
Fax : 91-80-4127 6990  
Email: shining@shiningconsulting.com

[www.shiningconsulting.com](http://www.shiningconsulting.com)