

# Teaching the Unteachable Skills: Teaching Soft Skills to Pharmacy Learners

Olabisi Falana, PharmD, BCCCP, BCPS, Field Medical Director  
Pfizer Inc

Christopher Leong, PharmD, BCCCP, PGY-1 Residency Program Director  
Kate Noonan, PharmD, PGY-2 Ambulatory Care Resident  
Northwestern Memorial Hospital



2023 ICHP  
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Olabisi Falana

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Activities <



My activities



## My activities

New folder

New activity

Activities / 096 - Bisi, Chris, Kate - Soft Skil...

Name	Last modified	Count
Poll: What's your opinion – can you teach interpersonal skills?	4 days ago	0 responses
1. Which of the following is considered a soft skill?	4 days ago	0 responses
2. True or False: Soft skills are considered equally as important as hard skills in pharm...	4 days ago	0 responses
Poll: What are some barriers you have experienced with teaching or coaching interper...	4 days ago	0 responses
Poll: How can we help our learners and new practitioners develop these skills?	4 days ago	0 responses
3. Which of the following are methods to develop soft skills? (Select all that apply)	4 days ago	0 responses
Questions?	3 days ago	0 responses

# Hard Skills



Technical and administrative skill sets or knowledge that are gained through education or experience



Cognitive Intelligence



“What the learner knows”



Olabisi Falana

INSERT PE



# Learning Assessment:

Which of the following is considered a soft skill?

- A. Appropriately fill/verify medication orders
- B. Perform an accurate medication history
- C. **Engage audience during a pharmacy conference presentation**
- D. Prepare compounded medications using sterile and non-sterile techniques



INSERT PE



# Learning Assessment:

**True** or False: Soft skills are considered equally as important as hard skills in pharmacy practice



Olabisi Falana



INSERT PE



# Hurdles to teaching soft skills

- Students and trainers/preceptors may see them as *natural* skills
- Consider training *unnecessary*
- Soft skills are *not as straightforward* as hard skills to teach
- *Difficult to measure*

# Audience Polling

How can we help our learners and new practitioners develop these skills?



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# How to help trainees develop soft skills: The role of the trainer

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Trainer-Trainee relationships provide the platform to cultivate the culture of learning “all skills”

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Skill development = f (P,E) = Desire + Environment

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Real development comes from a learning environment that facilitates and encourages:



# General tips for helping learners

Set clear expectations at the beginning of the learning experience

Provide an environment that facilitates skill development and refinement

Self awareness and reflection. Role modeling and coaching

Not an easy task

**The best learning style is learning by doing!**



## Classification of Soft Skills

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***Personal*** (self awareness, values, ethics)

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***Interpersonal*** (communication, collaboration)

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***Organizational*** (leadership)

# Personal Skills

- Emotional Intelligence is about twice as important as cognitive intelligence
- Essential attributes that must be cultivated in pharmacists and pharmacy technicians
  - Self-awareness
  - Self-regulation
  - Motivation
  - Empathy
  - Social skill
- Involves a person knowing how their **values, beliefs, attitudes** and **preferences** affect their behavior
- Self-awareness is critical for developing individual behavior



# Personal Skills



- **Role of the learner:** self-reflection
- **Role of a trainer:** role modeling, coaching
  - Preceptors or trainers can provide real-time coaching (“teachable moments”)
- **Example:** suboptimal interaction with a provider; helping the learner to realize the cause and effect and that an adjustment may lead to a different or better outcome in the future

Instructing

Role Modeling

Coaching

Facilitating

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# Example #1 – Preceptor/Pharmacy Resident

Prior to rounds, you met with your resident about patient KB's community acquired pneumonia regimen, which included vancomycin. The resident appropriately identified KB's lack of risk factors for MRSA and planned on recommending discontinuation. In the afternoon, you reviewed patients with the resident. You noticed KB was still on vancomycin, and started to question your resident why this was still the case since there is no indication for vancomycin at this time. This is the second time this week that the resident identified an intervention but did not make it. You tell your resident that it is inappropriate that vancomycin is still ordered, and that it needs to be discontinued before the next dose. Your resident is visibly frustrated but does not say anything.

# Preceptor Perspective

- Preceptor felt ultimate responsibility for ensuring that patients receive appropriate care
- Frustrated that things that were agreed upon were not completed as discussed prior to rounds twice this week
- Very busy week for the preceptor and difficult to balance precepting with other responsibilities – difficult to carve out time for coaching

# Preceptor Pearls

- Preceptor was focusing solely on whether an intervention occurred or not rather than trying to figure out the why
  - Clearly not a knowledge issue – the resident independently identified an appropriate intervention.
  - Likely a soft skill issue in this case – what else is going on during rounds?
- Difficult balance between ensuring accountability on appropriate patient care and providing role modeling and coaching

# Resident Perspective

- Resident has been having a hard time interacting with the current fellow on service. The fellow often speaks over the pharmacy resident on rounds and is generally not receptive to interdisciplinary recommendations.
- Majority of recommendations have been discussed after rounds, but the medical residents still need to run it by the fellow.
- Felt guilty that recommendations weren't being accepted but didn't know how to express this to the preceptor.

# Resident Pearls

- Difficult personalities are a workplace reality – there is a need to figure out how to work with everyone for the best interest of the patient.
- Self-reflection is key in navigating what worked well, what didn't work, and changing your approach. Trying the same thing over and over and expecting a different result usually doesn't work.
- Preceptors can't help if they don't know what is going on!

# Interpersonal Skills

**Communication** (verbal, non-verbal and written) skills are among the most important skills:

- Must be clear, concise, professional and correct
- Word choice, demeanor, tone, eye contact, body language, etc.
- Ability to facilitate collaborative group interaction and be a team player

**Collaboration** helps to develop other soft skills:

- Communication, team player, leadership, dependability, adaptability, respect

# Interpersonal Skills

**Role of a trainer:** role modeling, coaching, facilitating (assign group work)

- Some learners may not understand the importance of interpersonal skills, especially with generational and cultural gaps
- Encourage collaboration when multiple students are on rotation or site

**Examples:** IPPE students, Medical APPE students, pharmacy technician students

Instructing

Role Modeling

Coaching

Facilitating

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# Generational Values

Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials (Gen Y)	Generation Z (Gen Z)	Generation Alpha
1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-1996	1997-2012	2013-Current
teamwork, process-oriented, desire recognition, respect authority	self-reliant, skeptical, casual about authority, introduction to tech (computer), resourceful	<b>tech savvy, less focused on problem solving and more on choices, team concept, values mentorship, expect manager to be competent, demands equity</b>	<b>high need for information and transparency, strive for independence and autonomy, focus on mental health, purpose driven, emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion</b>	...TBD



## Example #2 – New Pharmacy Technician

You are training a new pharmacy technician in your central pharmacy. As the phone rings, the trainee comments that this nurse has been calling all shift. The trainee picks up the phone and politely greets the nurse on the other end. As the technician continues to listen, you notice a growing frustration. Eventually an argument ensues as to whether an inhaler was dispensed and delivered for that patient or not. Right before you intervene, the trainee says "we dispensed this inhaler twice in the last two days. I'm not going to dispense it again," and hangs up the phone.

# Trainer Perspective and Pearls

- Nurse called the pharmacy a few times during that shift requesting urgent medications for a decompensating patient.
- First day personally working with this new technician, but others previously provided feedback that this technician was almost too nice and needs coaching to how to be firmer. (i.e. re-dispensing medications that were recently dispensed)
- Was part of the hiring process for this technician – witnessed behavior was very different than what came across during the interview.
- Pharmacy was too busy to debrief in that moment, but committed to providing modeling and coaching for the remainder of the shift and debriefing the situation at the end of the shift.

# Technician Perspective

- Nurse had been calling all shift.
- Can see how many times the inhaler was dispensed over the last few days.
- Didn't appreciate what was being said on the call
  - Felt accusatory and personal about the technician not doing the job correctly
- Additional pressures
  - Being watched by the trainer and feeling the need to meet the trainer's expectations
  - Fear of being scolded again for "blindly" re-dispensing or not pushing back on the nurse enough
  - Not typically an aggressive person and wasn't sure how to incorporate previous feedback

# Technician Pearls

- Collaboration is key!
  - There is a common goal in getting the patient the appropriate medication in a timely fashion.
  - Regardless of who is at fault, the patient is ultimately the one impacted by a missing medication. Partnering with our interdisciplinary colleagues is necessary.
  - There may be a time that you need that colleagues help to figure out an issue in the future
- We interact with interdisciplinary colleagues at a point of time during the day but don't necessarily see the rest of their day
- Emphasis on word choice and demeanor during phone conversations

# Organizational Skills

- Leadership skills takes longer to develop, but do not dismiss
- “Big L” - individuals with leadership title
- “Little l” – individuals who demonstrate leadership in their practice
  - Positively influences peers
  - Takes initiative to try new roles and responsibilities
- Role of a trainer: give learners opportunities to see what goes on behind the scenes, involvement in leadership role, networking opportunities, etc.

# Summary



Soft skills are just as critical as hard skills for personal, professional and organizational success



Soft skills are harder to learn, measure and evaluate



Effective communication, time management, conflict resolution, leadership, adaptability, team player skills are required of us as pharmacists



Preceptors can play a critical role in instructing, role modeling, coaching and facilitating the development and refinement of these skills



***The best learning style is learning by doing!***



## Assessment 3:

Which of the following are methods to develop soft skills? (Select all that apply)

- A. Train in an environment that facilitates development of organization skills
- B. Practice presentation skills to large groups at pharmacy conferences
- C. Attend networking events to improve communication skills
- D. Be open to receiving feedback from trainer






## Assessment 3:

Which of the following are methods to develop soft skills? (Select all that apply)

- A. **Train in an environment that facilitates development of organization skills**
- B. **Practice presentation skills to large groups at pharmacy conferences**
- C. **Attend networking events to improve communication skills**
- D. **Be open to receiving feedback from trainer**



Soft skills are  
real skills that  
are teachable  
and learnable!

QUESTIONS?

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