


Teaching the Unteachable Skills: Teaching Soft Skills to Pharmacy Learners

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Speaker Conflicts

Dr. Falana discloses she is an employee of Pfizer, Inc. All the relevant conflicts listed have been resolved.


Dr. Leong and Dr. Noonan have no relevant financial relationships with ineligible companies to disclose.



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Learning Objectives:


1. Define hard and soft skills.
2. Describe the importance of soft skills in practice.
3. Examine ways to help pharmacy learners develop their soft skillset.



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Audience Polling

What's your opinion – can you teach interpersonal skills?




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Hard Skills




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



Cognitive Intelligence




"What the learner knows"




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Soft Skills




Interpersonal skills and social abilities that characterize a person's relationships with others



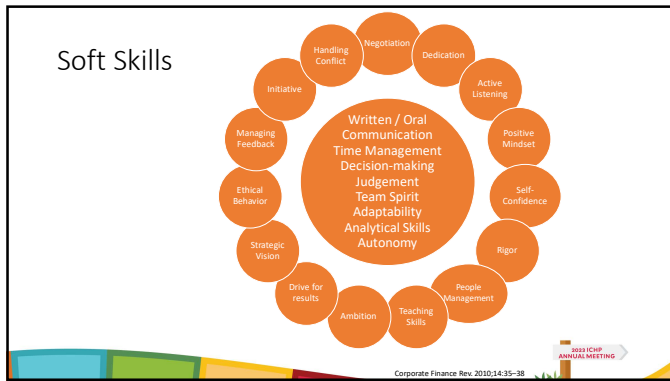
Emotional Intelligence



"Who we are" "How we work"



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Learning Assessment 1:

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

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Which is more important?

It depends on the career:

- Careers that need hard skills and little soft skills
- *Careers that need both hard and soft skills*
- Careers that need mostly soft skills and little hard skills

Many careers, including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, fall in the second category

Internet | Managing Projects Bus. 2010:3:387-401

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What soft skills are important for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians?

Success in healthcare requires more than clinical knowledge and technical skills

- Effective communication
- Time management
- Conflict resolution
 - Leadership
 - Adaptability
- Team player attitude

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians need to display these essential soft skills to be effective in working within a team and ultimately helping patients achieve their health goals

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According to a recent article in JACCP, identifying qualified candidates for residency training requires a more holistic process, going beyond the student's ability in the classroom

“...highly qualified candidates (are those) who possess skills, such as **work ethic, passion, adaptability, leadership, research experience, communication skills, professionalism, cultural competency, and personality fit.**”

J Am Coll Clin Pharm. 2019; 2: 177- 180.

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Learning Assessment 2:

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

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"Soft skills get little respect, but they will make or break your career"
– Peggy Klaus, Author


"Of all the life skills available to us, communication is perhaps the most empowering."
– Bret Morrison, Actor



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Classification of Soft Skills


- Personal** (self awareness, values, ethics)
- Interpersonal** (communication, collaboration)
- Organizational** (leadership)



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How are soft skills developed?


- Hard skills are generally learned through formal education or training
- Soft skills development is mostly **dependent on a person's interaction with their environment**
- Soft skills need to be continually developed through self-reflection and strengthened through interpersonal interactions
- Avoidance hinders growth



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How are soft skills developed?


- Pharmacy training focuses on learning facts (hard skills)
- Many learners have a strong knowledge base with weak skillsets
- This is where we come in!



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Audience Polling


What are some barriers you have experienced with teaching or coaching interpersonal skills?



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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**



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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

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

Skill development = $f(P,E) = \text{Desire} + \text{Environment}$

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


Self-reflection

Role modeling

Continually practicing these skills

Receiving and processing performance feedback

Accepting constructive feedback



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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!




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Classification of Soft Skills

Personal (self awareness, values, ethics)

Interpersonal (communication, collaboration)

Organizational (leadership)




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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

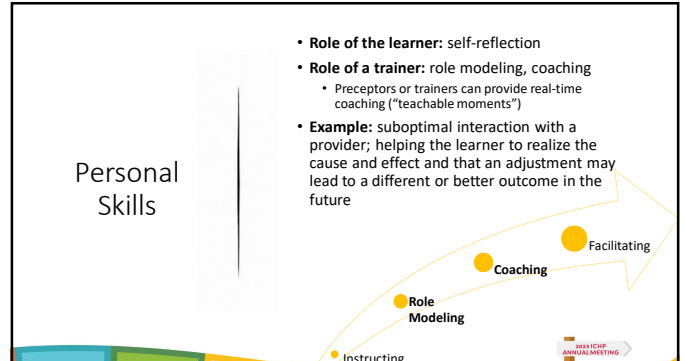

Goleman, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence. 10th ed. Bantam Books, 2007.



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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

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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.

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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

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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

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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.

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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!

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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

Goelman, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence. 10th ed. Boston: Books, 2007.

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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

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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	tech savvy, less focused on problem solving and more on choices, team concept, values mentorship, expect manager to be competent, demands equity	high need for information and transparency, strive for independence and autonomy, focus on mental health, purpose driven, emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion	...TBD

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Burnworth ML, Pettinger TK, Medina MS, Niemczyk M, Pharamand P, Gordanis J. 2020 Oct-Dec;38(4):23-76.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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

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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.



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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!




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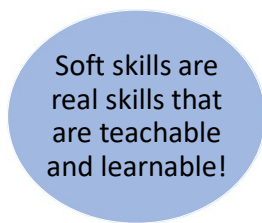
Learning Assessment 3:

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


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



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QUESTIONS?



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