

Today, based on a large body of research, we know that soft skills matter. In fact, we know that they are the most powerful predictor of success in career and life. They have a significant impact on academic, career and personal success. But, how well do they predict success?

Soft Skills as a Predictor of Academic Success

The [Stanford Research Institute International and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation](#) interviewed 400 Fortune 500 CEOs. They found that 75% of long-term college and career success depends upon developing soft skills. According to [another study](#), soft skills predicted high school and college completion. Their research reported that 95% of students ages 3-11 who scored in the top 20% of the soft skill “self-control” graduated high school. Only 58% of students who scored in the bottom 20% of “self-control” graduated. Research conducted by the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#) estimated that reducing the number of high school dropouts in half for a single high school class nationwide would increase America’s gross domestic product by up to \$9.6 billion by the time the graduates reached the middle of their careers. According to that same [research](#), the high school graduation rate across the United States for the class of 2015 was 83.2%. Increasing the graduation rate to 90% would:

- Create 65,150 new jobs
- Boost gross domestic product by \$11.5 billion annually
- Increase annual earnings by \$7.2 billion
- Increase annual spending by \$5.3 billion
- Increase federal tax revenue by \$1.1 billion

The most empirical finding of the economic impact of six widely used SEL programs found that the average long-term benefits of every dollar invested in these programs yielded an \$11 return. Included among these benefits were higher lifetime earnings and better mental and physical health.

[Research](#) conducted out of the University of Chicago found that scores on another soft skill, Conscientiousness, predicted how many years of education adults would complete. The correlation of Conscientiousness with years of completed schooling was .27 while the correlation with Intelligence was .16, making it highly statistically significant. No other predictors of academic success ranked higher than social skills.

Soft Skills as a Predictor of Career Success

Believe it or not, data has shown soft skills being more important than hard skills for 100 years. It was established back in 1918 by [Mann’s study](#) on engineering education that approximately 80% of success is due to soft skills while 20% is due to hard skills.

In [research](#) conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center concluded that 85% of job success came from having well-developed soft and people skills, and only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills).

Technical proficiency, once a guarantee of lifetime employment, is a commodity in today’s job market. Companies today are hiring for soft skills. [A 2006 survey](#) of 400 employers were asked to list the most

important qualities they want in their employees. The top three were: 1) professionalism/work ethic, 2) teamwork/collaboration, and 3) oral communications.

Return on investment in soft skills is much more than you could ever get from education or technical training. [Research conducted by Stanford Research Institute International and Carnegie Mellon Foundation](#) with Fortune 500 CEOs reported that:

- 75% of long-term job success depends on people skills while only 25% on technical knowledge.
- Higher levels of soft skills predict financial stability, lifetime earnings and frequency of financial crises.
- By 2020, more than half a million workers will be significantly held back by a lack of soft skills.

Echoing the Stanford Research reported above, [Mette Johansson, the head coach of KPI Singapore reported](#) that, by the year 2020, in the UK alone:

- Over 500,000 people are expected to be significantly held back by their lack of soft skills (this means that half a million people will not have the soft skills required to do their job).
- The loss of productivity due to the soft skills deficit is anticipated to exceed \$10 billion per year by 2020.

In 2002, [Bowles and Gintis Recent reported](#) the importance of high levels of persistence and the relative unimportance of IQ on lifetime earnings. Additional research has supported the authors' hypotheses concerning the role of soft skills, rather than technical skills, as determinants of labor market success.

In a 2008, Google conducted research called [Project Oxygen](#) to understand their top employees' keys to success. The findings of that research were shocking to many as technical skills came in last place. The rest were soft skills. The eight most important qualities of their top employees were:

1. Being a good coach
2. Communication skills
3. Possessing insights into others and different values and points of view
4. Empathy toward one's colleagues
5. Critical thinking
6. Problem-solving
7. Drawing conclusions (making connections across complex ideas)
8. STEM Skills

Soft Skills as the Best Predictor of Success in Life

Well-Being is recognized as one of the best measures of success in life. [In a study](#) of 8,119 men and women aged 52 and older, the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London found that soft skills boost well-being as we age. They discovered that conscientiousness, emotional stability, persistence, control and optimism work in concert to promote health, wealth and

well-being in early and later life. These five soft skills were associated with better health, less depression, less loneliness, fewer chronic diseases and greater financial stability.

Significant evidence connecting conscientiousness to health-related issues has also been found. [This research](#) concluded that conscientiousness increased positive health impacting behaviors like stress resilience, social connectedness, SES (educational attainment, career success and earnings) and longevity. In addition, it was found that conscientiousness decreased behaviors having a negative impact on health, including physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, excessive alcohol use, drug use, risky sexual practices, risky driving, tobacco use, suicide and violence. They also found that conscientiousness decreased morbidity related issues like Alzheimer's, diabetes, high blood pressure, skin problems, strokes, tuberculosis and ulcers.

Soft Skills Contribute to Becoming Healthy, Wealthy and Wise

Research over the past 100 years points to soft skills as the best predictor of success in academic, career and life. The past ten years have seen a marked increase in research into the positive impact of soft skills and the significance of the gap in soft skills possessed by graduated entrants to the workforce has been well documented.

As I reflect on some of the significant successes experienced by people I worked with in my counseling and executive coaching practice, one particular story comes to mind. Joseph (not his real name) and his wife made an appointment with me because their marriage was on the verge of ending as he was seldom home due to long work hours and when he was home, he was irritable and stressed out. Focusing on Joseph's behavior at home without attending to issues at work would have been an incomplete approach, so we decided to combine counseling for Joseph and his wife with professional coaching. As he learned and implemented soft skills at work, he found that employee morale increased along with productivity and a general improvement in the work culture. He also saw a decrease in turnover and customer complaints.

The combination of these changes led to higher profitability which led to him being noticed by the CEO. With the attention and support of the CEO, Joseph progressed through the ranks over the next seven years, climbing all the way to COO of this Fortune 100 company.

Joseph's newly acquired soft skills allowed him to accomplish more in less time and with less stress, allowing him to spend more time at home and be less irritable when he was there. He became the kind of husband and father he wanted to be, while simultaneously achieving his career goals – all due to his focus on developing soft skills. One could say that developing soft skills helped Joseph to become healthier, wealthier and wiser.

Not everyone works as diligently to develop soft skills as Joseph did, but when they do, they experience significant improvement in the personal and professional lives. Soft skills improve every area of life from the academic to career to health and wellbeing as I have learned based on both hard data/research and my own experiences in coaching and counseling.