Soft Skills in Workplace Volunteering

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In today’s workplace, it is important to have the skills required to manage and maintain interpersonal relationships between managers, co-workers, clients, and stakeholders. Some personality types are more predisposed to these soft skills, where other personality types have to work to develop the same skills. Throughout this week I have been taking various personality assessments that aid in understanding my personality and temperament. Some examples of questionnaires I have taken include the Myers-Briggs Personality Assessment, and The Keirsey Temperament Sorter, and the PARIN Soft Skills Assessment Tool. From these tools, I have learned that I land toward the side of the spectrum that finds strengths in rationality, problem-solving, analysis. I’ve found that I may have some opportunities for improvement in areas concerning soft skills, interpersonal relationships, and communication. For example, I scored INTP on the Myers-Briggs assessment, there is research to suggest that this may predispose me to distance education opportunities such as CSU-Global. “The results indicate that MBTI INTP (introverted thinkers with intuition) type students are most attracted to distance learning as a pedagogical method. For the second question, students indicated preferences for courses that emphasize introversion, sensing, and thinking (versus extraversion, intuition, and feeling) characteristics.” (Fornaciari & Mathews, 2000)

**KTS-II & PARIN Soft Skills Assessment Tool**

While I had previously taken the Myers-Briggs assessment in ORG 300 (Principles of Leadership), I had never heard of the KTS-II temperament assessment or the PARIN soft skills assessment. After completing each, I was not surprised by the results of rational temperament on the KTS-II. My top four targets in the PARIN test were accountability, critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic literacy. All of these skills come into play when adjusting claims. Accountability in that my name is signed on everything I touch, critical thinking when people are trying to deceive me, problem-solving in reconstructing accident scenes based on verbal statements, and civic literacy by knowing how each state’s laws differ when it comes to auto claims law. Also, unsurprisingly my bottom four opportunities for improvement on the PARIN assessment were social awareness, social responsibility, interpersonal skills, and collaboration & teamwork. (CSU-Global Connect, n.d.) The purpose of these types of assessments is to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a generalized personality type and then apply those insights to your day-to-day routines. These personality inventories have served to reinforce my preconceptions about myself, that I value logic and objectivity over interpersonal connections.

Part of the reason I decided to major in network engineering was the abstract problem-solving nature of the coursework involved. This kind of work plays to my strengths in analysis and risk mitigation. However, in every course I have taken so far at CSU-Global, the human factors of the curriculum have been stressed time and time again. It seems this type of personal development is unavoidable, and I welcome the challenge. Developing my social skills has been a lifelong pursuit and I am more or less able to fake it until I make it at this point in my life. It would be a great energy saver if I could train myself to react more socially on instinct when the opportunities arise. As I understand it, people who are extroverted gather energy from social interactions, whereas introverted people draw energy from their personal reserves to interact socially. I notice I am frequently exhausted and suspect prolonged social interactions to be the culprit. It would be a great benefit in my life if I were able to learn to flip the dynamic and gain energy from interacting with others instead of it being a constant drain.

**Developing Interpersonal Skills Volunteering**

A study by Khasanzyanova (2017) found that finding opportunities for “non-professional activities like volunteering can be actively incorporated into students’ learning process, making their overall experience of higher education more active, enjoyable and relevant. Learning through action was found to be the most important factor in the acquisition of soft skills. This article aims to contribute to research on the educational dimension of volunteering, demonstrating that it benefits both personal and professional development.” (Khasanzyanova, 2017)

I am fortunate to work for a company who is renown for its volunteer efforts. USAA provides various types of assistance in the form of disaster relief. Last year, I was able to contribute to the volunteer effort after the catastrophic hail storms in Colorado Springs and Pueblo. We gathered in a church parking lot to pass out food supplies to a community who had been affected by the catastrophe. My job was to separate good potatoes from the bad. The benefit I had gained from this experience was networking with employees from the company inside and outside of my department, getting my name out there as I was a new employee at the time. Through the experience of handing out food that day I was able to meet my future mentor at USAA. Chris was sorting apples next to me and while speaking with him I realized we worked in the same department. Chris had a few years of experience in the position and offered to help me complete my mentoring checklist back at the office. Hoy’s (2011) research showed the correlation between volunteering and mentoring relationships in the benefit of the intern/volunteer. “The mentor during my internship challenged my thinking about professional principles and practice. She took me outside my comfort zone as I noticed the difference between my mentor and my normal supervisor who made sure I knew the tasks and completed them.” (Hoy, 2011)

That day I met a manager in the financial advice and retirement services department of USAA. A few weeks later I was able to take a few hours away from my desk to listen in on inbound calls in an area of the company I intend to promote into. Although I have been practicing my verbal communication and listening skills since my youth, if I were able to volunteer on a regular schedule I would be able to further develop these skills with an audience of people in my best interest to get to know.

**Developing leadership volunteering with USAA.** USAA is acutely aware of the benefits of volunteering on its workforce and public image. So much that the company provides hours of paid time off that is meant to be used for volunteering in the community. The perceived benefit is not only brand recognition for the company, but it also enriches the lives of employees and the people they are helping. My personal experience was that I felt proud to work for such an organization and dig deep within myself to perform at my best to better serve the membership and the organization. Volunteering is an opportunity to hone my skills in verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as develop a bond with coworkers inside and outside of my department (Khasanzyanova, 2017.) This week I have learned about the importance of developing these traditionally weak areas of my personality so that the areas where I am strong will not be held back. Although sometimes uncomfortable, if one is able to equate the feeling of discomfort with growth, tremendous progress (both personal and professional) can be achieved. It is not lost on me that my own soft skills are helping others develop in their own way, it is important for me to always be approachable to people of all types so that myself and all involved are able to benefit from diverse insights and perspectives outside our own comfort zone.

References

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