THE SCHNEIDER REPORT

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Welcome to The Schneider Report,

For this issue we have another article written by Michael Shallanberger, our EVP of Consulting. Prior to joining Schneider Sales Management, a position he has held for the past 12 years, Michael was a leading sales manager at community and national financial services firms. He has also been President and CEO of two community banking institutions. He has received his M. Ed. in Adult Training and Education and a B.S. degree in Organizational Change Management and is an alumnus of the Pacific Coast Graduate School of Banking.

Selling Skills Aren't the Only Soft Skills Your People Need

Schneider Sales Management most often works with clients in the context of a comprehensive sales and service culture change effort. We've written often as to why these initiatives succeed or fail—the sales training effort, the effectiveness of coaching and feedback, the organization's sales process, and the level of employee focus and accountability. We've also had numerous opportunities to observe as our client's tackle major technology conversions, wholesale product line changes and mergers/acquisitions, and can attribute the success and failure of these efforts as well. The degree of success is often determined not by the core elements of the change initiative, but rather by how equipped the organization's managers and employees are from a soft skills and project management standpoint.

Soft Skills, also referred to as interpersonal skills or people skills, are behavioral competencies such as communication skills, organization and time management skills, negotiation skills, creative problem solving, strategic thinking, team building, and influencing and selling skills. Soft skills are essentially the skills of relationship management and creativity and are based on emotional intelligence characteristics like self-awareness, social confidence, empathy, self-sacrifice, initiative, originality, adaptability and resilience. We don't always relate our workplace experiences to the notion of soft skills, but it is not hard to do. If you have ever experienced "death by PowerPoint", sat through a 2 hour meeting with no agenda and no outcomes, or had a manager who was content to fill their days with administrative or paperwork at the expense of managing the people side of the business then you've experienced poor soft skills. Conversely, if you've ever left a meeting totally energized and feeling part of the solution or stayed at a job primarily because of your boss then you've likely experienced great soft skills in action. Schneider typically sees these skills working during change management initiatives, but they are equally important in the every-day running of an organization.

While there is no definitive list of what constitutes a soft skill, one of the better work-related lists (and definitions) is provided by career coach Lei Han. How are the skills of your managers and employees in each of these areas?

Self Management Skills
- **Self awareness** – knowing what drives, angers, motivates, embarrasses, frustrates, inspires you.
- **Emotion management** – being able to control unexpected emotions like anger and frustration so you can think clearly and at your optimum.
- **Self-confidence** – those who believe in themselves have access to "unlimited power."
- **Stress management** – Being able to stay calm and balanced in stressful, overwhelming situations.
- **Resilience** – Ability to bounce back from a misstep in your job or career.
- **Skills to forgive and forget** – Ability to move on without baggage from a past mistake or something in your career that wronged you.
- **Persistence and Perseverance** – Ability to overcome challenging situations and obstacles and maintain the same energy.
- **Patience** – ability to step back in an emergency to think clearly or the ability to pause and wait when you are in a rush or want to rush others.

People Skills
- **Communication skills** – general skills to listen and articulate your ideas in writing and verbally to any audience.
- **Presentation skills** – ability to maintain attention and achieve your desired outcome from presenting to an audience.
- **Facilitating skills** – ability to coordinate and solicit well represented opinions and feedback from a group with diverse perspectives to reach a common, best solution.
- **Interviewing skills** – ability to sell your skills as an interviewee or accurately assess another's ability or extract the needed information as an interviewer.
- **Selling skills** – this is not just for people in sales. This is the ability to build buy-in to an idea, a decision, an action, a product, or a service.
- **Meeting management skills** – this is the skill to efficiently and effectively reach productive results from leading a meeting.
- **Influence / persuasion skills** – ability to influence perspective or decision making but still have the people you influence think they made up their own mind.
- **Team work skills** – ability to work effectively with anyone with different skill sets, personalities, work styles or motivation level.

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- **Management skills** – ability to motivate and create a high performing team with people of varied skills, personalities, motivations, and work styles.
- **Leadership skills** – ability to create and communicate vision and ideas that inspires others to follow with commitment and dedication.
- **Skills in dealing with difficult personalities** – ability to work well or manage someone whom you find difficult.
- **Skills in dealing with difficult situations** – ability to stay calm and still be effective when faced with an unexpected difficult situation.
- **Ability to think / communicate on your feet (under pressure)** – ability to articulate thoughts in an organized manner even when you are not prepared for the question or situation you are in.
- **Networking skills** – ability to be interesting and interested in business conversations that motivates people to want to be in your network.
- **Interpersonal relationship skills** – ability to build trust, find common ground, have empathy, and ultimately build good relationships with people you like or in positions of power/influence.
- **Negotiation skills** – ability to understand the other side and reach a win-win resolution that you find favorable, satisfies both sides, and maintains relationships for future dealings.
- **Mentoring / coaching skills** – ability to provide constructive wisdom, guidance, and/or feedback that can help others further their career development.
- **Organizing skills** – ability to organize business gatherings to facilitate learning, networking, or business transactions.
- **Self-promotion skills** – ability to subtly promote your skills and work results to people of power or influence in your organization. This will build your reputation and influence.
- **Savvy in handling office politics** – office politics is a fact of life in corporate America. This is the ability to understand and deal with office politics so you can protect yourself from unfairness as well as further your career.

The only skill I would add to this list is one that we hear from our clients frequently, and that is **Collaboration** — working together to achieve a goal by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus.

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Research published by the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) suggests that there is a 650% return on training dollars spent in preparation of a change initiative, such as a workshop to prepare employees to embrace and handle change or training for managers to more effectively lead the change process. Returns on general leadership training are much higher—in the range of 1,000% to 1,500%. And, something as simple as holding a four hour workshop for managers on conducting effective meetings can yield as much as a 2,000% return. Consider the risks of not equipping your team:

- Major projects will be delayed or stall out altogether if project managers aren't highly organized, can't resolve conflicts, and can't manage people in a matrix environment.
- The benefits of a great kick off meeting or initial training effort will be lost if followed up by uninspiring presentations or boring team meetings with no participation and no measurable outcomes.
- Employee anxiety and frustration will increase dramatically during periods of organizational change due to managers' poor listening skills, inability to articulate a vision or need to change,
- Employee resistance to change will increase over time if they aren't equipped to assess the impact of that change, manage their personal feelings, etc.

Even though soft skills are rooted in emotional intelligence, most of them can be learned or improved through training and coaching. Looking at the underlying success factors of major initiatives we've observed over 29 years, here is the short list of soft skills training that will get you the greatest payback on your investment. It is no coincidence that the soft skills courses that Schneider offers are focused in these areas:

- Managing organizational change (manager view)
- Embracing organizational change (employee view)
- Behavioral interviewing
- Leadership skills, especially for individuals in you leadership pipeline
- Team building skills
- Organizational skills
- Time management
- Making effective presentations
- Conducting effective meetings
- Communications – organizational and interpersonal

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I'll close by sharing one real-world example of exponential returns on soft skill training that involved a Schneider client in Encino, CA. During our initial new client interviews, employees and managers noted that organizing and completing required new account and loan paperwork was the primary impediment to increasing sales time and seeing more customers (sound familiar?). The bank conducted 5 hour workshops on organization and time management skills for all personal bankers and branch managers which resulted in an increase in total sales sessions (unique customer conversations) of 28% and contributed to the bank's overall 100% increase in sales productivity. The bank made a one-time investment of $250 per employee in training and increased sales revenue for each personal banker and manager by $140,000 per year, every year. Of course, the bank also provided tools, set expectations, measured performance and held employees accountable for results. Otherwise the training dollars would have been wasted.

If you have managers or employees who are struggling with key soft skills, particularly those on the aforementioned shortlist that greatly affect your ability to complete initiatives, check out our course offering at www.schneidersales.com. If you don't see exactly what you are looking for then contact us regarding custom soft skills training solutions.

Regards,
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Director of Consulting

About the Author
Michael Shallanberger is Executive Vice President & Director of Consulting Services for Schneider Sales Management, LLC, a position he has held for the past twelve years. Michael will soon complete An M.S. in Organizational Leadership and Change Management from Colorado State University and he earned his M. Ed. in Adult Training & Education from Colorado State University in 2010. He graduated summa cum laude from Metropolitan State in Denver, Colorado with a B.S. in Organizational Change Management and holds an A.S. degree in Banking and Personal Finance. Michael is also an alumnus of the Pacific Coast Graduate School of Banking.

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