



### It is all about what they do back-on-the-job

I managed thousands of people during my career. Mostly, they were working professionals in IT, finance, or one of the other professions. Many were superbly skilled technically. Their growing on-the-job experience deepened those technical skills. They applied them in more complex role assignments. I continued to invest in this side of their skill base. I funded technical professional training whenever it made sense, given their current work assignments, current level of performance, and career potential.

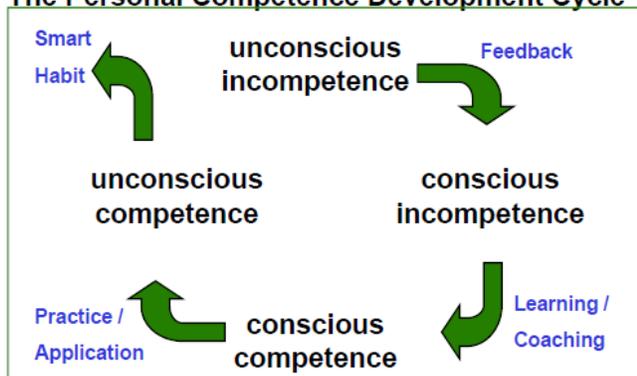
For most part, my people worked in teams. Or they managed direct reports as they moved them into managerial roles. I went looking for soft skill training programs to round out my training investments. My success criteria for these programs was clear – **evidence that time in such a program led to use of the new skills on-the-job**. For years, I was frustrated with the programs and the suppliers that I used. Despite great ‘at the end of the program reviews (‘smile sheets’), few people who went on these programs changed how they interacted with others when they got back-to-the-job. I wanted to know why.

### Learning about the Reality of Soft Skill Training

I had done post graduate work doctoral level work advanced research methodology and applied multi-variate statistics. Through a systematic review process, I learned the following.

1. **You need to break complex skills down into much smaller behavioral pieces to get real results.** Training people in leadership concepts and principles did not produce ROI back on-the-job. Training individuals in more basic skills did. Managers who could ask more effective questions became better leaders of their direct reports.

The Personal Competence Development Cycle

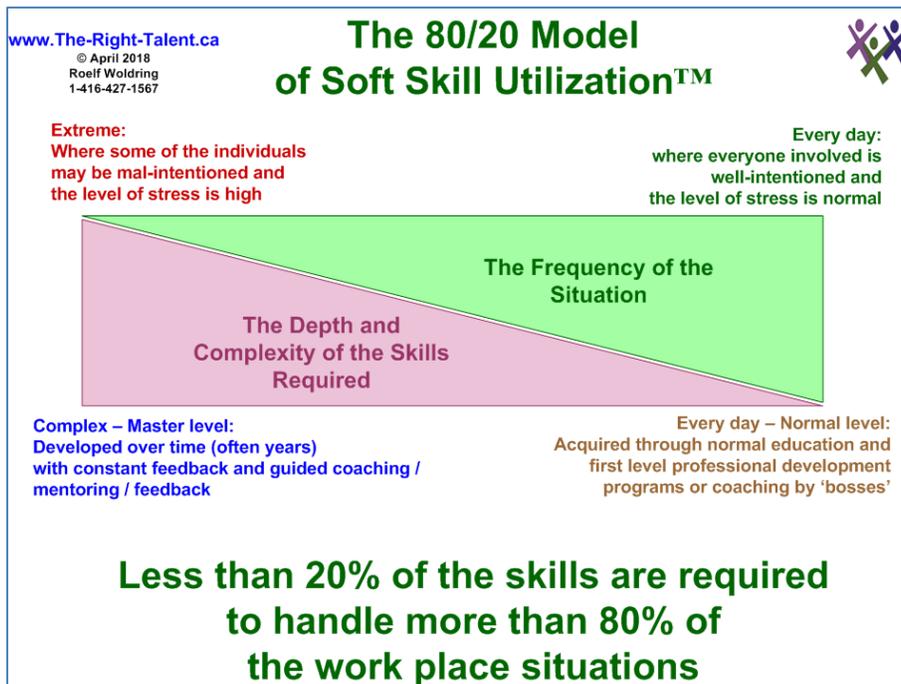


2. Soft skill training programs which did not take people through a **process of developing smart habits** did not yield ROI back-on-the-job. The soft skill training programs which did provide participants with lots of feedback around practice through role-plays and simulations. The course work was customized to reflect the actual work place situation in which the new skills will be applied. If it was the factory floor, the role-plays simulated the

factory floor. If it was an office environment, the role-plays took place in environments very similar to the office environments in which participants worked. The feedback process used video-recording as well as structured feedback from peer participants. This increases the likelihood that participants will apply their new skills back on-the-job.



3. **Only motivated people have the energy necessary to change personal behavior.** Unmotivated people do not. They may act out the new behavior during the training program. But once they get back-to-the job, they stop doing the new behaviors, going right back to their old ways of interacting with others. I stopped investing in soft skill training unless people specifically requested it. Those individuals were the ones who took steps to CHANGE the way they were interacting with others, particularly their direct reports and team mates.
4. **Advanced soft skill training is a lot like advanced sport skill training. It takes time, mentoring, feedback and deep levels of personal motivation.** But really advanced soft still are not required by in most work place situations. **The next level of soft skill beyond ‘the every day produced great results:** back-on-the-job as long as:



mentoring, feedback and deep levels of personal motivation. But really advanced soft still are not required by in most work place situations. **The next level of soft skill beyond ‘the every day produced great results:** back-on-the-job as long as:

- this training involved close-to-real-life role-plays,
- used video-based and structured feedback,
- and was offered to people motivated to improve the way that they worked with others on-the-job.

**What can you as a leader do about getting value from soft skill training?**

1. **Only invest in soft skill training for those people who demonstrate high levels of motivation** – who truly want it. You can tell by the fact that they are asking for it or looking for it by registering for e-learning or other programs focused on soft skills.
2. **Only use soft skill trainers who insist on incorporating lots of practice and feedback** - in situations which closely resemble real work environments. Pick soft skill trainers skilled at giving feedback using video-recording and at leading structured peer-to-peer feedback.
3. **Invest in the “next level” of skill beyond the everyday:** things like asking effective questions, providing feedback on the job, making effective presentations. Leaders behave differently interpersonally in fundamental ways. This is the reason they are leaders. They become more skilled interpersonally because they value being so. They take steps to become so. They first move from the everyday to the truly effective next level of soft skill.