



### I finally got it .... after years of not understanding.

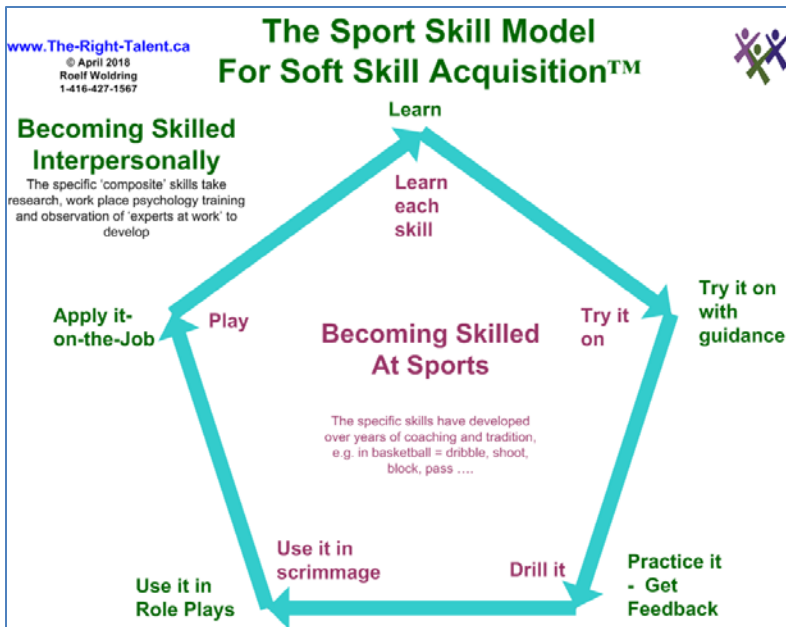
I have spent several decades managing working professionals. I have been a C level executive in large, small, for profit, and not-for-profit organizations. Halfway through my career, I suddenly understood that my job was all leveraging the talent of others to get results. I also realized that I did not know much about how adults behaved at work or about how they learned new skills later in their life. I went back and did doctoral work in work place psychology and organizational behavior. My perspective on work place soft skill development changed deeply.

### Adults Learn Everyday Soft Skills Implicitly As Part of Growing Up

Most adults use work place interaction skills they learn as part of growing up. These skills get 'rounded out' in their teen age years, and as part of their university experience. Role models play a large part in this process. This soft skill learning is largely implicit, done without much conscious thought.

We now know that much of our personality and interpersonal behavior is based on social instincts and abilities that are hard wired in the pre-conscious parts of our brains. Our social language abilities, our desire to work in groups, our need to live in families, and even our intimate interactions with our significant others is shaped by this genetic inheritance. The human genome is so rich that we have the wonderfully diverse and wide range of personalities and human capabilities that we each experience every day.

### Organizational Life is an Extension of Our Ability to Live Productively in Tribes



Human social abilities evolved continuously over hundreds of thousands of years of living in tribes. Today, we express those abilities in our work and social lives.

My doctoral level insights allowed me to see how profoundly we express these social abilities in our organizational lives. I began to pay attention to the parallel between our patterns of interaction in work place and in sport organizations. I saw an amazing parallel between the way we learned sport skills and the way we

could learn "beyond everyday" soft skills. As an executive leader, I re-shaped all my future work place investment in soft skill training to take advantage of this parallel.

I managed extensive skill training budgets in large professional organizations. So, I could test



out my insights in very practical ways. **I set a clear criterion for successful soft skill training: behavior change back on the job which produced valued business results.** I used organizational measures of productivity increase to measure business value. First, I focused my HR staff on looking to see if people going on soft skill training programs applied what they learned back-on-the-job. Then, I used my financial and operational folks to check to see if those changes led to increased productivity in their work teams and their direct reports. Over several years, 3 things became very clear.

1. **Soft skill training programs which were about concepts such as leadership produced very little real ROI.**

Only a very few people changed their behavior on-the-job after participating in such general skill training. The ones who did so were unique. They did not just go on 'organization' mandated training programs. Instead, they did one or more of the following:

- read books and articles on interpersonal skills,
- signed up for courses on managing people, often on their own 'dime',
- looked for feedback from others in the work place on their behavior,
- asked for soft skill training during performance reviews and career planning sessions.

Such people were self motivated to change their interpersonal behavior at work. They valued becoming more skilled interpersonally. Not all of my folks did so..

2. **Soft skill training programs which focused on the 'basics' led to real behavior change on the job with direct reports which lead to business value.**

Over time, I developed a management skill training framework which guided all the investment that I made in soft skill training. I used it to shape our support for progressive training for the highly self-motivated individuals who self-initiated on acquiring interpersonal skills (e.g. signed up for an external learning program in one of these areas).



3. **Really advanced soft skills take years to develop.**

I invested sparsely in executive one-one-coaching for a few high potential people who had already demonstrated their ability to implement "beyond the everyday" levels of soft skill on-the-job. We choose coaches who were experienced executives with relevant career experience, had great soft skills, and were skilled in the use of one or more 360° feedback tools. This capstone training investment, combined with planned career development assignments, helped these high potential individuals become exceptional manager/leaders.