

Sideline Skill Attributes Defined

Communications:

1 Avoid the Dirty Dozen, don't kill relationships with toxic words

In stressful communications, it's tempting to use 12 dirty expressions that make communications worse, including: blaming, shaming, name calling, psychoanalyzing, bartering, praising, demanding, bartering, and others

2 Be "present" when listening, not interrupting or problem solving – when someone is trying to express their concerns and you appear distracted, quick to interrupt, or bent on solving the problem they would probably prefer to solve themselves,

3 When requesting, state what you do want, not what you don't want – If a smoker comes into a no-smoking section where you're sitting and lights up it's tempting to yell "don't smoke here", rather than say what you do want – "could you please smoke somewhere else?"

4 When feeling interrogated, provide only "info" not "ammo" – In stressful communication it's common for the other person to start asking rapid-fire questions, back to back. Typically by the 3rd question asked, they are starting to impugn your values [eg. "Why are you this way?"] At the point where the other person appears to be looking for evidence to make you look bad [ammo] rather than have a discussion with you to exchange information, shut off the opportunity to provide more ammo – doesn't help.

5 In giving criticism, focus on fixable problems, not the person – Neither teachers nor coaches serve students well by saying expressions like "you're un-teachable", or "you're un-coachable". Go for fixable behaviors – "when you turn in a paper with 15 or more spelling errors it tells both of us that you didn't carefully review your work before submitting – this could cost you in a job someday."

6 Pass the 3-way test: is your communication true? kind? necessary? – This Asian proverb is easy to understand but hard to demonstrate when upset with another person. Savvy communicators really adhere to the 3-way test because it doesn't make conflicts worse.

7 In giving instructions, state what you want, not necessarily why – In addition to focusing on what you do want in communication, it's often better to leave off the "why" unless the listener requests it. The "why" part often opens the door to more conflict.

8 It's easier to understand, than to be understood – Really good communicators, across life situations, have a way of listening more than talking, presuming that from any conversation – even with people they don't enjoy, something useful can be learned.

Leadership:

1 Be clear and agreed with helpers & Customers about What Outcomes matter most

– when leadership problems arise, the cause is often traceable to issues being either unclear, not agreed to, or both. Having one of the two pieces right is not enough. If people are clear about what is to be done, that doesn't mean they've bought into doing it. Conversely, if a person will take action, their behavior is helpful only if in line with what was agreed between you.

2 Give customers and helpers opportunities to be heard, assurance they are heard – neither customers, helpers, or suppliers like to feel forced into doing things, even if you feel strongly about following your solution. To avoid this, give people some opportunity to voice their needs and preferences and once done, find a way to assure them that you heard them out, even if you don't agree with their position and will not honor it.

3 Encourage customers and helpers to share ideas for Sideline improvement – it's been said that if you're not sure what motivates people, ask them. Sage advice – none of us is a trained mind reader, so if in doubt about what customers or business helpers want, we are well served to ask them.

4 Seek diverse sources of guidance like using an informal "Board of Directors" – odd as it sounds, even the smallest Sideline would benefit from being able to check information periodically with people who have useful information or ideas for building a business. And sometimes the best ideas come from really diverse sources, including people you only call on the telephone or text online for tips.

5 Recognize you get respect from others not by expecting but inspecting results

6 Use the 80-20 rule when pursuing results – Respect really matters in positive relationships. Too often an inexperienced Sideliners will “expect” vendors or helpers to perform without actually inspecting their helpfulness. Catching people succeeding at work is a great skill to acquire and makes for stronger relationships.

7 Understand that management involves producing results with/through others – by definition Management implies imperfection – when you ask someone to help you with your Sideline, they will never do it as perfectly as you might want, but they will still help you produce more/better results than you will usually be able to produce all by yourself, especially if you have lots of customers.

8 Be bendable but not breakable in setting a direction for your sideline – any size Sideline entity faces challenges that must be handled with a certain level of structure and commitment. If you have too little structure the result is “Stricture” where hanging loose produces unhappy results; conversely if you have too much structure you also generate stricture, by squeezing off vitality and amiability that is sometimes necessary in dealing with unanticipated adjustments.

Analyzing Performance:

1 Use show-tell-do to ensure others know what you want done – if you want a sideline helper to emulate what you do well, they are more likely to get it if you first show them how you do it well, then, tell them how/why its done this way, and then have them try doing it a few times in your presence.

2 Manage performance problems like having a monkey on your back – If a real monkey landed on your back and hypothetically stayed, you would have 3 choices: feed it, kill it, or let it die from neglect. Of course you would want to feed it – unless you had numerous other monkeys already residing on your back [horrible metaphor I know]. Then you would be faced with killing it or letting it die. The worst of all alternatives is to neglect it, and let it die, which is what we tend to do when overworked and can’t adequately address a Sideline problem that won’t go away. So next time, either don’t let it land on your back, or address it, or kill it but don’t neglect it.

3 Acknowledge there’s no “one right way” to do any important task – an inept manager can quickly be identified by simply saying, “here’s the right way to do it”. There are at least 52 different acceptable ways to tie shoelaces. There’s pretty much always more than 1 way to remedy a problem.

4 Treat recurring problems like garbage left under the sink – if you leave on vacation with a full garbage can left under the kitchen sink, it will not stay the same while you’re gone but be much worse. Leaving unattended problems alone will usually result in their becoming worse all by themselves. Take out the garbage sooner than later.

5 Apply the 80-20 rule when managing time for competing tasks – Pareto came up with the principle of 80-20 or when dealing with a problem and having limited time, devote 20% of the time you would normally spend to do it perfectly, but doing it in a way that results in 80% of the desired outcome. What you don’t want to do is spend the remaining 80% of your time trying to achieve the remaining 20% to have done something perfectly. Perfection is a fleeting concept in more situations than not because rarely is there enough time to be perfect and attend to other important tasks.

6 Measure twice, cut once – Carpenters minimize construction mistakes by never measuring one time, but taking 2 tries to ensure their assessment is correct. Good advice for all of us non-carpenters in assessing situations before picking a remedy.

7 Have consequences for performance and non-performance – As a sideliner, one of the worst things you can do if using helpers is to provide insufficient rewards when work is done superbly, and conversely, provide too much positive incentive if work is done unacceptably.

8 Understand that motivation = movement toward desired goals – people are motivated to excel if they are moving toward ends they personally desire. And when sideliners or helpers are underperforming, its usually because they don’t desire the goal being pursued.

Facilitating Change:

1 Have and use tell tale signs of impending change – sailors depend on a little piece of yarn protruding through their sail to tell them if they are steering a proper course to maximize the benefits of wind speed. Sideliners who have meaningful indicators of good direction setting are less likely to perform ineffectively.

2 Be a “learning organization”, always seeking ways to adapt – if you’re always in a “buying” mode for new ideas and information as a sideliner, you’re more likely to anticipate problems and/or respond to them more effectively if you’re on top of new information coming your way

3 Avoid having one choice; increase your options by at least one – people are more likely to be conflicted if they have but one alternative for moving forward. Sideliners who actively pursue 2 or more alternative strategies have less likelihood of getting stuck if conditions become unfavorable.

4 If it ain’t broken, improve it anyway [rather than don’t fix it] – most of us have been brought up to believe if something is working well, then leave it alone. But business conditions, especially for small entities, can change quickly, so continually trying to improve performance, incrementally, will help ward off adversity that comes your way.

5 Structural approaches are easier to change than behavior or technology – there are 3 basic approaches for changing and improving an organization, including structure, technology, and behavior. Changing behavior is difficult for most people with firm habit patterns. And machines can make things better except they tend to miss-perform over time. Structured changes can typically be the best and easiest methods for improving the operation of a small business.

6 Imitation or innovations are both good change strategies- American’s tend to think the way to come up with a good business idea is to create or invent something new. Conversely, many other cultures that have business success often imitate results achieved by others, and then adapting it to be even more effective than the original developer.

7 Regularly engage in search-n-learn-missions w exemplars – in every Sideline endeavor, someone is probably already doing it successfully in the market place. By spending time identifying exemplars, and then tracking reasons for their success can save considerable time and money invested creating an idea from scratch.

8 Recognize that unlearning usually precedes learning – when adapting a work process or methodology, any improvements don’t happen until the less desired behavior is first unlearned, and then replaced by the preferred behavior.

Negotiating Differences Skills

1 Conflicts grow out of differences, more than rights and wrongs – in the heat of a conflict with a customer, vendor, or helper, it’s tempting to lock onto the desire to prove oneself more right than the other person. This is an unproductive use of time – since both parties are already convinced each is correct for their own reasons. Conflicts are about differences much more than rights/wrongs.

2 Diagnose the conflict: is it over facts, methods, roles, goals, values? – people disagree for 1 of 5 basic reasons. The easiest to fix reason, facts, is pretty fixable. However, disagreements over enduring beliefs like values and goals are very tough to remedy – like debating politics.

3 More fixable conflicts are differences over facts or methods – If you want to come close to resolving an ongoing dispute, try to focus on differences over facts, or methods – these two kinds of differences are easiest to fix.

4 Value differences are nearly unfixable; avoid them – when people tangle over their longstanding core beliefs, no compromise is possible since our most solid beliefs simply don’t change. Avoid disagreements about values and goals

5 When negotiating, focus on number and quality of agreements made –no indicator of effective conflict management skill is more potent than the type and quality of agreements that are made between disputing parties.

6 Be willing to horse-trade when negotiating differences – while fighting fair is a virtue, coming to some agreement is not predicted on certain rules of conduct – agreements are carved out of only what people are willing to do after they leave the discussion.

7 It’s nearly impossible to “resolve” conflicts; so just manage them – conflict “resolution” is a misnomer. Since conflicts grow out of recurring differences, they simply never go away for ever unless the parties have no future contact.

8 Any agreement made are good only until your next planned negotiation – agreements are fragile creature, based on a temporary willingness to work together to avoid future disputes. But if no planned discussion is made to review agreements at some future date, its better not to even try to reach and agreement because it won't be productive.

Planning

1 Review Effectiveness Goals – doing the right things – Goal setting really helps set a desired course for a new Sideline. It provides a template for directing all activities toward the right things that will make a difference.

2 Reset Efficiency tactics – doing things right – Similarly, goals are more likely to be achieved and sustained if they are undertaken with an eye toward repeatedly doing things right

3 Become clear and agreed with stakeholders about what matters most – in Sidelines there are customers, suppliers, and eventually helpers. Together they are all stakeholders who have some vested interest in seeing the Sideline do well. From time to time its essential to review each of the stakeholder's interest in success, knowing that only partial overlap of common interests is possible – but still enough to sustain considerable success.

4 Examine most important customer measures of quality – customers vote with both their mouths and their feet. More times than not, however, customers won't verbally communicate what matters most to them, so it becomes critical to sniff out what indicators customers use to judge quality work.

5 Have one or more “unit measures” of desired outcomes - a unit measure is some type of metric that anticipates impending success or failure of the Sideline. For example, number of repeat customers is a useful unit measure at a restaurant, especially if they possess the desired demographic qualities such as age, income, education, and so on.

6 Conduct cost-benefit analysis of current strategy – Having a roadmap or plan for success is made better if it includes numbers – especially whether or not the business is producing more revenue than expense. Cost-benefit can be used for every purchase decision, every supplier agreement, every customer pricing standards, and wage thresholds for retained helpers.

7 Review external threats and opportunities – at least twice annually there is benefit in sitting down for a half-day to assess what external factors outside your business can contribute to success or potential set backs. Are competitors looming near? Is construction being undertaken nearby? Are laws affecting your business about to change in your favor?

8 Assess internal strengths and weaknesses – anything that occurs on your side of the customer sale is “internal” to your operation. Everything you and your helpers and suppliers do that improves or hurts your customer relations will make a difference in profitability.