

# Soft Skills at Work: Soft skills are crucial in the emerging cyber marketplace

By Marcia Hall, For The Capital  
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Open any newspaper and you will likely see an article about cybersecurity. A company often referenced in such a story is ManTech International Corp., a leading provider of innovative technologies and solutions for mission-critical national security programs.

ManTech is headquartered in Fairfax, Va., with an office in Hanover, and has approximately 9,800 professionals in 40 countries. The corporation supports the intelligence community, U.S. government departments such as Defense, State, Justice, and Homeland Security, the space community, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other federal customers. Among its many capabilities are systems engineering, cyber security, information technology, intelligence operations, and global logistics.

With technical expertise paramount to ManTech's success, how important is it for employees to demonstrate soft skills in the workplace?

I had an opportunity to talk with Chris Goodrich, vice president NSA operations of the Mission, Cyber & Technology Solutions Group of ManTech in Hanover, and Carlos Echalar, executive vice president of Human Resources, at ManTech headquarters in Fairfax, about this very topic. I asked them what soft skills they look for in their employees.

"Strong communication skills are very important - including team work, customer service, presentation skills and ability to collaborate effectively across the work environment," Chris said. "Writing skills are also critical. With the rise of e-mail, blogging and social media, we are using more tools that require the ability to articulate clearly and accurately. 'LOL' and emoticons don't get you very far in business. Clear thinking and clear expression do."

Chris spoke about a second set of proficiencies that are vital.

"Leadership skills are essential," he said. "We can't confuse this with management skills. We need people to be managers, but more important, we need leaders. Leaders are able to drive people success and project success. Many customers are more impressed by well run organizations, with strong and positive cultures. Leaders can be at any age or position type. Leadership needs to be recognized as a skill, encouraged, developed and put to work in modern corporations."

While demonstrating soft skills is clearly valued at ManTech, how do they compare to the importance of technical competencies?

"Those who succeed in the workforce will need to have both technical and non-technical skills," Carlos said. "Like 'hard' skills, soft skills have a place at the corporate table. They've been largely unacknowledged, but skills like leadership, collaboration, customer service and innovation contribute to the top and bottom line. ManTech expects our

employees to be focused on mission - ours and our customer's. We're in a business that provides solutions for our customers, so need both individual contributors and leaders who demonstrate both strong technical skills based on project demands and soft skills such as teamwork, collaboration and customer service. Each of these supports our customers' missions and their long-term success."

With the number of employees expected to grow substantially at ManTech, I wondered about the hiring process and what would help or disqualify a job candidate. Chris talked about qualities that create a positive impression.

"I'm always impressed by candidates who can articulate their accomplishments clearly and succinctly," he said. "Candidates should be prepared to do that. It's not bragging - it's selling yourself to your new employer. Of course being prepared, looking ready to interview and knowing as much as you can about the potential employer is essential. And enthusiasm and a positive attitude are so important."

And what would disqualify a job candidate?

"Poor communication and presentation skills would be a concern. No matter what technical accomplishment we have, at some point, we're going to have to explain it to someone," Chris said. "So again, communication skills are essential. Companies are more likely to hire candidates who can clearly articulate ideas, accomplishments and value to the enterprise."

Chris and Carlos mentioned that honesty and patriotism are extremely valued as well. From talking with them, it was apparent that soft skills help the company meet its mission and build its reputation.

"We pride ourselves, year after year, in our value-based culture," Carlos said. "We have to support what the company stands for - taking care of our customer and our people. We will always stand by our values."

Chris added, "The customer expects ManTech to provide solutions and value. They are critical to maintain a good reputation."

To foster the type of reputation ManTech has achieved, the importance of soft skills can't be emphasized enough. Whether in a major corporation like ManTech or at a small to medium-sized business, demonstrating soft skills always matters.

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