

IT'S NOT
WHO YOU
KNOW,

Five SocialSmarts® Secrets Today's Business
Leaders Need to Stand Out and be Successful

IT'S HOW
YOU TREAT
THEM



CORINNE A. GREGORY

**It's Not Who You
Know, It's How You
TREAT THEM**

*Five SocialSmarts®
Secrets Today's
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Need to Stand Out
and be Successful*

CORINNE A. GREGORY

Published by Maestrowerks, LLC.

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 9780-9827981-0-2

Gregory, Corinne A.

“It’s Not Who You Know, It’s How You Treat Them: Five SocialSmarts®
Secrets Today’s Business Leaders Need to Stand Out and be Successful”

Cover Design and Layout by Dawn Teagarden

Edited by Richard Jarman

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To James Malinchak – From whom I learned the valuable acronym “GSDF” (Get Stuff Done Fast) as well as so many other things I take to heart,

*To Craig Duswalt – Without whom this book wouldn’t have “gotten done fast” – Rockstars do EVERYTHING fast!
Really FAST.*

*To my family – Jay, Alana, Alexis, Regan – Truly you all are the source of my inspiration and for whom I do all that I do.
Thanks for believing...*

To my mother, Eva – Who instilled in me my earliest “SocialSmarts”

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It's Not Who You Know, It's How You Treat Them

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered why some seem to have the “magic” of being able to connect with people in business, while others just seem to struggle? It truly seems sometimes as though some people “have it,” while some people simply don’t. And, what is “it” anyhow?

Well, the “it” is what this book is all about. “It” is the most significant differentiator businesspeople can have in today’s challenging business environment. “It” has become a lost art in too many cases, something that has gone by the wayside. Truly effective leaders make powerful use of “it.” You’ll find it tough to become a leader these days without “it.”

Our term for this powerful secret weapon? “SocialSmarts.”

SocialSmarts refers to the collection of social skills, character traits and abilities you need to effectively build, nurture, and develop lasting connections with staff, employees, vendors, and customers. In today’s business environment, where so much emphasis and energy is spent on individual progress and achievement, the business person who takes a different approach in his or her business dealings is certain to be noticed. This is true particularly when that approach is one that is less self-centered and self-absorbed than what appears to be the societal norm.

This book was created to share with you those SocialSmarts that you need to think, act, and be different than the rude, crude, and ego-centric mainstream. By learning and employing the Five SocialSmarts Secrets recommended in the coming chapters, you’re likely to find that you’ll achieve more of what you want, more easily and with less stress, and get a lot less of what you *don’t* want.

But SocialSmarts isn't a one-time shot or silver bullet. You can't just put this book under your pillow and hope to absorb its lessons. So, in addition to explaining the underlying foundations and concepts you'll want to learn, I've also added some quick "takeaways" you should put into practice right away. They're called "Take 5," because they really should take you only a few minutes to put into use. They will help you immediately start seeing some changes based on action, not just theory.

I hope you benefit strongly from the information contained in this book. If you take it to heart and use the lessons and concepts presented, it will change the way you do business. It might even change your life by showing you a more inclusive, civilized way of doing things. You see, SocialSmarts aren't just for business...they're who we are and what we are, no matter what else we might be doing.



Chapter Two

WHY SOCIALSMARTS® FOR SUCCESS?

In the previous chapter, we made the case that when it comes to business, although we are working within the context of companies and organizations, we are really dealing with people – people we talk to, email, and communicate with. People we must work with, for, or alongside on a continual basis. As we become increasingly technology-dependent, our abilities to work effectively with others are becoming diminished.

Who needs “people skills” when we type one-dimensional words from a keyboard into a document, press “Send,” and the recipient gets it at some unpredictable time, based on their schedule generally, not yours? Their response is likely to come back on an equally unpredictable schedule and path, but loaded with the expectation that you will respond appropriately based on their timeline, without much consideration about what’s happening on your side of the dialog.

In addition, electronic “conversations” can span days rather than minutes, and any emotion of the conversation is frequently muted by the medium. Any emotion that is conveyed electronically is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Clearly, it is easier to “not mince words” when you are not face-to-face with your counterpart. Relationships formed through email threads are difficult to build and maintain. They lack the direct, human touch, eye contact and body language.

Ah, but therein lies the key...in this world of anonymous, ambiguous and loosely defined interaction, how can anyone stand out? The answer is, you have to be smart about it – but probably not in the way you expect. Read on...

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS?

Since Day One of our early education, we’ve likely all been told to work hard, get good grades – that’s the key to our success, both in school and in the work place once we leave school. But, as it turns out, it’s not entirely true. Oh, sure, doing well in school is important, don’t get me wrong. But it’s not THE key to what makes you successful. There’s something else quite a bit more important, and most people don’t know it.

According to repeated studies from such well-respected academic institutions as Carnegie-Mellon University, Stanford University and the legendary Harvard University, 85% of our personal and professional success depends on our social skills. That means it’s more important than our academic achievement, more important than our socio-economic background, more important than the “who we know” network. In fact, it’s more important than all of those factors *combined*.

That may seem far-fetched at first, but think of it this way: don’t we all know someone who is extraordinarily smart, was at the top of his or her class, is always the first one with the answer...but can’t get along

with others? Conversely, we also can likely identify someone who may not have had the best grades, perhaps they came from a broken home. Maybe they were dirt-poor growing up, or were abused and neglected. But, in spite of those disadvantages, they have managed to overcome them and are a real pleasure to be around, and spend time with.

Think of many of the “rags to riches” stories you know: Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell, Walt Disney, Marshall Field, Conrad Hilton, Dave Thomas. They may not have had the best beginnings, but they were able to rise above their challenges because they were able to be comfortable around others, and to make others comfortable around them. They relied on positive character traits such as perseverance, trustworthiness, and loyalty to make their mark. In other words, they were smart in ways that matter the most: what we call *SocialSmarts*.

Not only do you know this is true from stories about successful people, but the benefit of good social skills has been studied and verified. Two recent academic studies point to how important this aspect of your development is. In October of 2008, the University of Illinois released the results of a study in which they compared two sets of high school students. Both sets were ranked equally based on their academic test scores, but one group was rated higher than the other on their social skills and interpersonal abilities.

Ten years later, the group of students that had been identified to be more socially capable, conscientious and cooperative were shown to be earning significantly more than the first group, which had similar test scores but lesser social skills.

On the heels of that report, in December, 2008, the University of Washington issued their findings of a 15-year study in which they followed a group of students who received what researchers termed, “early childhood intervention” in social skills education. They tracked

these students over the course of their lives, and 15 years later, these young people were found to have better mental health, higher academic development, and better economic achievement than students who did not receive social skills training.

So, the takeaway is that not only are social skills more important than academic achievement, having these valuable skills makes success easier and better, in every area of life, including academics.

THE BUSINESS IMPACT OF POOR SOCIAL SKILLS

But, you say, we're all out of school at this point. Do "socialization" and social skills matter in business? Well, yes, very much so, as it turns out.

Whether you call it social skills, soft skills, people skills, interpersonal skills – whatever the phrase of the moment is – too many people lack them these days. The website BusinessDictionary.com offers this definition of social skills: the "ability to communicate, persuade, and interact with other members of the society, without undue conflict or disharmony."

Essentially, what we refer to as SocialSmarts is the set of skills, attitudes and character development that enables us to interact and communicate with others in a positive, productive way. As you read that sentence, picture in your mind typical business interactions. My guess is you'll visualize many people that don't fit the image of "positive and productive."

This is one of the biggest problems in business right now, especially as the generations of workers become younger. Surveys of employers show that the #1 complaint they have of young job candidates is that they lack the "soft skills" they need to be effective and productive in the workplace.

What kinds of things are we talking about? It runs the gamut from poor

communication skills – people who are unable to communicate effectively in business, regardless of the medium for that communication. It also includes spending time surfing the Web or sending personal emails from work because the employer’s Internet connection is so much faster than what they have at home. It’s about being rude and callous to customers and vendors because they caught you at a bad time or get on your nerves. It’s the lack of ethics and integrity that allows people to make questionable business deals that are unfair in their advantage to some favored colleagues or a preferred “in crowd,” or even illegal. It’s about accepting kick-backs and special perks, arranging for special treatment or favors, or engaging in business practices that are exclusionary and predatory. All these things fall within the fabric of “social skills.”

Integrity and business ethics in particular are a big deal these days. Stories of Enron, WorldCom, Martha Stewart’s insider trading challenges, and more serve as examples for what happens when people fail to use good judgment and ethical business practices. Unfortunately, as many incidents in the press these days show, the “new integrity” means being very sorry when you are caught doing wrong—but it isn’t the thing that *keeps you from doing wrong* in the first place.

Even if we discount the (relatively) extreme cases of poor business ethics, a lack of basic social skills has a potentially negative impact on business. See if this sounds familiar: you are the customer with a challenge. You pick up the phone or come to the company offering its services with which you need help.

Even though you are the one having a problem with the company’s service or product, and you are reaching out for that help, you realize within 20 nanoseconds of the phone being answered or your

appearance at the “service” counter that you have seriously impinged on that employee’s personal time or messed with their groove.

Whether it’s the inflection of the voice on the phone or the body language when you deal with the employee in person, it’s clear you are an intrusion. “Customer service” is becoming an oxymoron like “jumbo shrimp” or “government efficiency.” It’s enough to make you want to apologize for needing assistance, and *it’s their product or service that isn’t working!*

That kind of treatment can cost you customers. And lost customers are a double-problem because not only are you losing immediate revenue, you are risking your reputation in the market. I know of one company whose “sales method” was to badger its customers – not-for-profit organizations and charities – into signing questionable, obscure, long-term contracts for their services. Then, they provided shabby products and terrible customer support. When the customers tired of the poor service and unreliable products, and wanted out of the contracts, the company threatened to sue them.

How long do you think the charities would stand for this kind of treatment? What kind of reputation do you think the service provider developed in the industry? Word gets around quickly when you abuse your customers. As a result, the company’s market share plummeted. It was ultimately purchased and forced to change its name in the hopes of rebuilding its dwindling business. But a change in name, without a change in policy, isn’t likely to fix bad business practices.

GOOD SOCIAL SKILLS ARE A LOST ART

It’s a sad commentary on our society that we can’t get through a day without having someone treat us poorly, be rude, crude or disrespectful, or just plain indifferent towards us. It happens in business, it happens

on our streets and in our neighborhoods. And it's getting worse.

There are many reasons for why this decline in civility and decency has come to this point; covering all the reasons why is beyond the scope of this book. (It would warrant an entire book on its own!) But we can take a look at some of the contributors in order to understand why this is such a common problem today.

First, the way we were taught good social skills – manners and character – changed dramatically about 40-50 years ago. When many of the young people of the 60s generation decided to turn their backs on what their parents, grandparents and previous generations believed in and stood for, it represented a significant shift in what was considered proper and decent behavior.

Consideration of other people's feelings and needs, or what was right and just, gave way to "if it feels good, do it." We made a transition from what's good for "us" to what's good for "me." With the transition came an increasing attitude that the end justifies the means and that if it works for me, it should be ok for you.

This attitude begins early. A 2002 survey of 12,000 high school students by the Josephson Institute showed that:

- ◆ 74% admitted cheating on an exam at least once in the past year
- ◆ 38% admitted having shoplifted at least once in the past year
- ◆ 37% admitted that they would lie "in order to get a good job"

Many of our young people today feel they don't need to deal with other people: if someone says something you don't like, you can humiliate them and assassinate their character in 27 different ways, via the Internet, cell phones and text messages, or just turn off the power

switch rather than reach a resolution.

Also, as modern parents have been overly focused on building their young children's "self-esteem," they have often completely overlooked the need to develop the skill for getting along. The practice of giving every child a trophy merely for showing up as a member of a team sport is not a good paradigm for what it's like in the real world.

Not everyone has the ability to be a "super-star" on every level, but our kids have been conditioned to believe that the sun rises and sets by them. As these younger generations with their over-inflated egos and lack of effective interpersonal skills leave their homes and schools and enter the workplace, is it any wonder that there is disharmony and lack of cohesion in business?

Truly, we are reaping what we sow. The question we have to ask is: how is this helping or hurting our ability to do business? And, what type of business person and leader do you want to be: one that blends in with the crowd of self-centered, abrupt and self-serving individuals, or one who stands out by being different, using positive social skills as a powerful tool?

SUMMARY

This chapter was dedicated to the idea that the key to succeeding – in business as well as in life – depends on your abilities to successfully interact with other people. Our relationships with *people* are truly what determine success, not transactions with companies or organizations. While we may be working within the scope of the organization, we are actually working with *individuals* – individuals that have needs, desires, and goals of their own.

Our ability to make these interactions successful, to have them grow

and develop beyond a superficial level, depends on our use of effective social skills – what we call SocialSmarts. It is clear from all the research presented, as well as anecdotal evidence, that social skills are a hugely critical factor in our personal and professional success. However, it is also true that positive social skills are becoming rarer in a culture that is increasingly abrupt, rude, and indifferent to the feelings and needs of others.

While it is true that acquiring and practicing positive social skills and developing good character is something ideally started early in a child's life, the good news is that it's never too late. The mission of this book is to help you acquire or hone those skills that you'll need to stand out in a positive way so you can make and grow those relationships that will really make a difference in your life, on all levels.

Now that I've made the point of how important these types of "smarts" are, in the next chapter we'll begin to dig down into the specifics of what kind of "smarts" we are talking about, and how you go about incorporating them into your business toolkit.

TAKE FIVE

In this chapter, we offer a unique idea, one that begins to put into practice those concepts covered in the chapter. The idea is to do something, take action, in a small way that makes the concepts real and practical. Our suggestions shouldn't take long – five minutes or less. But they'll be powerful tools as you begin to develop your SocialSmarts and can start making a difference right away.

- Make a list of 10 incidents you've experienced lately where someone treated you rudely, with disrespect or indifference. Think about how that makes you feel.
- Now, make a list of 10 incidents where you were treated respectfully, where you were made to feel you were valued, particularly as a customer. My guess is this list will be harder. How does that make you feel this time?
- If you had to do business with a company whose product or service cost 10% more, but you were treated better, would you prefer that business over one that cost less but offered minimal or poor support? Consider what airline you might want to fly as a business traveler: one that offered you an extra service, like a decent hot meal or waived your luggage charge, even if it cost you \$10 more for the ticket or a “no-frills” airline where you felt like cargo?