

The Most Important Skill for Techies to Succeed

Hint: It's about people, NOT computers.

Several years ago, I had a problem with some Microsoft software. I traded along series of emails with a Microsoft customer "service representative" that was a nightmare.

No matter what I wrote, he refused to read it in sentence by sentence format. He scanned it for keywords, then sent off some canned message that had nothing to do with my particular problem.

His non-responsive responses quite obviously showed that he had not read or understood my emails.

Finally, my extreme anger and frustration got across to him, and he referred me to a supervisor who was willing to actually read, understand and then solve my problem.

What is this most important business skill the MS techie failed to practice?

It's learning how to put yourself in another person's frame of reference. That is, to understand what they're feeling, what they're thinking and what they're understanding.

It's easy to write. It's easy to think you already do it even though you don't.

Businesses must understand how their customers think and feel -- or they are put out of business by competitors who do.

Workers must understand how their co-workers think and feel -- or they make enemies.

Employees must understand how their bosses think and feel -- or they get fired or passed over for promotions.

Bosses must understand how their employees think and feel -- or the work doesn't get done.

Politicians must understand how the voters think and feel -- or they lose the election.

Husbands and wives must understand how their spouses think and feel -- or they get divorced.

Techies are NOTORIOUS for their inability to understand non-techies.

Remember, we don't know what you take for granted. Don't be arrogant just because of your technical knowledge. If you needed heart surgery would you want to go to a doctor who looked down at you because of your lack of knowledge of Latin and the intimate details of your body's structure and chemistry?

Take a minute right now and think about someone who's close to you but not really like you. Your wife or husband, your roommate, whoever.

If they came to you for help with a virus on their hard drive, could you help them without feeling smug about your superior knowledge of PCs? Could you adapt your level of understanding to theirs?

Next time you have an argument with a significant other or friend, take a deep breath instead of getting angry. Take a mental step away and look at both of you as though you were a Martian anthropologist observing the behavior of Earthlings.

Just practice seeing the situation from their point of view -- even if it is "wrong." :)

Keep on practicing with friends, co-workers and everybody else.

And yes, this is a skill everybody needs.

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