

People Smarts – Creating Business Success Through and With People

“The most basic of all human needs is to understand and be understood.” Ralph Nichols

Fundamentals

- Leaders create business success through and with others
- Leader’s reputations are diminished or enhanced based on their performance in social settings
- People Smarts is a powerful blend of social and interpersonal skills and behavioral fluency and flexibility
- People Smarts is founded on strong self-awareness and self-consciousness
- Enhanced People Smarts can be acquired, sharpened and grown

The primary job of any leader is to create business success through and with others. Leaders do this through their ability to connect with, and engage and influence others. This form of connection always happens best within relationships that are predicated on trust, empathy and reciprocity.

People Smarts – a powerful blend of interpersonal and social skills and behavioral flexibility – enables a leader to project contagious confidence and warmth, to influence with style, and to adapt with an elegant ease to changing social contexts and diverse peoples.

This primer is a jump-off point for any leader intent on optimizing in the social and behavioral aspects of the leadership role.

People Smarts Definition and Characteristics

Often diminished as mere “tact”, “diplomacy”, “people skills” or mystified in concepts such as “Social Intelligence”, People Smarts is a learnable skill set best addressed as an intentional act – shaped by one’s nature and personality but learned and enhanced by one’s intent and experience.

At OLE Consulting, we define People Smarts as:

“A leader’s ability to build connection, empathy and reciprocity and exert influence across changing social contexts.”

The People Smarts Primer

Step 1: It all starts with self-awareness

Within the context of People Smarts, self-awareness refers to our “selfhood” which operates at two levels:

1. Our knowledge of self in relation to self – awareness of our personality, emotionality, values, motives and goals
2. Our knowledge of self in relation to others - a form of “consciousness” that helps us understand ourselves within social contexts i.e. how we show up to others, what we bring to the encounter and our ability to adapt.

Leaders leverage this heightened form of self-awareness to come across as authentic and adaptable but also to ensure that they chose the right behaviors, at the right time and for the right result.

- Develop higher degrees of personal reflection and mindfulness – why do you act the way you do in certain situations and with certain people – fear, nervousness, exhilaration, competitiveness?
- Seek feedback from multiple sources – trusted others and 360 degree and psychometric instruments – to identify the strengths you should play to, the behaviors you should amplify, modify or drop all together.



Step 2: Become Fully Present

Becoming fully present is a liberating and empowering act for a leader. It is about recognizing and expressing your true self and allowing others to do the same. It is about listening not just to the words people say but also to the feelings and emotions that they are expressing – and leveraging that knowledge to form deep connections and drive concerted action.

- In key meetings and interactions, prime yourself to be attentive to all of the social cues and clues circulating in the room. Listen intently and plan your contributions and questions in ways that add value to the meeting and has a nourishing effect on the other key stakeholders present.

Step 3: Develop your ability to read social dynamics and other social actors

Leader's with People Smarts observe and listen well. They possess a form of situational and social attunement and adapt to fit-in with the agenda, tone and temperature of individuals and groups.

- Use the emotional intensity, words and actions of others to identify what makes them tick (are they results orientated or process-centered, fast or slow decision makers, talkers or listeners, stable or risk-taking?). Learn to speak their language and assert why you are a key asset and strong partner.
- Understand the social roles people play and how to play the game. Experiment with different social roles to see what fits you and serves you well – Change Agent, Inquirer, Trusted Advisor, Diplomat etc.

Step 4: Expand your behavioral range and adaptive qualities

Personality factors (e.g., introvert or extrovert) will shape behavioral and communication style and range but people can grow through developing increased confidence, new skills and behaviors.

- With your career goals firmly in mind, identify the behaviors or skills most critical to the future success of your organization and your success therein. Build a development plan to gain the skills, behaviors and habits that will enable you to add value and step-up and stand-out.

Step 5: Build powerful conversational skills

Your ability to conduct powerful conversations – authentic and authoritative, clear and compelling, inspiring and influential – will be key metrics others will use to judge you.

- Experiment with new behaviors and skills, force yourself to contribute more in meetings and interactions, practice different questioning and inquiry techniques and learn to give advice in a tactful and strategic fashion.

Bottom Line

People Smarts is a critical skill-set for leaders – it extends leadership prowess (“the leadership self-concept”), psychological benefits (“self-esteem”) communication enhancement (“social expressiveness skills”) and enhances our connections to others (“social self-efficacy”).

It is a learnable skill set and worth striving for – it will help shape the impact you have on others and secure the leadership and career legacy you crave and deserve.