

EMMA-SUE PRINCE

THE ADVANTAGE

The 7 **soft skills**
you need to stay
one step ahead



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ADAPTABILITY • CRITICAL THINKING • EMPATHY • INTEGRITY
OPTIMISM • BEING PROACTIVE • RESILIENCE

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ADVANTAGE**

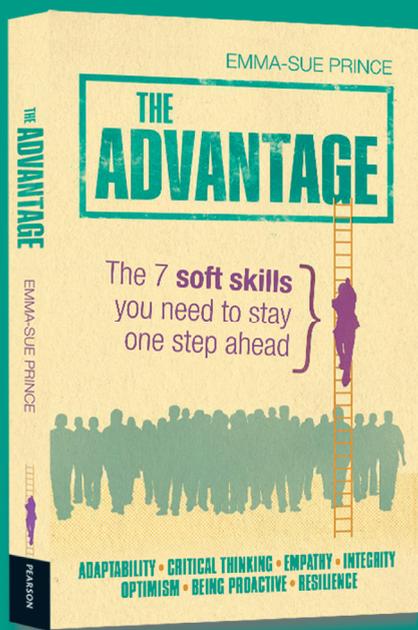
JUST DOING YOUR JOB WON'T GET YOU TO THE TOP, BUT WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

SOFT SKILLS are your secret weapon

These days we're all working harder and longer, but finding it harder than ever to make an impact and get the results we want.

In this groundbreaking book, we set the scene for seven new skills that will propel you and your career forward.

Through a combination of scientific research, no-nonsense advice, practical exercises and case studies, this book shows you how to understand, develop and use:



ADAPTABILITY – respond effectively to challenges and grab new opportunities

RESILIENCE – learn from experience and attack the next challenge with equal boldness

OPTIMISM – be the most positive person you know

PRO-ACTIVITY – thinking and acting ahead

CRITICAL THINKING – challenge assumptions and find solutions

EMPATHY – respect and nurture your relationships

INTEGRITY – trust, values and honesty are the name of the game now as is authenticity

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ADAPTABILITY

What is it?

I bet if I asked you if you're adaptable – flexible and open to change and challenges – you'd say yes, wouldn't you? But you might be surprised by how resistant to change you actually are. Think about if you're asked to make a sudden change in your plans, your first gut reaction is very likely to be “no” rather than that big fat “yes”.

Adaptability isn't just about being flexible – it means being really open to things, even those things outside your comfort zone. It's about developing more of what you are truly capable of and living to your fullest potential.

So what?

You might not realise it, but being adaptable is crucial today. You need resourcefulness, creativity and openness to respond well to any and every challenge and grab new opportunities. Why?

- Technology never stops – it's evolving dramatically and you need to keep up.
- Increasingly, offices are over/You're not tied to a desk – workers will now be working remotely, virtually and internationally.
- Get over it – some people are crushed by change, but highly adaptable individuals survive and thrive.
- You will be reinventing yourself many times throughout your life and work.

Okay, but how?

You're already hard-wired to be adaptable. Without realising it, you've been adapting throughout your life – school, work, relationships, learning – and you're probably quite good at it. The only thing that's holding you back is the mental scripts you've learned. You need to step out of your comfort zone by understanding and unlearning these so you can conquer your natural resistance to change.

Don't worry, there are opportunities all around you to flex those adaptability muscles – some so obvious you may not even be aware of them. You can build your adaptability incrementally through small, easy steps.

If you want to find out more, you can find the book online at
www.the-advantage.info



CRITICAL THINKING

What is it?

If I asked you what critical thinking is, you might say it's about solving problems creatively or questioning assumptions using what you see or hear about facts presented to you. But this isn't the case.

Critical thinking goes deeper: it means seeking out the what and the why of every situation, adopting different perspectives, finding opportunities and using our brains effectively to make sense of vast amounts of information. It also means sharpening our ability to retain and use key data.

Your critical thinking skills probably aren't as good as you think, but there's a good reason for this –the way we look at information on websites and social media has contributed to a speed in making judgements and perceiving data that is not as in-depth as you might think.

So what?

You're probably overwhelmed by work overload, information overload and stress overload. Yet critical thinking will help you manage this. Why?

- Quick decisions – you need to think fast and decide quickly with less information.
- Realise the potential – critical thinkers can size up a situation and see potential where others can't.
- Get creative – critical thinking has a positive impact on creativity, which gives you a competitive advantage.
- Clarity – you need critical thinking skills to help you understand and use all that information effectively.

Okay, but how?

Your brain already has the capacity to develop effective critical thinking skills. It's a purely cognitive skill. But being a critical thinker is a lot more than learning a collection of techniques. It is a mind-set and attitude you adopt every day.

For example, next time you find yourself trying to fill in the gaps, stop and instead try listening out for what's really being said. The more you do this, the more self-aware you'll become. The more we can rise above ingrained habits and fight the tendency to make decisions and assumptions too fast, the more strategies we will develop for thinking critically.



EMPATHY

What is it?

Empathy is often confused with sympathy or as being a bit “touchy-feely”, which might not quite seem like a key skill, but think of empathy as having super-tuned listening skills instead.

We all think we’re good listeners, and pretty sympathetic, but in fact it’s a natural skill that we have all started to lose. At the same time the need for it is much greater because everything you do is more visible now to many more people. Empathy is also known as “social intelligence”. If you have this, you can quickly assess the emotions of those around you and adapt your words, tone and gestures accordingly.

So what?

Empathy is vital to success today. The one thing that can’t be outsourced is an understanding of what makes others tick, creating strong relationships and generally being caring of others. The skill of empathy will make you really stand out amongst individuals in a crowded market place and noisy on-line world.

- Work is changing – we’re working virtually and with different types of people, which demands a more responsive set of interpersonal skills.
- Empathy = good business - numerous studies link empathy to strong business results: increased sales, enhanced performance, new ideas and innovation and retention of talent.
- Get with the programme – being more responsive to others will mean you more quickly sense and respond to changing circumstances.
- What people want – if you’re able to really listen to them and put themselves in their shoes, you can understand what it is that they really want.

Okay, but how?

Some people are naturally good at empathy, but it can also be learned. From practicing mindfulness to active listening, from getting better at reading faces and body language to creating an outcome-based focus in your interactions, there are lots of ways you can develop empathy and strengthen this ability.



INTEGRITY

What is it?

Are you true to your values? Do you do what you say you're going to do? Are you honest? Do you keep your promises? Do you hold yourself accountable and do you take responsibility for your actions? I've no idea. Only you know that.

Truth is, you're probably equally capable of great integrity as much as you are of greed and self-interest. Unfair? As our speed of life has accelerated, so has the number of people who are neglecting to do the things that are expected of them. That includes you and it includes me. Being late for appointments, failing to return calls and emails, changing plans at the last minute and not completing projects on time are an everyday occurrence. These may seem like small things but they are not!

So what?

In this age of transparency and visibility, it will be increasingly important to demonstrate trust, honesty and "doing the right thing". Having integrity can make a huge impact when it comes to others being able to trust you and to being known as reliable and able to get the job done. It means that you will be the person they come to whether it's to confide in you, to support you or to give you that job or break. Why?

- Trust and relationships are valued more highly now than anything else.
- Stand out with integrity – in the midst of change and stormy waters, integrity can become the very thing that differentiates you.
- Employers want it – from high-level decision-making to how people are treated, integrity is evident in a company's corporate culture.
- Integrity goes where you go – if you are acting in line with what you believe in and know to be right, you will, quite simply feel happier and less stressed.

Okay, but how?

Integrity is about character. Can character be developed? Of course it can! From being consistent to doing what you say you will do. From having an opinion and standing up for something to understanding your values and principles, it's all about knowing yourself.

There are so many things you can do in the everyday to build and use your integrity.



OPTIMISM

What is it?

How do you view difficult events in your life? You may be someone who sees the glass as half full, or half empty or neither of these. Perhaps you think of yourself more as a realist. Maybe you think optimism is something you are born with.

Optimism is not about positive thinking, though. It doesn't mean putting on a happy face, no matter what the circumstances or banishing negative thoughts in case they lead to negative results. Real optimism invites you to face problems, accurately assess the situation and seek solutions. We can achieve far more than what we believe may be possible by a combination of hard work, self-belief and healthy optimism. In that context anything certainly may be possible.

So what?

Our current economic and world situation invites us all to examine our potential, perhaps more so than we ever would have done otherwise. We're living in an exciting era of opportunity and change. Real optimism requires you to have your eyes wide open and not shut. Real optimism helps you to:

- Be truly motivated- take control of your life, your circumstances and your responses rather than being swayed by every change you experience.
- Be popular - you will be perceived as likable, open and someone other people want to be around.
- Explore opportunities – you'll be more open to exploring possibilities and being part of innovation and collaboration.
- Boost your psychological immune system – optimism is a core ingredient of being resilient and able to cope well with setbacks, rejection and failure.

Okay, but how?

Optimism can be learned, and we all need to start learning to develop healthy optimism. Martin Seligman says that the key to optimism is asking ourselves more questions before automatically defaulting into a negative response. This requires becoming more self-aware and changing your attitude from “expecting the worst” to “being your best”.

There are opportunities all around you to do this each and every day.



BEING PROACTIVE

What is it?

I'm sure you consider yourself to be pretty proactive. You focus on results, making decisions, dealing with change and managing a complex life. You'd be surprised by how much of this is actually reactive rather than proactive though. Why? The fast pace of our lives means that unintentionally we survive by multi-tasking our way through multiple demands on our time and focus.

Being proactive is about working towards a clear, specific goal, whether that's changing yourself or changing your environment. It's also about being more aware in the present.

So what?

With so much outside our control in work and life, many people struggle with anxiety, lack of sleep, worry and even depression. Being proactive is a way of feeling more in control of our lives and of our futures. In a world that can seem out of control, proactivity is essential because proactive people waste no energy worrying about matters over which they have no control. It's a choice but it's a hard one for some people to accept. If you're truly proactive you will:

- Be in control – only you can create the kind of life you really want.
- Forge ahead – if you want to move ahead in your career or reach a personal goal or achievement that is important to you, it won't happen without you being proactive, resourceful and responsive.
- Make those contacts – networking is not the transactional “working a room” approach but about building genuine relationships both face-to-face and online through social media channels.
- Be better equipped to handle change – even if things are going really well, you can't afford to not be proactive.

Okay, but how?

Some people are naturally lazy or don't want to be bothered with doing things over and beyond what might be expected or required. This is a personal choice, though! From lighting up the room to eating the elephant one bite at a time. From slowing down to learning something new, there are opportunities all around you to be more proactive.



RESILIENCE

What is it?

When the world is stacked against you, do you rise or do you fall? Do you lash out or do you survive? Resilience is the ability to respond well to pressure, deal with setbacks effectively, respond well to change and challenges and basically, bounce back. Most importantly, it is not a fixed character trait but an innate ability and capacity which means it can be developed.

So what?

Resilient people tend to accept the fact that there will be setbacks and challenges in life, but are able to respond with action and feel in control anyway. Setbacks are a part of life but that's good because they force us to take risks, learn and grow. Be resilient and you will:

- Be brave – you need to be willing to take risks and venture into things you may never have tried before.
- Shrug it off and move on – In this time of uncertainty and change you are likely to go through even more setbacks, rejections and disappointments and you need to be able to cope.
- Create support networks – Resilient individuals tend to have strong social networks to help buffer against the changing dynamics of the workplace and society in general.
- Get ahead – studies show that resilience helps you deal with fierce competition and stronger pressures so you can get ahead professionally.

Okay, but how?

Developing resilience takes effort and determination. And this may not come naturally to everyone. If you are naturally risk-averse, for example, then developing resilience will be harder but there are simple things you can do to become help you not only deal with setbacks and rapid change, but also help you to pre-empt potential difficulties and challenges. From taking more risks to celebrating failure. From keeping your options open to asking for help. These opportunities to develop resilience are all around you.



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Emma-Sue Prince is the Director of Unimenta, a best practice free membership site for practitioners offering soft skills training or personal development to individuals, schools and companies

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She has over 15 years experience in the delivery of soft skills programmes, materials and qualifications and teacher training expertise both in the UK and internationally.



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