

5 hard facts about soft skills and why this matters to youth

By [Mark Levy](#)

1 Aug 2022

I have kids - three in fact. And as they grow, they ask more questions; but, as they hit their tweens and their teens, they stop asking questions and choose to provide you with all the answer instead. As a parent, questions and answers seem to be the ping-pong game we continuously find ourselves playing. Ironically, not with our children as much with ourselves.



Mark Levy, founder of Playbox

I have questioned my decision-making as a parent *ad nauseam*; I have second guessed more than half my answers and verdicts; I have asked myself countless times if I'm teaching my kids the right way – and if *I'm* not teaching them the right way, then who is.

There's no denying it: today is a challenging world for teens to grow up in, particularly when it comes to life skills. Aside from an array of societal and systematic challenges, from funding to textbooks, a number of South African schools struggle to provide deeper-truth, quality education for our kids who are in urgent need of a variety of skills that will help to ensure they can succeed when they eventually enter the working world.

What sort of skills are these exactly? Traditionally, formal education systems, such as high schools, have focused on developing hard skills with a view that this will better contribute towards learners' future careers; skills like language, math and computer skills. This is necessary, yes, but what about the soft skills?

In my own life, being a stalwart of education, I've pursued many educational ventures and self-development avenues and my frequent discovery is that traditional education channels often fall short when it comes to teaching the necessary soft skills, alongside formal academia because they're already so overwhelmed.

As a nation, we want our teens (and our people) to be successful in their future careers. And we also need them to be prepared for life, and hopefully well-rounded individuals. I believe that achieving this requires a healthy mix of both hard and soft skills that enable learners to become meaningful contributors to society, equipped with tools they will use in a multitude of contexts and conversations over the course of their lives.

[According to studies](#), employers in Africa say that graduates tend to overlook essential soft skills development when undertaking their degrees and unfortunately, this can negatively affect their ability to find work. This suggests that there is great benefit for future career prospects, and societal contributions, for our learners to get a head start on the development of both sets of skills, while they're still in school.



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The key to ensuring they learn the necessary soft skills, for me, is to educate through storytelling, while adding some entertainment all the same – which is why I'm so passionate about online learning platforms that offer this. My passion project, [Playbox](#), is this exact model. Not only does it supplement traditional in-school learning in a way that is engaging and entertaining, but it also allows learners of all ages to master an array of soft skills in their own time, at their own pace, while witnessing the stories of some of South Africa's greatest icons.

So, here's what I know about the importance of soft skills in our schooling environment, and the role it plays in all our lives:

Five hard facts about soft skills

1. 80% of recruiters say the ability to adapt is becoming increasingly vital in the workplace

When it comes to living in tumultuous times, young South Africans – and indeed, young people the world over – need to be prepared for their lives to change for the worse on a whim and in ways they won't always be able to control. To this end, it's important for them to develop resilience, to ensure they can bounce back no matter what comes their way. Ultra-trail runner, Ryan Sandes, is no stranger to overcoming the odds, and his episodes on Playbox tackle the soft skill of resilience. An undeniable mountain master, he shares wisdom that goes beyond the trail, teaching us all how to handle adversity and, ultimately, come out on top.

2. 9.7 million employees experienced workplace conflict in 2018 to 2019

Soft skills teach teens – and adults alike – that life isn't going to be a walk in the park; that there will be bad moments, sad moments, and tough moments. They also ensure that you can develop what it takes to always overcome the worst. Mogau Seshoene, also known as The Lazy Makoti, is a famous South African chef who lives by the motto: "Do it with the fear!" In her coaching episodes on Playbox, the African cuisine queen touches on the best ways to handle conflict and persevere in pursuit of your wildest dreams - even when there are those around you who tell you to quit.

3. 90% of employees are more likely to stay with a company that empathises with their needs

“When we understand empathy, and we learn how to use it to make the world laugh, that’s when empathy becomes our superpower.” These wise words are from South Africa’s homegrown funny guy and award-winning stand-up comedian, Joey Rasdien. He taught me a lot. Aside from delivering side-splitting lessons in comedy, my learnings from Rasdien speaks about the importance of having empathy – for yourself and everyone around you. And whether a teen ends up leading teams, or working as one part of a bigger whole, knowing how to be empathetic is essential for their success. In fact, empathy is something the world could use a lot more of, no matter our age.



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4. Attitude is the number one important factor when hiring new employees

Just like many of us, your teen will likely have to work for someone one day, or *with* them if they decide to launch their own thing, and the truth is that even if they’re brilliant at what they do, they’ll fail if they have the wrong attitude. Values and manners are important soft skills that are required to get through life and make positive connections as you go. Global soccer star, Lucas Radebe, goes for the goals when he says, “Attitude is what sums you up as a leader, a captain, a true rocket of the game – that’s what sets you apart.” Those who have the right attitude are more likely to move forward in life, making it a skill that’s as necessary to grasp as the fundamental basics of reading and writing.

5. Courage is one of the top seven qualities recruiters look for in the hiring process

The Princess of Africa, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, believes that in order to succeed, you need the guts to be different and the grace to be human. As technological advancements in multiple industries render positions obsolete, young people today may find themselves being told tomorrow that they no longer have a future in certain industries, businesses, or fields of work. In light of this, today’s teens have to consider innovating and building something for themselves – from the ground up – which is where guts come in.

I’m proud to say I’ve had the privilege of collaborating with some of South Africa’s most respected icons while working on and building Playbox. We need more mentorship like this. We need more respect for the skills they don’t teach us in school. We need more recognition of the wonderful ideas storytelling can teach us.

Given the daily challenges we face, in the office and out of it, it’s time for education that does it differently – that is like no other. Not only for our kids, but for us as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Playbox founder, Mark Levy is also founder and CEO of Digital Planet, one of South Africa’s first electronic online stores established in 1999. Levy is a serial entrepreneur who’s been involved in over a dozen businesses and is determinedly motivated to put his love for South Africa into action in a way that matters and, ultimately, makes a difference. Levy’s vision for Playbox is #LikeNoOther and it has resulted in the development of a platform to inspire and educate South Africans of all ages and aspirations to harness their skills, and uncover hope, through watching some of the nation’s most prolific icons sharing their stories and expertise to educate and entertain. An avid reader, and lifelong lover of learning, Levy also currently sits on the board of one of the largest private school groups in South Africa.

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