

# BUSINESS WORLD ON A HEADHUNT FOR THE BEST OF BESTS IN SOFT SKILLS

*By Ruvini Jayasinghe*

The overpowering significance of soft skills in the business world today, pitched against only academic and technical qualifications, has tipped the scales so profoundly to make job applicants with the best set of soft skills, “the best among equals.”

The hard fact about soft skills is that a highly effective set of soft skills is essential for job applicants, especially at higher levels of employment in organizations and has now evolved into a corporate chorus.

While hard skills demonstrate and endorse knowledge, experience and understanding of a particular, measurable ability, soft skills often indicate a person’s ability to work with others and grow within a company.

Soft skills come from within and are a nurturing of an individuals’ innate personal development. Soft skills complement technical skills.

A person’s soft skills can also contribute effectively to the employer’s reputation. Employees’ interactions with clients and business partners

can influence how people perceive a company and impact their decision to embark on a business partnership with them.

On the 10th anniversary of Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology’s (SLIIT’s) “Soft Skills+”, BMD spoke to Business Professor Samantha Thelijjagoda, Dean of SLIIT Business School on the steps taken in promoting soft skills training for schools providing Advance Level education across the country. This massive island wide programme, has undertaken grooming school children in higher grades with soft skills required to perform well in their higher education and thereafter in the corporate world. SLIIT Business School also runs its own soft skills training programmes for undergraduates of the campus’ business management programmes, to enter the business world with confidence, armed with technical, academic qualifications and acquiring the set of soft skills that would take them to the top of the corporate world.

*Excerpts from the interview:*





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**Q. How did “Soft Skills+” evolve?**

This is a CSR initiative organized by SLIIT Business School with the approval of the Higher Education Ministry. As the importance of soft skills in the business world grew to an extent where job aspirants with the proper academic /technical qualifications were not getting hired for suitable jobs because they lacked the key soft skills required in the business world, we understood that soft skills training had to be taken to a very elementary level right into our school education system. We conduct this as an annual event and has become the key event of SLIIT Business School.

**Q. What is special in Soft skills+ 2022?**

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As mentioned, since this is a CSR event, there are absolutely no costs involved to schools or participants. It is SLIIT Business School’s commitment and contribution to the society to develop a high caliber of soft skills in our students countrywide. We work with a team of trainers and lecturers who are committed in conducting the training. We are humbly proud to announce the milestone of our 10th anniversary in conducting this programme. programme details are available at [www.sliit.lk/business/soft-skills-2022](http://www.sliit.lk/business/soft-skills-2022).



**Q: What kind of soft skills training is offered to SLIIT Business School students?**

We have introduced soft-skills modules, various related programmes, and activities for our business students since 2007. We realized that they have improved themselves significantly and perform very effectively in the industry after their graduation, since. The areas such as self-management, personal development planning, leadership and teamwork, learning and study skills, career readiness and business etiquette and effective communication have been included into the degree programme. The aim of these efforts is to give a considerable support to move to the higher level of their career comfortably.

**Q: What are the key soft skills identified by SLIIT in grooming our students?**

There are a few key areas our students require training in.

For example, consider a group of students, it is natural to hand over leadership to the person who demonstrates inborn leadership skills/traits. Other team members who realise the particular team member's obvious or outstanding leadership skills, often hand over the reins to that person and are happy to be led by the identified person.

But this is not a healthy situation. While some individuals do have inborn leadership qualities, we train all our students to take on the mantle of leadership, in any given situation.

Similar situations arise in decision making, problem solving and taking initiatives. The most common reason students hold back in making decisions or taking initiatives is the fear of failure. By providing them soft skills training, we aim to build their confidence in decision making, by improving their background knowledge, levels of awareness and train them in listening skills, communications skills & leadership skills.

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So, from classroom to lecture hall, we continue to teach our students the importance of leadership, taking initiatives, decision making and problem solving which are all individual characteristics that have to be identified, trained and nurtured.

We also teach them the importance of teamwork and building the team spirit. It is the usual pattern for our students in higher grades to study on their own for their examinations. They spend much time alone to achieve their targets of securing excellent results at examinations or making presentations etc,. However, this solitary environment does not prepare them for the reality of the work environment where their success or in showcasing their abilities would depend on the cooperation of their team members and vice versa. A similar situation is confronted with problem solving where a team effort is most often the right path.

Some students, although outstanding in their academic performance, display an inability to work with others, (team work) or communicate their thought processes on varying issues effectively (Communication). As these two skills are vital in creating highly effective business leadership; we, SLIIT Business School, take it upon our shoulders to hand over the baton of 'Soft Skills' to future generation of our country. <sup>bmd</sup>