



The Hard Asset Value of Soft Skills Training

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**THINK Like a
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Jim Bouchard
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HOW IMPORTANT ARE MINDSET QUALITIES IN THE WORKPLACE?

According to business leaders and human resource professionals, apparently very important!

Operating an organization with little or no emphasis on soft skill training is like trying to operate a computer without software. Without up to date software, a computer is just a box. Likewise, no process can be effective without the soft skills and mindset characteristics that make it so.

A recent study by the *Center for Professional Excellence* at York College of Pennsylvania provides poignant data on the most essential mindset characteristics identified by business leaders, and which of these characteristics are readily apparent or lacking in new hires.



SOFT SKILLS BECOME HARD ASSETS

Managers cutting budgets in tight economic conditions often cancel “soft skill” training. Appearing on FOX Business News Matthew Randall, one of the researchers of the York College report said, “Employers are looking for the right mix of technical skills- and soft skills.”¹

Desirable soft skills include:

- *Workplace respect and etiquette*
- *Communication skills*
- *Self-motivation and initiative*

These “soft” skills are the differentiation points separating the most productive employees from those who are simply doing the bare minimum or worse- those who through slacking, bullying, harassment and even stealing become a major drain on the company’s bottom line.

Nearly 98% of the professionals polled by York College reported that these soft skills indicative of professionalism are critical when considering new hires. It’s not unreasonable to assume these same leaders value these characteristics throughout an employee’s career with the organization!

¹ FOX Business Live, “Generation Gap at the Office?” FOX News Strategy Room, (accessed 10/4/2010) http://video.foxnews.com/v/4394009/generation-gap-at-the-office/?playlist_id=86980

INNOVATION, CHANGE AND PROGRESS

Soft skills are really the characteristics that make for a creative, innovative and productive organization.

“As per the research conducted by **Forbes ,Ernst & Young and the Wharton School of Business** have found innovation to be the important value of any corporate either durable or non-durable companies.”²

Innovation and creativity become hard assets when an organization cultivates the **Black Belt Mindset** characteristics of:

- *Confidence*
- *Courage*
- *Discipline & Focus*

These characteristics are either present to some degree in new hires, or must be cultivated by the organization. The most successful organizations are those that focus a continual effort on the development of these traits at all levels.

You simply cannot install a culture of innovation or a process for significant change without these fundamental mindset characteristics. How can anyone be innovative and creative without confidence? Where is innovation without courage? How do you implement changes without discipline and focus?

I recently saw a powerful presentation by change management and innovation expert Gerard Bruno of Gerard Bruno Associates in Massachusetts. In his presentation, Bruno described “The Emotional Wave” that occurs when an organization attempts to implement any significant change.



As an organization moves through a change process, shock, denial, frustration, fear and anger must be managed and mitigated for the transition to take place. After the change, there may be another period of frustration before the organization experiences renewed energy, deeper understanding and eventually full integration.

This roller coaster ride is completely due to the human element. People create, propose, manage and implement change- and people feel emotions. The better prepared people are, the smoother the transition

and the more effective the change.

On the down slope are the emotions that cause resistance to change. Each can be mitigated and managed by open communication, leadership, partnership between levels and attention to mindset. After all, emotions are products of mindset.

² Management, “Corporate Success, Importance of Innovation in Business Strategy,” Think Ahead.net, (accessed 11/9/2010,

<http://management.thinkahead.net.in/corporate-success-importance-of-innovation-in-business-strategy.html>

On the up slope mindset is critical to see the process through to a successful conclusion, make adjustments and build on the experience gained throughout the transition.

Develop and implant these mindset characteristics and soft skills before implementing any significant change and the process is streamlined- resistance factors will be mitigated and driving forces amplified. Back to the computer example, soft skills equate to an optimized platform running all the most current, effective and powerful software.

These mindset characteristics are not new, nor should they be unique. They should be fundamental components of your organization's culture. My work identifies and cultivates the mindset that encourages innovation and creativity and mitigates the emotional barriers that stand in the way of positive change and progress.

Let's look at the emotions people experience throughout a significant transition and how the characteristics of **Black Belt Mindset** enhance positive and mitigate negative emotions...

Emotion	Black Belt Mindset <i>characteristic that mitigates or enhances that emotional step...</i>
Shock, Denial	Leadership, Compassion - leaders must be sensitive to the emotions experienced by those implementing or affected by the change.
Frustration, Fear	Confidence, Courage - Open lines of communication and teamwork at all levels to assure that everyone is knowledgeable about the transition process, knows why it's happening and that the change will be beneficial, not threatening.
Acceptance, Frustration (on the upswing)	Discipline, Focus, Perseverance - based on the knowledge that the change is going to benefit the organization and the individual. It's going to make life better, not worse.
Renewed Energy	Practice, Perfection - accepting that change and perfection is a never-ending process and part of the natural cycle of growth, renewal and progress.
Deeper Understanding	Wisdom - now the team has a valuable asset in the form of the knowledge and experience gained throughout the transition process.
Integration	Excellence, Mastery, Power - now you've got the resources to effectively repeat and expand the process and to share the process with the next generation.

THE GAP

“What I’m seeing is a real gap,” says David Polk, PhD., Professor of Behavioral Sciences at the Center for Professional Excellence and President of the Polk-Lepson Research Group who conducted the study, “between what employers want in a young employee- young professional and what they’re actually seeing.”

“For example,” Polk adds, “when we asked employers to rate a list of items- qualities as far as what is most important, what you’ll hear is they’re most after someone who can accept responsibility- personal responsibility for their actions and their decisions...the number one thing.”³

What are the rest of these traits of professional mindset so important to businesses? Dr. Polk summarizes the findings of the study- here’s what employers are looking for:

1. *Accepting personal responsibility.*
2. *Taking initiative.*
3. *Work ethic.*
4. *Displays ethics in the workplace.*



Again from Dr. Polk, “..and the amazing thing is, that when you turn around and say what traits are in existent, you find at the very bottom- is the one that’s most important.”⁴ This means that while employers value personal responsibility, initiative and work ethic most highly, these are exactly the assets most lacking in college graduates seeking employment.

Mindset development is an essential component in closing this gap and positioning the organization and the individual for success.

³ FOX Business Live, “Generation Gap at the Office?” FOX News Strategy Room, (accessed 10/4/2010) http://video.foxnews.com/v/4394009/generation-gap-at-the-office/?playlist_id=86980

⁴ Ibid

CLOSING THE GAP

The primary reasons for this gap as cited by the study are an increasing sense of entitlement and a lack of the basic mindset characteristics that identify someone as a professional.

“In an open ended question, respondents described the three traits or behaviors that characterize an employee who is a professional.

“Almost half the respondents referred to interpersonal skills (48.0%) and the ability to listen and communicate (46.9%). Included in interpersonal skills was the presence of courtesy and respect.

“These traits were followed by work ethic (35.4%), personal appearance (34.2%), and a sense of self combined with confidence (20.1%).⁵

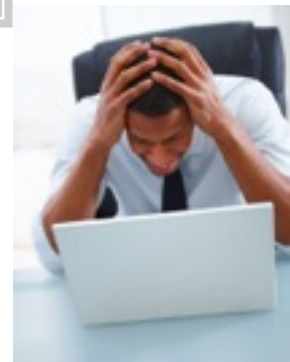
Work ethic seems easily understood in terms of productivity and profitability, but why did so many business leaders rate “soft” skills such as courtesy, respect and confidence so highly?

Without those skills, it is difficult if not impossible to cultivate an effective, innovative and productive employee. The fact is that these so called “soft” skills are the raw materials that produce a company’s most tangible hard asset- profit.

THE COST OF IGNORING SOFT SKILLS

Look at these assets from the other side of the mirror and it becomes apparent that ignoring the cultivation of these characteristics can cost a company an enormous amount of money and cripple an organization’s culture.

For example, studies done by the *Workplace Bullying Institute* show that just one disrespectful employee can reduce the productive output of the target employee by 50%, and associated employees by as much as 35%.⁶ Factor in the medical and legal costs and one employee lacking the “soft” skills of courtesy and respect can cost an organization as much as \$500,000 or more in a single incident, and that’s before we talk about turnover costs due to disrespectful employees and workplace bullies.



What is the cost of a poor work ethic? A widely cited poll of over 10,000 employees by Salary.com shows that American workers waste an average of 2.09 hours per day. Assuming national averages, this translates to about \$5,700 a year- per employee. That means the average American business (16 employees) is losing about \$91,000 a year to lost and wasted time.

Another study by Basex cited on ITWorld.com puts the cost of lost time due to interruptions at \$588 billion dollars in America alone.⁷ That’s 28 billion hours of time wasted to personal calls, internet

⁵ 2009 Professionalism Study, Polk-Lepson Research Group, York College of Pennsylvania, (accessed 11/5/2010) <http://www.ycp.edu/cpe/YorkCollegeProfessionalismStudy2009.pdf>

⁶ Workplace Bullying Institute, (accessed 11/5/2010) <http://www.workplacebullying.org/research.html>

⁷ James Gaskin, Workplace Interruptions Cost \$588 B in Lost Productivity, IT World, (accessed 11/5/2010) <http://www.itworld.com/lost-productivity-nlsnetworking-080108>

browsing and email interruptions, and not all of this is illegitimate, many of these interruptions are work related. Much of this time could be recovered with simple mindset training in focus.

Now factor in the projected loss of potential productivity. How do you measure the potential revenue your organization will lose by not cultivating and supporting productive soft skills development?

WHEN SHOULD MINDSET TRAINING START?

There's a growing demand among employers for a pool of applicants already trained in the soft skills they desire. They're turning to colleges and universities to implement soft skill programs particularly those dealing with communication skills, work ethic, business ethics and protocol (respect and courtesy in the workplace). The York College study and its Center for Professional Excellence serve as evidence that the academic community wants to be responsive in filling this need.

Colleges and universities that provide programs and workshops in mindset and character development are doing a great service to their students. It is essential that we refocus on developing these attributes to better prepare students for both professional and personal life. The same mindset characteristics that make good employee will also greatly increase a student's chance of earning a degree.

"It is estimated that 40% of college students will leave higher education without getting a degree, with 75% percent of these students leaving within their first two years of college. Freshman class attrition rates are typically greater than any other academic year and are commonly as high as 20-30%. These statistics show a need for colleges to do something about retention rates."⁸

At the same time, "An alarming number of schools have no specific plan or goals in place to improve student retention and degree completion."⁹

Many students lack the fundamental mindset characteristics that assure a reasonable chance of success.

"Though research links financial difficulties to dropout rates, there are a number of factors that account for why students decide to leave school. Students tend to drop out because their expectations of college—academically, socially, or both—don't match up with the reality once they get there. They also suffer from lack of motivation, inadequate preparation, and poor study skills."¹⁰



If students are entering college without the fundamental mindset traits necessary for success, the answer is to provide programs to develop these characteristics. Teach **Black Belt Mindset** as part of your college program and you give students the soft skills that greatly increase their capacity to successfully complete their degree programs- and later become more successful in professional life.

A small investment in this area can produce remarkable changes particularly when you consider the value of each student to an institution and each graduate to the community. Using economic measurements alone, the average college grad still earns roughly a million dollars more over a lifetime

⁸ College & University Blog, *StateUniversity.com*, "College Drop Out Rates- Who's to Blame?" (accessed 11/13/2010) <http://www.stateuniversity.com/blog/permalink/College-Drop-Out-Rates-Who-s-to-Blame-.html#ixzz15AwnURRk>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

than a dropout. Each lost degree is a tremendous loss of potential resources to the community, especially in low income communities where the dropout rates are highest.

Current cultural trends particularly the rise in a sense of entitlement adds to the problem.

“You have dreams and aspirations,” comments Matthew Randall discussing the results of the York College study, “but it takes time and hard work to get there.”

Discipline, focus, self-motivation, confidence are the Black Belt Mindset characteristics essential to successfully completing a degree. These same traits make for an attractive and productive employee entering the workforce.

Once the student becomes an employee the value of the investment in a new hire must be protected and can be increased by the hiring organization through comprehensive soft skill training. This type of programming can improve the value of the human resources in any company as well as expanding on the creativity, innovation and productivity of the entire workforce.

Mindset training and development of soft skills should be a continual effort and investment from grade school to retirement, and beyond.



BENEFITS OF BLACK BELT MINDSET TRAINING FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:

- ***Increased student retention.***
- ***Higher grades & better student performance.***
- ***More respectful academic and student life environment.***
- ***Reduced incidents of student to student bullying and harassment.***
- ***Less student alcoholism & drug abuse***

THE SOLUTION: THE BLACK BELT MINDSET

From simple fortune cookie sayings to epic works of cinema and literature, we have a fascination with the wisdom of the ancient Asian martial arts masters. Long before Dale Carnegie, Stephen Covey and Jack Canfield the sages Lao Tzu, Musashi and Sun Tzu developed fundamental techniques for mindset training, personal development and leadership that are as applicable today as they were in ancient China and Japan.

I've been practicing and teaching martial arts for more than 25 years. My primary interest has always been in the philosophical aspects of martial arts training. Nearly every day my students share stories with me about how they apply the principles of what I call *Black Belt Mindset* in school, work, business and at home.

These stories inspired me to write *Think Like a Black Belt* and go out on the speaking circuit to share **Black Belt Mindset** with folks outside the *dojo*. You don't need to be a Black Belt to think like one!

Let's review the characteristics most desired by business leaders and human resource professionals and compare them to the characteristics of **Black Belt Mindset** I teach in *Think Like a Black Belt*:

Traits desired in the professional...	Think Like a Black Belt...
Accepting personal responsibility.	Courage, Self-Motivation
Taking initiative.	Self-Motivation, Discipline
Work ethic.	Discipline, Focus, Leadership
Displays ethics in the workplace.	Leadership, Compassion, Respect, Courage

An individual doesn't need to practice martial arts to cultivate and utilize these mindset characteristics. One does need to develop a sense of self-awareness and commit to continual self-improvement to leverage these traits to increase power and effectiveness.

Teach everyone in your organization to *Think Like a Black Belt* and the power of the organization increases exponentially.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

An investment only makes sense when there's a reasonable expectation of return. An investment in mindset training will add thousands of dollars to your bottom line. Let's look at what happens when employees learn and apply the characteristic of Focus.

Earlier I shared a frightening statistic: the average American worker is wasting 2.09 hours per day. Much of this lost time is attributed to a lack of focus and workplace distractions.



“According to Madbury (N.H.)-based NFI Research, two-thirds of 228 senior executives and managers who responded to a recent survey say e-mail is the most prominent workplace disruption, followed by crisis of the day (42%), personal interruptions (31%), and changing priorities (30%).”¹¹

The average employee is knocked off task every 11 minutes, after which it takes an average of 25 minutes to get back on task¹² and “Studies show that a person who is interrupted takes 50% longer to accomplish a task.”¹³ It’s easy to see how a Basex report estimates “*The Cost of Not Paying Attention*” at \$588 billion for American business alone.

We live in the age of multi-tasking, yet “To put it bluntly, research shows that *we can’t multi-task*.”¹⁴ So- while it’s true that we can’t really multi-task and we’re terribly distracted...

From Think Like a Black Belt:

“It’s also true, however, that in our incredibly noisy and fast-paced world people who can deal with the noise and confusion are pretty valuable people! Multi-tasking is really the ability to shift focus quickly from one target to another and back again. The lag-time problem most people experience happens when you try to come back to the original train of thought. People who can do this quickly and successfully are the people we say are good ‘multi-taskers.’

At the same time,

“You can’t force focus. It’s useless to try and force yourself to concentrate. Focus is really a process of letting go; it’s a matter of turning off the noise and letting your mind do what it does naturally. When you turn off the distractions you operate at peak efficiency and the mind naturally settles on the task at hand.

“Of course, turning off the noise is more easily said than done! Sometimes it’s physically impossible to eliminate distractions at a specific moment that demands your full attention. You *can* train yourself to ‘tune-out’ distractions, which requires some work and some understanding.”

Recover just 10 minutes per day through focus training and a business with 100 employees will recoup nearly \$50,000 per annum in salary alone to say nothing of additional payroll expenses. Factor in the increased productivity potential of more engaged workforce and the returns can be exponential. In ***Corporate Culture and Performance*** John P. Kotter reports that a fully engaged workforce can outperform the competition by as much as 500 to 700 percent.



¹¹ Emily Keller, *Bloomberg Business Week*, Bloomberg.com, “Why You Can’t Get Any Work Done,” (accessed 11/13/2010) http://www.businessweek.com/careers/content/jul2007/ca20070719_880333.htm

¹² David H. Fredman, “Taskus Interruptus,” *Inc. Magazine*, February 2007, 67

¹³ John Medina, *Brain Rules*, (Seattle, WA: Pear Press, 2008), 87.

¹⁴ Medina, 85.

THE HARD ASSETS OF SOFT SKILLS

The absence of critical soft skills is causing an incredible drain on our resources and potential. Let's do a quick assessment of the potential savings and increased profitability possible when you train your students or employees to think like Black Belts.



Black Belt Mindset Trait	Workplace Benefits
Respect/Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevent workplace bullying and harassment.• Improve management/employee relationships• More effective mentoring.• Increase productivity.• Reduction in lost and sick time.• Reduction in healthcare expenses and lower insurance rates.• Reduce risk of lawsuit.• Lower employee turnover & related costs.
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase productivity.• Higher levels of motivation and engagement.• Increase sales.
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce lost and wasted time.• Improve employee satisfaction & morale.• Improve customer service & satisfaction.• Decrease errors and accidents and improve safety.
Courage & Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve innovation and creativity.• Stronger more responsive leadership.• Improve job satisfaction and morale.• Increase productivity and sales.• More respectful workplace environment.• More effective leadership at all levels.

Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase effectiveness and efficiency. • Higher employee retention rates. • Increase motivation & engagement. • More effective leadership.
Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase alignment with organization mission & vision. • Improve brand perception. • Greater sense of purpose and fulfillment.

THE BOTTOM LINE...

Widely published research from the *Gallup Organization* indicates that only 29% of the American workforce is actively engaged on the job.¹⁵

- 54% are “not-engaged” moving through the day like automatons.
- 17% are fully “disengaged,” they’re not productive at all and are likely to be disruptive to other employees.



When a student or employee knows how to **Think Like a Black Belt** that person is fully engaged. That person understands the value of discipline, focus, perseverance, excellence and a continual commitment to self-improvement.

“Perfection is not a destination; it’s a never-ending process...Enjoy!”

In martial arts there is a common distinction between “hard” and “soft” styles. Generally, hard styles teach a more tangible or “external” approach to technique while soft styles emphasize internal power. You might say that both approaches develop power and the greatest effect is achieved when one can master both internal power and external expression.

Engagement, courtesy, respect, work ethic and other so called “soft” skills are difficult for most companies to measure efficiently. Even a small investment in development of these soft skills can greatly impact the hard bottom line profitability and effectiveness of any organization.

Preventing a single case of workplace harassment can save an organization hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost time, lowered productivity and legal fees. I’m very proud that my clients have installed **Black Belt Mindset** as part of workplace policy:

¹⁵ Dr. Maynard Brusman, “Employee Engagement, Running on 1/3 People Power,” <http://www.workingresources.com/professionaleffectivenessarticles/article.nhtml?uid=10040> (accessed 9/1/2008)

"You have my sincere gratitude for a job well done as indicated by the very complimentary evaluations you received. We now have a new Code of Ethics and Respect that went into place earlier this week. Much of the credit for this new document comes as a direct result of all the discussion in the senior leadership team meeting following your program."

Joe Hyatt, VP of Human Resources at Oakhurst Dairy

There are no line items on your balance sheet to measure internal mindset characteristics like discipline, focus, confidence and courage. The external expression of these characteristics is immediately measurable when you review your profit and loss statement.

ABOUT JIM BOUCHARD...

Martial arts transformed Jim's self-perception from former drug abuser and failure to successful entrepreneur and Black Belt. As a speaker and author of Amazon bestseller ***Think Like a Black Belt***, his second book, Jim tours nationally presenting his philosophy of *Black Belt Mindset* for corporate and conference audiences. He's a regular guest on TV and radio programs including *FOX News*, *BBC Worldview* and *FOX Across America*.

Jim's resume is colorful. As a former television writer and producer, Jim has done everything from fitting pipes on submarines, mopping floors, pumping gas and selling hot dogs to producing television commercials, fighting fires, boxing, playing drums in major concerts, hosting radio shows and kicking for semi-pro football teams.

For more than 25 years Jim Bouchard has explored personal and professional excellence through martial arts. He's helped thousands of students reach their full potential as founder and Master Instructor in Residence at Northern Chi Martial Arts Center. He's a member of Cane Masters International Association and creator of the Beifang Qi Cane system. Jim has twice been featured in Inside Kung Fu Magazine and is a 2004 inductee to the U.S. Martial Arts Hall of Fame.

Jim's presentations are highly interactive events engaging the audience in a full-contact journey of personal discovery and transformation. He freely shares his journey of self-transformation to motivate and inspire everyone in his audience to not only "Think Like a Black Belt," but in every sense of the word and in whatever vocation you choose- to be one!



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TESTIMONIALS

"You were terrific!" I was so excited by your presentation.... I want to reach out, grab some people, shake them and tell them how important and exciting this was! THANK YOU!!!!"

Geoff Lamdin
President, Association for Consulting Expertise

"Thank you Jim for an outstanding presentation to the CEO Club of Boston! One of our long time members said it was **the best presentation he has ever seen at the CEO Club!** That says it all!"

Fred Green
President & Founder, CEO Club of Boston

"What can I say about Jim Bouchard- a GREAT deal! He is the alpha professional with a quiet demeanor that makes you want to implement his ideas ASAP. This is a motivational speaker you want to book for your event ASAP. In addition, his new book Think Like a Black Belt, is a must read!"

Dr. John Tantillo
"The Marketing Doctor" & FOX News Contributor

"I recommend every director of Events Enrollment and Retention secure Jim Bouchard to address their freshman class and make 'Think Like a Black Belt' required reading!"

Professor John Brubaker
Central Maine Community College

"Thank you for...speaking to our students - You were their favorite speaker of the semester! You rock!"

Michelle Neujahr
SMCC Entrepreneurial Center Director

"Jim delivers a powerful message with the excellence that he speaks about. He brings in the Black Belt Mindset and weaves it skillfully throughout to show how to utilize it in all of life's experiences, and every moment. He speaks in a passionate way about facing and overcoming challenges with courage and confidence. It is refreshingly 'real-life'. In short, Jim is inspiring!"

Jo & Mike Chevin
Founders of JoAndMikeNow.com and the Entrepreneur's Guide to Success Series

"Jim Bouchard is an instigator in every good sense of the word! As a speaker Jim's energy, charisma and acumen make an incredible combination. When he spoke to our group there was an abundance of nodding heads and lively audience interaction. I'd go to his seminars any day!"

Mikaela Rios
Women In Business

"Top notch speaker, motivator and educator rolled into one! Jim's workshops have been some of the highest rated and best attended workshops over the past two years. I highly recommend Jim to anyone who wants to grow their employee base and motivate themselves to the next level!"

Steve Wallace
Director of the Southern Midcoast Maine Chamber of Commerce