

(Re)Tired Chief

Kevin M. McFarland

Old Dominion University

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Professor Dr. Sherron Gordon-Phan

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Abstract

This reflection, titled *(Re)Tired Chief*, explores the development and impact of key soft skills—Leadership, Communication, and Creativity—cultivated over two decades spanning military and academic careers. While formal education played a role in honing these abilities, the foundation was laid through extensive service in the United States Navy. These soft skills, often undervalued due to their intangible nature, have consistently proven to be critical differentiators in professional environments. Leadership is examined not as a position of authority, but as a measure of influence and mentorship. Communication is discussed through the lens of both written and oral expression, with an emphasis on authenticity and transparency. Creativity is framed not only as artistic expression but as a problem-solving tool driven by innovation and flexibility. Through personal anecdotes, professional achievements, and selected artifacts, this paper illustrates how these intertwined soft skills have shaped a career and prepared the author to rise above conventional metrics of success. Ultimately, while employers often prioritize quantifiable experience, it is the nuanced, human-centered skills that enable true professional growth and leadership.

Keywords: cybersecurity, skills, interdisciplinary

(Re)Tired Chief

Reflecting on the skills I have obtained or developed during my academic career would probably be a disservice to this paper. My academic career has been rather short so far, and many of my skills were developed during my enlistments in the United States Navy. So, to remedy that possible disservice, I will include skills obtained or developed during both time periods, a time spanning 20 years. The skills I will be taking a hard look at and reflecting on are Leadership, Written and Oral Communication, and Creativity. These can be considered soft skills, and soft skills tend to be harder to measure or quantify. A hard skill can be documented easily, they often have a record, are measurable and testable. You earn a certification, have an accomplishment rate, fielded so many corrections, but they don't define you best. However soft skills in comparison to hard skills are better suited to providing an apt description of a person, rather than just marking off their accomplishments. Dr. Bret Fund of Flat Iron School provided this point of view of potential employers, "The true middle ground in security talent and hiring is finding candidates with risk-mitigating factors (Fund 2021)." Those factors Fund refers to are a diverse set of soft skills. I hope this reflection provides a description of me as a professional and a person that elevates me above the check in the box most employers seek.

Skills to Pay the Bills

Leadership

As I look back on my naval career, I recall a phrase that was probably meant to empower and encourage sailors at all ranks. However, I do believe this phrase was often taken as patronizing and maybe seen as a way to place blame at times. That phrase I recall was, "Everyone is a leader." I personally saw it as an empowerment tool, if the person receiving that

phrase took value in it and applied it to their work environment, they were able to show they were capable of more than their rank implied. Not being tied to your enlisted rank and performing beyond it truly allowed you to shine. It allows one to gain trust, gain responsibility, and eventually be recognized as someone who deserves promotion. But how does one measure leadership? It is not exactly tangible; however you could get recognized for displaying leadership during an event, but that doesn't translate well into a measurement. I found as a leader in the United States Navy, the best way I could measure my success, was by seeing how successful my juniors were. The Sailors that I was responsible for, what milestones did they hit, what did they accomplish? It was no longer about me and what I did, it was what was accomplished not necessarily because of me, and yet sometime in spite of me. I wasn't a harsh leader, but I would hold you accountable, and if you failed to perform at a level that I assessed you could perform at, I would hold your feet to the fire. I invested my time, blood sweat and tears into these kids, and my investments paid off. According to Lydia Abbot, a contributor on LinkedIn, "Research shows that organizations with high quality leaders are 13X more likely to outperform their competition. Clearly, having people who can guide and drive change will be essential to your company's success (Abbot 2016)." Leadership ultimately is not about being in charge, but what you do for those in your charge, that leads to mentorship.

Two of the artifacts I have relate to some of my time as a mentor is from volunteering with the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative as a Technology Enabled Engagement and Mentoring (TEEM) Program Mentor. This is a program I have participated in twice, where I served as a mentor to high school students interested in exploring careers in cybersecurity. The mentee is tasked with exploring various topics related to the field just as certifications, artificial

intelligence, interview preparation and skills needed, and from there get with the mentor to receive their experience and point of view on each subject.

Another artifact related to my leadership experience is my certificate for being initiated into the Omicron Delta Kappa, which is The National Leadership Honor Society. To be invited and then initiated, I had to be identified as in the top 35% of my class and have an application describing my academic leadership experience. I was accepted and initiated and provided my certificate and key pin. Funny how that works, receive recognition when you aren't focusing on yourself, but on others.

Communication

Communication is easier to identify as both a hard and soft skill. Writing or typing makes for an easy representation of this as a hard skill, however there are two factors that make communication considered a soft skill as well. First there is oral communication, you can talk and express ideas, communicate your needs. The second factor is less tangible, but how you communicate, at what level is your vocabulary, do you get nervous when you speak, your tone and inflection. I happen to be great at written communication and have experience speaking at the senior level when it comes to organization.

I have a few artifacts posted here of examples of my written works, one of which has been identified by a professor of mine as graduate level work. I wrote a paper on the social implications of the use of the National Institute of Standards and Technology 2.0 Cybersecurity Framework Policy. It is that quality of writing that has helped me be successful in my naval and academic careers. If I were to be honest though, I prefer not to communicate on the phone or orally at all if I can help it. And that's not because I can't or don't have the skill, I just know I am

a stronger, faster, more eloquent writer. And I will be able to continue to multitask, avoiding that expectation when talking to someone that they have your undivided attention. Also I just plain don't like talking on the phone. Another thing about communication that I tend to employ is openness and transparency. According to Shayna Joubert of Northeastern University, "It is best to approach workplace communications with an open mind. You should accept that you might not always agree with someone's point of view, but try to be sympathetic to their perspective and always show respect. This way, you can disagree amicably, and avoid causing rifts that may affect future work (Joubert 2024)." That can help build trust, but what builds even more trust is transparency. Be honest about the situation, the mood, whatever is going on, share details that are important. That transparency allows for free communication and possible exchange of ideas that lead to solutions. Being the senior man with a secret or even the junior with the secret can breed distrust but can also stifle creativity and lower moral. Developing and learning how best to communicate has played a major factor in my success.

Creativity

As far as skills go, creativity is a core attribute of mine. I have always been creative, and I embrace it as a skill to continually develop. Creativity is great for creating art, designing and building things, but it's also great for being a source of solutions. Kemli Beltre offers this point of view on creativity as a soft skill, "Creativity is one of the soft skills and is supposed to help develop innovative solutions to problems. It requires an openness to innovation and mental flexibility. In many sectors, creativity techniques are seen as a means to an end and are designed to achieve better results (Beltre 2022)." Creativity enables you to see the big picture, think outside the box and even play devils' advocate. Playing devil's advocate has not always made me popular with my peers, but it has consistently been a tool to identify the holes or at least provide

point of view or solution that otherwise wasn't being considered. I have some artifacts showing my artistic side, where I approached the assignment from a different angle, and I used different skills to accomplish success.

Conclusion

These skills, and many others I have developed over the years, are all complimentary. They support and strengthen each other making for a more diverse yet also comprehensive professional. Their function in concerto is parallel to how cybersecurity is an interdisciplinary field, and no singular discipline can explain it, nor could a single skill make for a great professional. But lest we forget, what companies are actually looking for is "Relevant work experience is identified as the most important factor in recruiting, and enterprise and employability skills have increased in importance as a recruiting factor (Harris & Clayton 2018)." So its great to have the soft skills, they will make you a great professional, but at the end of the day what is going to get your foot in the door is the work experience.

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