

**Forbes**<http://onforbes.es/1sJWUy1>**Alex McClafferty** Contributor*I cover the process of success, entrepreneurship and public speaking.*

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## 6 Soft Skills That Guarantee Your Success

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I failed 'Introduction to Java' in my first year of college and gave up software engineering for good.

In spite of this, I co-founded a successful [WordPress support](#) service.

Three things have helped me succeed as a first-time entrepreneur. The first is luck and the second is my co-founder, Dan. The third?

*Soft skills.*

In this post, I'll outline six soft skills that will help you succeed as an entrepreneur, why they matter and where you can learn more about each skill.

### Empathy

"The best vision is insight." - Malcolm S. Forbes

Empathy is the #1 soft skill you can develop as an entrepreneur.

*Sympathy* is feeling compassion or commiseration for another person, while *empathy* is when you project yourself into them and feel what they are feeling.

Empathy will help you understand your customer, write better copy and motivate your team.

To develop your empathy, listen more and talk less. To really 'understand where someone is coming from', ask thoughtful and probing questions that draw out implications and feelings. When you listen intently and talk less, you'll be amazed at how much more insight you glean from a short conversation.

This [popular video](#) explains the difference between sympathy and empathy.

### Negotiation

"Place a higher priority on discovering what a win looks like for the other person." - Harvey Robbins

For first timers, negotiation feels terribly awkward.

By definition, you seek conflict to work towards an agreement. Yes, it is

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counterintuitive. Luckily, you can rapidly improve your negotiation skills with focus and practice.

There are three keys to negotiating:

1. Prepare yourself with everything you can to support your position
2. Know your BATNA (Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement)
3. Keep your emotions in check

If you haven't negotiated before, visit a local market and find an item you like. Then, ask for a 10% discount. If the storekeeper asks you why; tell them you are looking for a deal. If you get rejected, no problem – dust yourself off. If they say OK, try the 'nibble' technique and ask for another concession.

For a play by play negotiation script, read [this post](#) by Tim Ferriss.

### Public Speaking

"There are certain things in which mediocrity is not to be endured, such as poetry, music, painting and public speaking." - Jean de la Bruyere

To become a successful public speaker, you need to:

1. Craft an interesting story
2. Accept discomfort
3. Talk to people

There is an enormous crossover between learning sales and public speaking. They both involve speaking with potential customers, working through a script and facing your fear. You get to learn sales without having to cold-call. Ask any outbound insurance salesman and they will tell you – it's a win!

If you know how to use PowerPoint or Keynote, you earn extra points. The best public speakers work on the assumption their equipment will fail... and you should do the same.

To get started with public speaking, read this post on beating [glossophobia](#).

### Relationship Building

"Business is not just doing deals; business is having great products, doing great engineering, and providing tremendous service to customers. Finally, business is a cobweb of human relationships." - Ross Perot

The term 'networking' sounds sleazy for a reason. Most networking events feel like a cross between speed-dating and a business card trading meet up.

Let's reframe networking to a new definition: *relationship building*. When you are authentic, building relationships is a lot of fun and the rewards can be astronomical.

To get started with relationship building, do the following:

1. Find an influencer, business owner or customer
2. Be genuinely interested in their problems
3. Help them

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Down the track, you can ask for a favor if you need one. The only 'trick' to building relationships is to be helpful, then let reciprocity and human nature take care of the rest. Excited entrepreneurs often overplay their hand, so instead, play the long game and you will win.

To get started with relationship building, read [Never Eat Alone](#) by Keith Ferrazzi.

### Leadership

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way." – John C. Maxwell

Building a team is *easy* – hire a 'resource', give them a few tasks and set them loose.

Leading a team is *hard* – you need to motivate, inspire and coach every team member to succeed. Developing your leadership skills is part art and part science; but mostly practice.

Your people (**not** resources) can be your competitive advantage. Here are three simple steps to leading a successful team:

1. Discover what drives them
2. Have regular, weekly one on ones
3. Provide constructive feedback

For a crash course in leadership, here are [five tips to be a better manager](#).

### Time Management

"A goal without a plan is just a wish." – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Time management separates struggling entrepreneurs from successful businesspeople. Here's how to make it work for you:

1. Measure your time
2. Use your calendar
3. Create productive habits

Block out specific blocks of time to work on high-value projects. Then, free yourself from distractions by turning your phone off, shutting down Facebook and locking in for at least an hour of focused work. It's hard at first, but once you get started, your momentum will keep you going.

Next, find your productive zones to form productive habits. My formula for focused writing is as follows:

1. Visit the cafe across the street from my San Francisco apartment
2. Purchase an Americano
3. Open Spotify
4. Play a song on repeat
5. Write until my fingers hurt

Sometimes, I'll get distracted after a few minutes. I step away from my desk, grab some fresh air and then dive back into writing.

To conquer your time management woes, read [this article](#) by Perry Marshall and then download and use [Rescuetime](#).

### Conclusion

The beauty of soft skills is they compound and cross-over with one another.

To demonstrate: you *negotiate* your way into a conference for free and *speak* about *leadership* best practice. Post-presentation, you ask the audience excellent questions; using your finely honed *empathy* which helps you *build relationships* and your business.

The million dollar question? Is this the *best use of your time*?

**Want to build your soft skills?** [Join my VIP list](#) to receive your free public speaking course and my best article delivered weekly to your inbox.