



**SOFT SKILLS FOR YOUNG RUSSIAN LAWYERS**  
**Moscow State Law Academy – named after O.E. Kutafin**  
**24 September, 2018**

**Luke Conner, Managing Partner**

- **Moscow based**
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**Luke Conner, Managing Partner, Conner & Company**



- Graduate of the University of Manchester and Nottingham Law School
- English qualified solicitor
- 2003 – 2005: trained in the City of London with CMS Cameron McKenna LLP
- 2005 – 2007: Associate Solicitor at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP in London
- 2007 – 2011: Associate at Linklaters CIS in London and Moscow
- 2011 – 2015: Senior Associate and International Counsel at Chadbourne & Parke LLP in Moscow
- 2015: founded Conner & Company
- January 2017: appointed President of the British Business Club in Moscow

- What are soft skills? What does this widely-used term actually refer to?
- U.S. Army formulated the concept nearly 50 years ago.

*"Soft skills are important job-related skills that involve little or no interaction with machines and whose application on the job is quite generalized."*

PJ Whitmore 1972 CONARC Soft Skills Conference

*".....in other words, those job functions about which we know a good deal are hard skills and those about which we know very little are soft skills."*

U.S. Army Training Manual, 1972

- The [Collins English Dictionary](#) defines the term "soft skills" as:

*"desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include [common sense](#), the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude."* Source: Wikipedia

- So, less concrete than academic or specific technical skills.....perhaps better defined as people skills.....
- In fact, soft skills, only relatively recently started to be discussed in legal circles. More often talked about in C-suites....
- Can someone give me an example of a soft skill and a hard skill?

• Eastern Kentucky University gave the following examples:

1. Communication;
2. Courtesy;
3. Flexibility;
4. Integrity
5. Interpersonal skills;
6. Positive attitude;
7. Professionalism;
8. Responsibility;
9. Teamwork; and
10. Work Ethic.

To excel genuinely at all of these, would represent quite some achievement!

- Why are soft skills so important?

- different studies show that soft skills can make up more than 75 per cent. of long term job achievement and career success

- they may be harder to obtain, in that they are more esoteric and less easy to define objectively. They are also more likely to be ignored by your competitors as management talk i.e. all fluff and no substance

- they are basically all personal and social skills of some kind, and therefore maybe we are pre-disposed or conditioned by society to be worse at them, and not to try to develop them.

- **Why are soft skills so important for young lawyers in Russia?**

- there is an identified skills gap for soft skills in Russia generally.....

- traditionally, in Russia (as, to some extent, elsewhere), soft skills have been regarded by Universities as non-academic, not serious enough etc., meaning Russia has probably been somewhat slower to adapt than the West

- lawyers worldwide are generally pretty conservative. Russian lawyers and law firms have probably (at least historically) been even more conservative and slightly cynical.....

- now though, the trend is taking Moscow by storm!



- So what are we going to talk about today?
- I am going to focus on some specific areas which, through my experience of working with young Russian lawyers over the last 14 years or so, I think are going to be important for your career development.
- I am also going to give you some real-life examples and tips, focusing on where I AM GUESSING you will need help.
- Nothing you hear today will be mind-blowingly revolutionary. It is all based on common sense! But some of it may still surprise you.
- And we may at times drift into the realms of medium and cognitive, or hard skills, because the lines can be blurred.....

- Simon Sinek places a lot of emphasis on empathy.....listening.....
- Empathy is most important as a management tool.
- It is neglected by senior managers, who tend to be results orientated and miss out on the human factors connected with performance.
- One of the reasons why people find leadership so hard, is because the leaders can't empathise with people, and the leaders aren't emotionally intelligent i.e. they miss the signs and misunderstand what people want, need, think, and how they feel.
- Leadership is still very important for junior lawyers. Why? Because you will lead hundreds of people, even as trainees – drivers, couriers, secretaries, receptionists, third party suppliers, other trainees etc. etc.
- Leading people with empathy yields results.
- Work out what drives the other person, and how you can help them to help the team, and yourself!

- Probably more of a hard skill, or at least medium skill, than a soft skill.
- Often, in Russia, referred to as a soft skill, because it is a concrete skill that can be taught to paying customers!
- Key thing to remember – win, win. Not win, lose; or lose, lose!!!!!!
- i.e. is not a zero-sum game
- Look for commonality.
- Work out what they need, and what you have and can offer, without your client suffering too much.
- Know the value, of everything you have at the table and can offer, and also the value of everything they have.
- But use empathy and emotional intelligence to anticipate when you can trade something that you have, for a big gain!

- Knowledge of the business sectors and transactions, which impact on and affect your firm's client base and your firm.
- An extremely difficult skill to obtain and maintain. Why?
- It takes a long time to build up the basics.
- Then you need to spend time to remain current, which is easier, but still takes time.
- Get it right and:
  - you first gain the respect of your colleagues, mentors and supervisors – a talking point;
  - you later win deals, because clients trust you more than other lawyers and need to spend less time explaining their businesses/transactions/cases to you; and
  - it is very helpful to allow you to take control in an interview.

- How to get there?
- Spend half an hour or so every day, reading business newspapers like Kommersant, RBC, and Vedomosti.
- Add in the Financial Times and Bloomberg for a more international comprehension. Remember – business is global.
- Watch Bloomberg and CNBC in English. It is fascinating and you can learn a lot quickly and learn the relevant English terminology.
- Remember that experts try to look clever by confusing people, so supplement the gaps with Google searches and asking your lecturers.

- I take a particular interest in this topic. Why because any success I have against this metric has been learnt through hard work and constant efforts at perfection. MOST JUNIOR LAWYERS NEED HELP WITH THIS.
- It starts with the request – respond to it and confirm you are doing it as quickly as possible. That way the task-giver can relax. If you just do it, but don't let the delegator know, he/she might start to panic.
- Ask questions so you can be sure you understand the task.
- Use a to-do-list and prioritise.
- Best advice, do short and easy tasks – like email follow ups and calling to find something out first (i.e. 5 minute tasks) IMMEDIATELY.
- Get these tasks out of the way, so that you can free up time for bigger tasks, and get people off your back....

- Knowing what to prioritise is difficult when you don't have access to the client or relevant partner. SO YOU NEED TO ASK AN ASSOCIATE WHICH TASK IS MOST IMPORTANT.
- When given a task, always ask the deadline, unless it is a 2-5 minute task. Then just do it straight away. Where an email, always copy the task-giver. This will put his/her mind at rest.
- Never email, when asked to phone. And *vice versa*. People giving tasks, give specific instructions for a reason.
- How to handle your to-do list?
- Clustering – dealing with similar tasks at the same time to create synergy e.g. sending emails?
- Focusing on easy tasks first?
- Focusing on core hard tasks first, and getting them out of the way?
- You need to find the best way that works for you.

- **Extremely difficult, almost entirely subjective, and varies across countries and cultures.....**
- **A few tips:**
  - **you can hardly ever be overdressed, but it is easy to be underdressed, and people judge you more for underdressing;**
  - **for lawyers, classic is usually a safer bet than high fashion;**
  - **pay attention to how, when, and why you use your phone.....;**
  - **be self-aware.**



- Utterly critical for all lawyers....
- This is a lecture in itself, but here are some tips:
  - before you give advice, make sure you understand the parameters of the question;
  - only answer that question, and don't make another one up;
  - be as succinct as possible;
  - think before you speak, a short silence is fine – waffle makes you look stupid;
  - retain eye-contact, it makes you more trustworthy;
  - pre-read emails you are sending;
  - send them to yourself in the form in which the client will receive them, so you can be sure that they look okay.

- This is the hardest for a young lawyer to be good at.
- And it is the hardest to teach.
- Why?
- It doesn't come naturally to intellectuals.
- Lawyers feel uncomfortable when they find themselves in a sales role.
- It is very nuanced.
- Start with knowing exactly what your firm is good at.
- Then look to your contacts base to see if there is a direct match.
- If there isn't – work out which of your contacts has enough money to be a consumer of your firm's legal services.
- Draft up a BD plan and strategy. Just for you.
- Don't always look for personal gain. Do it for the firm. The results should follow.
- Practice and marketing.
- Ask your firm to back you. For this you require respect.

- **Soft skills may be even more important than technical skills.**
- **They require constant development.**
- **Start now, and work on them everyday.**
- **Many of them are transferable to different jobs, sectors, roles, etc.**

- Wikipedia
- Simon Sinek
- Jay Shetty
- Years being in your position

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**Thank you!**

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