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## School Counselor's Role in Facilitating the Development of Students' Soft Skills: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Attributes to Promote Career Readiness

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# School Counselor's Role in Facilitating the Development of Students' Soft Skills: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Attributes to Promote Career Readiness

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## I. INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the predominant belief in work settings was that one's cognitive abilities were the most important criteria in determining work performance and success. There had been some emphasis on the importance of personal qualities of education and the workplace (Willingham & Breland, 1982), but this was a rare acknowledgment. However, in the 1990s, psychology began to immerse out of the five-factor model of personality (Goldberg, 1990), which alluded to the theory that personality plays a large role in workplace success. Several studies showed that the big-five personality factors; most pressing 'being conscientious' (striving for being organized and working hard) predicted both workplace (Ones, Dilchert, Viswesvaran & Judge, 2007) and academic success amongst students. In addition to conscientiousness, other non-cognitive predictors such as goal setting, showing commitment, having social support, academic self-efficacy, a positive self-concept, time management skills, and effort regulation also were important factors in producing positive outcomes for students (Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2012). Further, researchers found that personality features predicted mortality, divorce, drug use, occupational attainment, job satisfaction, creativity, and performance (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi& Goldberg, 2007). 77% of employers indicate that "soft skills;" including communicating effectively, are just as important in the hiring process as are technical job requirements or "hard skills" (Rinker, 2014).

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These personality factors are typically comprised of a conglomerate of traits including character, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, grit, growth mindset, non-cognitive traits and habits, social and emotional skills, and soft skills, which all play an instrumental role in a student's level of career readiness. In addition to possessing cognitive and technical skills and abilities, in order to be successful in the workforce students must be able to communicate effectively and express themselves, engage in teamwork and collaboration in order to work cooperatively with colleagues, demonstrate adaptability, display problem solving abilities; specifically situational awareness in regards to his or her ability to respond to a situation and resolve an issue in a constructive manner, be able to analyze and interpret data, as well as effectively engage in conflict resolution in order to overcome challenges peacefully and efficiently (Kamenetz, 2015). These soft skills refer to a cluster of personality traits, social grace, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism (Rouse, 2015) and include personal attributes that enhance a person's job performance; including one's ability to empathize with others and negotiate.

Although educators are expected to teach students core academic subjects as well as elective courses, they are also responsible for helping students to acquire practical skills that are necessary in order to obtain employment such as confidence, flexibility, honesty, integrity, optimism, common sense, communication, networking, negotiating and public speaking (Lafrance, 2009). Certain soft skills are more appealing to employers than hard skills (technical skills). Similar to hard skills, soft skills are not necessarily innate and can be acquired and developed over time. Through character education, classroom guidance, and school workshops, school counselors play an important role in teaching students about the importance of perseverance, being courteous, having integrity, being adaptable, effectively problem solve, display confidence and humility, become leaders, maintain optimism, and to engage in constructive conflict resolution (Lafrance, 2009). In order to be successful in college or careers, students need to be prepared for the academic rigor, as well as be able to manage their own time, get along with



roommates and employees, and cope with set backs in a healthy manner. Many experts say that students' lack soft skills are hindering their college completion rates, as well as career performance (Adams, 2012). Due to the fact that many millennials have had helicopter parents who protected them, they haven't had the opportunity to struggle and have not developed resiliency or self-soothing skills (Adams, 2012). Therefore, school counselors today more than ever need to incorporate the teaching of 'soft skills' into their counseling programs in order to help students be successful after they graduate and enter college or begin their careers.

a) *Constellation of Intrapersonal Attributes Critical for Career Readiness*

There are several non-academic skills and characteristics that are integral for students to possess in order to attain future career success. Intrapersonal skills involve the talents or abilities that reside within the individual and help them in problem solving (National Research Council, 2010).

i. *Adaptability*

One's ability and willingness to cope with uncertain, new, and changing job conditions, including responding effectively to emergency or crisis situations, learning new tasks, technologies, and procedures. Adaptability also includes handling work stress, being able to work with people who have differing personalities, communication styles, and cultures (Houston, 2007).

ii. *Self-Management*

Refers to the ability to work remotely, autonomously, to self-motivate and self-monitor. One important aspect of self-management is being willing and able to ascertain new information and skills related to the job (Houston, 2007).

iii. *Self-Regulation*

Includes individuals displaying control over their behaviors and reactions. It refers to the capacity for individuals to guide and monitor themselves towards achieving their stated goals through restraining impulses and exercising discretion (Houston, 2007). Students who exemplify self-regulation are able to control their emotions and actions and demonstrate self-discipline. At school students come to class prepared, pay attention, aren't easily distracted, follow directions, and start their work right away rather than procrastinating. Students who self-regulate stay calm even when criticized, do not interrupt others, are courteous to adults and peers, and keep their emotions in check (Kamenetz, 2015).

iv. *Grit*

Refers to one's ability to persevere, display self-control, persistence, and conscientiousness. Students

who demonstrate grit finish what they start and even if they experience failure they show resilience and overcome adversity. Students who demonstrate grit have been found to be more academically and vocationally successful, as they exude passion, drive, fortitude, and focus (Kamenetz, 2015).

v. *Growth Mindset*

According to Dweck (2006), a growth mindset refers to people who believe that their basic qualities (intelligence, talents, traits) can be developed and enhanced through dedication and hard work. Having a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset (in which people document traits rather than develop them), allow people to experience a love of learning, resilience, and experience a sense of accomplishment.

vi. *Zest*

According to educators at Kipp Academy in Harlem, New York, students who are taught about the importance of displaying zest and are encouraged to approach life with energy and enthusiasm appear to be energized, enthusiastic, passionate about learning, and invigorate others (Kamenetz, 2015).

vii. *Optimism*

According to Kamenetz (2015), mindset is extremely important in that students who are optimistic and hopeful about their future have been shown to be more successful academically. Students who are optimistic have high expectations for their future and work to achieve their goals. They rebound from frustration and setbacks easily and acknowledge that applying effort and displaying perseverance during challenging times are key ingredients to a positive future.

viii. *Gratitude*

Students who show gratitude recognize what others have done for them, show respect, thankfulness, appreciation, and do for others what has been done for them. Students who show gratitude have been shown to be more successful in the workplace as they are humble, grateful, and express thanks to their colleagues for their support (Kamenetz, 2015).

ix. *Social Intelligence*

Social intelligence means that students are cognizant of the motives and feelings of other people, as well as the importance of being self-aware. If conflicts occur, students utilize effective conflict resolution skills in to determine proactive solutions. It also includes students being taught about the importance of respecting others and fostering an inclusive atmosphere (Kamenetz, 2015).

x. *Curiosity*

Students who are curious are inquisitive about the world and the people around them. They are eager to learn about new material, are engaged in the learning process, actively participate, and ask questions that

catapult their understanding of material covered (Kamenetz, 2015). Their thirst for knowledge and desire to learn enables them to be more successful academically.

x. *Public Presentation*

Students who have effective public presentation skills have been shown to be more academically successful and more comfortable in social situations. Students who are able to make effective public presentations have been found to exhibit improved manners, personal hygiene, appropriate dress, and display increased self-confidence (Laker & Powell, 2011).

xii. *Leadership*

Students who possess leadership qualities have been found to be more academically successful and improve their workplace performance, in that they possess effective communication skills, are motivated, delegate tasks effectively, demonstrate positivity and optimism, are trustworthy and respected, honest, creative, provide constructive feedback, are responsible, committed, and flexible in accepting changes (Laker & Powell, 2011).

xiii. *Time Management*

Students who manage their time well have self-reported more positive outcomes in comparison to students who do not manage their time well. Time management allows for people to manage their time effectively via keeping check lists, staying on task, and keeping a schedule rather than procrastinating and being less efficient. Time is an asset that must be managed effectively. Many successful employees follow the RAC Method in that they record what they do during the day, analyze their notes and highlight events that they did not find productive, and change unproductive behaviors in terms of arranging tasks and daily schedules, according to prioritized activities (Soft Skills Academy, 2013).

xiv. *Stress Management*

Building a life of healthy balance is imperative for success and performance in careers and in life. Stress can prevent us from functioning effectively in that when we experience stress we feel a loss of control over events and feel overwhelmed. Therefore, stress management teaches students how to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress, as well as to explore strategies to relieve stress in order to feel more energized, calm, and focused. Managing stress enables students to gain conscious awareness, engage in positive self-talk, and helps them to relax; ultimately allowing students to be more productive (Soft Skills Academy, 2013).

xv. *Critical Thinking*

Problem solving and critical thinking refers to our ability to use knowledge, facts, and data to

effectively solve problems. Effective critical thinkers are able to pull together data and solve problems in a logical and systematic manner (United States Department of Labor, 2013).

Students who are able to think critically are able to assess problems and find solutions in a reasonable time frame; enabling them to be successful both inside and outside of the classroom. Employers seek employees who can solve problems on their own or collaboratively with other employees. People who can think critically, share thoughts and opinions, use sound judgment, make decisions, and complete tasks successfully are seen as positive assets in their work setting.

xvi. *Creativity*

Creativity is a critical component in both academic and career endeavors. Creative people are able to see things from multiple perspectives, are open minded, flexible, adaptable, think of extraordinary solutions for ordinary problems, and are able to find multiple ways to resolve problems. Creative people believe that there is more than one way to accomplish a task, are innovative, and stretch beyond their normal boundaries of thought. Creativity allows people to problem solve in a non-linear manner and brainstorm alternative solutions to an obstacle (Gara, 2015).

xvii. *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills*

According to the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, there are four particular skills (the 4 C's) that assist students in achieving success including critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity, as well as possessing technological literacy (Kamenetz, 2015).

xviii. *Character*

Character education focuses on emphasizing the importance for students to demonstrate respect, integrity, responsibility, courage, emotion regulation, friendship making, and problem solving skills in order to be efficient in the workforce (Kamenetz, 2015).

b) *Constellation of Interpersonal Attributes Critical for Career Readiness*

i. *Listening*

Research shows that regardless of one's cognitive abilities and talents, possessing effective listening skills is a necessity for being successful in completing tasks. In particular, active listening is essential, as it empowers fellow employees to feel heard, validated, and understood. Active listening also allows one to communicate well with colleagues, while being able to complete a job accurately and efficiently (Soft Skills Academy, 2013).

ii. *Verbal Communication*

Effective verbal communication begins with clarity. Effective communicators are able to speak slowly and thoughtfully. It is important for students and



future employees to learn how to speak in an understandable, calm, and articulate manner. Students need to learn not to rush, to wait their turn to respond, to answer appropriately, and to pause when responding in order to allot themselves time to think and reflect (Gemma, 2014).

### iii. Non-Verbal Communication

According to Yaffe (2011), Professor Albert Mehrabian published a book titled *Silent Messages*, in which he found that 93% of our communication is non-verbal and only 7% is verbal. In the book, it stated that 55% of communication was through body language and 38% was through vocal tone, while the remaining 7% of communication referred to the words themselves. Therefore, non-verbal communication is much more revealing of one's thoughts, actions, body language is than verbal discourse. Therefore, students need to learn how to communicate non-verbally by being made aware of their body language, actions, facial expressions, making eye contact, their voice, tone, and gestures as they expose one's true attitude and perceptions more so than verbal exchanges (Gemma, 2014).

### iv. Ability to Accept Constructive Feedback

It is important for students, as future employees to learn to be open and accepting to constructive feedback, as humans there is always room for growth, learning, evolution, and improvement. Accepting feedback and making modifications based upon feedback speaks volumes about one's character and shows that one is open and willing to make necessary changes in order to better themselves personally and professionally (Gemma, 2014).

### v. Demonstrating a Strong Work Ethic

While in school, counselors need to reiterate to students the fact future employers are looking for employees that take an initiative, are reliable, and will work diligently to get the job done correctly. It is essential that students recognize the importance of working hard, taking on a leadership role, and putting in as much time as necessary to complete a task efficiently (Gemma, 2014).

### vi. Negotiation

The negotiation process accords people an opportunity to settle their differences in an amicable manner. It is a type of compromise in order to avoid an argument. Negotiation includes preparation, discussion, clarification of goals/ compromise/ flexibility, negotiating towards a win-win outcome, agreement, and implementation of a course of action. Thus, it is important for students to learn how to negotiate so when faced with an issue, they are able to communicate their concerns and viewpoints with fellow employees and employers, and to problem solve in a proactive manner, in order to come to a mutually agreeable resolution. It is inevitable that future employees may disagree. Therefore, students need to learn about the principles of

fairness, relationship maintenance, and seeking a mutually beneficial outcome for all parties involved (Spiers, 2012).

### vii. Questioning

An important skill for students and employees to learn is effective questioning, as it builds upon listening and is a way to obtain information in order to ascertain more details about what a task requires. Questioning is also a way to initiate conversation as it demonstrates interest, as well as a desire to learn and listen. Counselors need to reinforce to students that it is not just about asking questions, but about asking quality questions which probe deeper and can reveal more relevant information regarding a task (Gemma, 2014).

### viii. Manners

Students need to learn the importance of etiquette and having good manners, especially in today's global economy as the understanding of good manners translates well into other cultures (Gemma, 2014). Etiquette is an important topic to learn in school, since students need to learn how to interact politely with one another, as well as be prepared for the future when interacting with colleagues and clients, as it enables them to build a positive rapport, communicate more effectively, work collaboratively as a team, and build a supportive network critical for personal and professional success.

### ix. Problem Solving

Challenges in life are a certainty and are unavoidable. Therefore, early on, students must learn how to effectively problem-solve in a collaborative manner. Counselors can teach students the importance of listening to everyone's perspectives, to be respectful, and to voice their thoughts so that everyone is heard and understood. Problem solving is a team effort. The key aspects of problem solving entail identifying the issue, dissecting the problem so it is understood, examining all options relating to solutions, discussing ways to solve the problem, and putting the plan into action (Gemma, 2014). Effective problem solving allows for efficiency, improved communication, productivity, and being solution focused.

### x. Social Awareness

Being aware of others' emotions is an essential part of interpersonal communication, school, and vocational success (Gemma, 2014). It is imperative for counselors to teach students about the importance of social cognizance, being intuitive, observant, and empathetic. Although students need to recognize the importance of focusing on their own successes, they also need to know about the importance of team work, supporting colleagues, and being mindful of the way in which their actions impact others. Social awareness is crucial to identifying opportunities in building rapport, in that being perceptive to the needs of others helps to forge and strengthen interpersonal connections.

x. *Self-Control*

Self-management is a fundamental component to leadership success in that it allows us to control our emotions when they are not reflective of what is deemed to be appropriate behavior for a certain situation (Gemma, 2014). It is essential for counselors to teach students about the importance of anger management, ways in which to diminish frustration, and the significance of displaying a calm demeanor. Conflict is unavoidable in daily life, but students need to recognize the importance of maintaining civility and composure to deescalate any conflicts rather than lashing out and escalating disagreements.

xii. *Negotiation*

Negotiation is a type of compromise in order to avoid an argument. Negotiation includes preparation, discussion, clarification of goals/ compromise/ flexibility towards a win-win outcome, agreement, and implementation of a course of action.

xiii. *Responsibility and Accountability*

Taking responsibility and being accountable for one's actions are indicative of maturity (Gemma, 2014). Saying you are going to do something and following through with your actions is a sign of demonstrating responsibility, and is a way to build trust between employees and employers. Responsibility and accountability are important values to instill in students to develop as they are reflective of character, integrity, and trustworthiness. As future employees, students need to recognize that demonstrating responsibility and accountability builds rapport and reliability. Additionally, holding oneself accountable for mistakes rather than placing blame on someone else for a wrongdoing is a sign of strength and character and is crucial for conflict management (Gemma, 2014). Counselors can teach students about the importance of admitting to a mistake by admitting responsibility for their actions, as well as the significance of rectifying a mistake in order to achieve a more positive outcome personally and professionally.

xiv. *Assertiveness*

Being assertive allows one to express their thoughts and feelings in a confident and strong manner without being passive or aggressive. It is valuable for students to be given assertiveness training by counselors so that they are knowledgeable about the importance for them to voice their opinions to peers and future colleagues in order to be heard. In this competitive job market, it is critical that all stakeholders have an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions, as that is what helps to get the job done in a team setting (Gemma, 2014). Leaders who are assertive stand up with confidence, conviction, and are able to provide instruction clearly and concretely. Being assertive helps people to gain respect and is empowering.

xv. *Collaboration*

Collaboration is a skill that all students need to learn, as it will enable them to work cooperatively with others at a future workplace. There are several elements of successful collaboration including defining and agreeing upon roles, having open communication, having recognition and respect for contributing collaborators, identifying obstacles, and placing group goals above personal recognition (Doyle, 2015).

Successful collaboration requires mutual respect, active listening, and flexibility. Collaboration can occur between employees in the same department, interdepartmental collaboration, or collaboration between bosses and employees. Employers look for those who function as a part of a team and can balance personal achievements with group goals (Doyle, 2015).

xvi. *Motivational Skills*

Motivational skills are substantial for students in school or in the workplace. There are several steps in the motivational process including assessing the personality characteristics of the group to be motivated, defining motivational strategies, conveying expectations and desired outcomes, communicating benefits, providing constructive feedback and rewards for achieving the desired goal (Doyle, 2015). Counselors can teach students about the importance of being self-motivated to work to their potential to achieve their dreams, as well as the importance of motivating others to perform to their ability. Motivational skills elicit a desired behavior or response by a stakeholder (Doyle, 2015). Employers look for employees who have a motivating spirit, as that is a valuable asset for their company in regards to persuading, empowering, and identifying the strengths in others in order to get a task done efficiently.

c) *The Importance of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Attributes in Promoting Career*

i. *Readiness*

Experts agree that establishing connections between teachers and students, as well as between students and their peers is essential for the mission of education (Dodd, 2000) as well as career readiness to be successful employees. Researchers found that a positive correlation exists between attending to students' social and emotional needs and school success, as the academic achievement of students increase, behavioral issues decrease, and the quality of the relationships impacting students improves. Raising Healthy Children, a social and emotional learning project, determined that students experience enhanced mood management when they learn specific ways to handle their emotions and increase their usage of appropriate responses automatically (Cummings & Haggerty, 1997). A caring and respectful school environment can promote a climate more conducive for learning and achievement (Dodd, 2000). Therefore, it is



essential that students learn at a young age the importance of developing caring relationships with others, as this will enable them to flourish and prosper throughout their lifetime. The Carnegie Commission has urged school administrators at every level; especially the elementary level, to develop preventative programs that emphasize the importance of teaching students communication and other pro-social skills that are necessary to interact with others appropriately. As a result of these skills being implemented, there are fewer behavioral issues, and the school climate allows for students to attain higher academic achievement, enhanced career readiness, as well as decreased dropout rates (Clark, 2003). Researchers have found that creating classrooms that are respectful and collaborative in nature provide students with a sense of responsibility to learn and help their peers to learn (Dodd, 2000).

d) *School Counselor Interventions: Helping Students Develop Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Attributes*

School counselors can implement the following interventions in order to help students develop their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills:

i. *Infusing Responsibility*

School counselors are in the unique position to encourage students to take responsibility for their actions, as well as work performance (Adams, 2012). Counselors need to emphasize the importance for students to assume ownership of their academic responsibilities and personal behaviors to apply the values of integrity and autonomy. Counselors can conduct classroom lessons addressing goal setting, self-advocacy, and self-regulation (Adams, 2012). Further, counselors can also collaborate with teachers and encourage them to blog daily and post their assignments online so if students are absent they are required to complete the assignment via the Internet. Additionally, college readiness has predominantly focused on scheduling students for honors and Advanced Placement courses and navigating the college application process. However, today counselors need to focus on student development to provide students with access to different post-secondary resources in order to take an active role in the college search and application process, as doing so helps to enhance self-efficacy and empowerment (Adams, 2012). Further, due to the fact that counselors have such a large caseload, they could develop a system of reminders to prompt students to return their college applications, as doing so enhances student self-regulation and motivation (Adams, 2012).

ii. *Advisory Groups*

Counselors can assign students to advisory groups which meet regularly until graduation in order to help students set goals and hold one another accountable for achieving these goals (Adams, 2012).

Implementing peer lead support groups are very important as peers are heavily influenced by one another, can relate to each other's issues and concerns, and can motivate one another to strive to their potential. Holding advisory groups also helps to improve students' communication skills, as they prepare to facilitate group lead conferences about their academic progress, discuss grades with parents and fellow group members, practice their public speaking skills, assume leadership roles, and improve their problem solving skills. In these groups, students learn to be self-advocates. Additionally, counselors can encourage teachers to provide two sets of grades; one that is indicative of mastery of content and the other that reflects their personal work habits and behaviors. Counselors can also work with teachers on helping them to develop assignments that are longer and more complex which require group work and research to prepare them for post-secondary endeavors (Adams, 2012).

iii. *Building Communication Skills*

The school counselor acts as a consultant and collaborator with teachers and plays an instrumental role in teaching and modeling effective communication skills to both teachers and students (Dodd, 2000). According to Rinker (2014), school counselors can encourage students to build their communication skills in order to be more effective public speakers and more effective future employees. Effective communication is the foundation for building open and trusting relationships, as well as enabling employers to complete tasks efficiently. Counselors have the ability to teach students about the importance of active listening, paraphrasing, questioning, using reflection, and clarification in their exchanges with others. Counselors can also teach students about the acronym RASA in order to improve communication skills by motivating students to receive, appreciate, summarize, and ask questions during conversations, etc. (Rinker, 2014). Both in college and in the work place setting, students will need to learn how to actively listen and work collaboratively as part of a team.

iv. *Develop a Strong Personal Work Ethic*

In a national survey conducted in 2013, over 2000 hiring managers said that they looked for employees who possess a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, and dependability (Rinker, 2014). Counselors can work with students on the importance of completing all required assignments as well as enhancing their time management skills, by providing positive reinforcement and incentives for completing assignments in a timely fashion. Moreover, counselors can encourage students to pursue volunteer opportunities to learn about their career fields of interest and the responsibilities and tasks that are entailed. Additionally, counselors can offer classroom counseling lessons addressing the importance of maintaining a positive mindset; as doing

so has shown to help people to achieve their goals and be successful (Rinker, 2014).

v. *Develop Life Long Learning Skills*

In order for students to be successful in today's cutting edge society, they must become lifelong learners, be knowledgeable about other cultures, seek continued education and training, and cognizant of a myriad of topics (Rinker, 2014). Counselors can motivate students to tutor or mentor peers, since tutoring provides the opportunity to teach and when teaching, they are constantly learning themselves. Students can also attend free events at libraries, museums, colleges, or browse the Internet to learn more information about a variety of topics.

vi. *Enhancing Parental Involvement*

According to Rinker (2014), parents play a crucial role in helping their children to develop soft skills. Parents can talk to their children about the ways in which possessing strong soft skills have helped them in their own careers. Parents can also encourage their children to communicate with them on a daily basis about their lives and school, and assign them household chores to foster responsible behavior which enhances the importance of a strong work ethic and dependability. Parents can also motivate children to be autonomous by encouraging them to individuate, pursue their goals and dreams, do things independently, and praise children for acting in an self-governing manner in order to become strong, driven and self-determining individuals.

vii. *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)*

One of the most proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors is to create positive school climates (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015).

Positive behavior support is an application of behaviorally based systems used to enhance the capacity of schools and communities to design healthy environments that augment the link between evidence based practices and the environment in which learning occurs (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). School counselors can help to implement a continuum of positive behavior supports for all students both inside and outside of the classroom setting. In the past few years, school wide discipline has focused on using punitive punishment when students misbehave including being reprimanded, getting detention, losing privileges, being suspended or expelled from schools. Research has shown that using punishment when used inconsistently or without other positive strategies is ineffective (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008). Using modeling and reinforcing positive behaviors has shown to have more positive outcomes on student success. Positive behavioral intervention systems include identifying meaningful outcomes, establishing and

investing in school wide systems, selecting and implementing evidence based practices, and collecting / implementing data in order to make decisions (Simonsen et al., 2008). Counselors can set behavioral expectations in school settings, including being safe, respectful and responsible. Counselors can then create posters highlighting the expectations and create lesson plans for classroom guidance, which reinforce each of these expectations. School counselors model the expected behavior, engage students, which enables them to practice the expectation, and allows counselors to assess the degree to which students have acquired the skills taught (Simonsen, 2008). It is paramount that students learn positive behaviors and that their positive behaviors are recognized and reinforced while in school, so once they graduate they are mindful of the importance of displaying appropriate behaviors in the work place. Counselors who utilize PBIS obtain ongoing data in order to make beneficial decisions, which support staff and student behavior. Counselors have the ability to create environments that are predictable, positive, safe, and consistent, which has been shown to help prepare students to be career ready (Simonsen et al., 2008).

viii. *Modeling*

One of the most effective ways to teach soft skills is to model them. Counselors, teachers, and parents can work collaboratively to help students acquire these skills as early as possible. Students who see their counselors, parents and teachers demonstrating skills helps them to understand the value of them, and encourages students to adopt and integrate the skills into their own lives (LaFrance, 2009). Instructors or counselors who discuss a controversial issue with their students teach them about the importance of compromise and negotiation. Teachers and counselors can also teach students about the importance of optimism by encouraging them to find the positive aspect of a challenging situation (LaFrance, 2009). Students who learn soft skills at a young age tend to find work in their ideal career and experience healthier and happier personal and professional relationships (LaFrance, 2009).

ix. *Continuous Feedback*

Continuous feedback that is constructive in nature is an effective intervention that counselors can utilize in order to help students to enhance their soft skills (Murphy, Putter, & Johnson, 2014). Counselors can provide students with continuous positive feedback regarding their strengths, as well as skills that they can potentially improve in order to be more academically successful and career ready.

## II. DISCUSSION

This manuscript highlights the importance for school counselors to assist students in developing and



SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE IN FACILITATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' SOFT SKILLS: INTRAPERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRIBUTES TO PROMOTE CAREER READINESS

strengthening their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills in order to enhance their career success. The article addresses the instrumental role that soft skills and specific character traits such as a growth mindset play in students' future work place achievements. By acquiring the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, including leadership, effective communication, listening, resilience, self-management, self-regulation, work ethic, perseverance, integrity, accountability, time management, stress management, creativity, zest, gratitude, and optimism, students will have distinct advantages in their career journey and ultimate workplace accomplishments. According to employers, soft skills even more so than technical 'hard' skills, have been shown to have a profound impact on employee workplace performance. Through fostering and promoting student soft skills, school counselors are in the unique position to recognize student attributes, encourage them to build upon their strengths, identify skills and traits that need to be enhanced, and implement interventions to help students augment these skills, so that they have the opportunity to reach their potential and thrive in a globally competitive society after high school graduation or their post-secondary education.

### III. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several suggestions for future research to further substantiate the stipulation that school counselors help students advance their soft skills in order to be more fruitful in the workforce. Although research has shown that soft skills play a critical role in workplace success (Kamenetz, 2015), it would be advantageous for researchers to determine which specific soft skills have the greatest impact on career readiness and work performance.

Further, additional research needs to be conducted in order to assess for the extent to which school counselors are currently teaching and incorporating soft skills into their comprehensive counseling programs. Thus, in the future it would be beneficial to employ a national survey to address the frequency and degree to which counselors currently teach soft skills in order to determine the extent to which soft skills are being taught, as well as raise counselor awareness about the importance of integrating soft skills into the curriculum of school counseling programs.

Moreover, research needs to be conducted in order to assess the extent to which graduation rates and level of career readiness amongst students differs amongst schools that utilize positive behavioral intervention and support systems (PBIS) in comparison to those schools who do not utilize these school wide interventions. If so, more schools may be motivated to implement positive behavioral intervention support systems, if it is determined that it leads to decreased

behavioral referrals, increased student engagement, improved graduation rates and career readiness, and enriched overall school climate.

Additionally, it would be helpful for research to be conducted to determine additional strategies school counselors can use to enhance students' leadership, communication, self-regulation, and motivational skills to ensure that they possess the necessary intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to be effective students and employees.

Lastly, it would be efficacious for researchers to evaluate the degree to which excessive parental involvement promotes or impedes upon students' work ethic, responsibility, and autonomy as doing so will raise awareness about the impact that parental involvement has on the strengthening or weakening of students' soft skills, as well as their ability to demonstrate independence, accountability, and drive.

### IV. CONCLUSION

In addition to the myriad of duties that school counselors are accountable, teaching, instilling, modeling, and reinforcing soft skills is critical for counselors' work with students in order to ensure that their students are prepared for the competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. Employers have indicated that they seek employees who possess strong soft skills including leadership, effective communication, responsibility, optimism, collaborative, and those who can problem solve efficiently, as these traits have been found to equate to professional success. Therefore, in addition to working with teachers, administrators, and parents to ensure consistency and to reinforce soft skills taught, school counselors need to not only work with students to help them sharpen their academic and technical prowess, but essentially need to further assist students in developing and mastering non-cognitive intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, as these essential skills are not solely innate and can be taught, rehearsed, and mastered via practice. School counselors need to ensure that the building and development of soft skills; specifically leadership, communication, listening, collaboration, time management, accountability, work ethic, optimism, and problem solving are assimilated into counseling programs in order to help all students be competitive and highly sought job candidates in our demanding and dynamic society.

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