

# WEST AFRICAN JOURNAL OF ORTHODONTICS

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Soft Skills in Orthodontics



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# Soft Skills in Orthodontics

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## Abstract

Soft skills form an important aspect of the skills required for success in the modern world. These skills refer to personal values and interpersonal skills such as effective communication, leadership, good work-ethics, integrity, teamwork, and collaboration amongst others. In contemporary dentistry and orthodontics in particular, these skills have become very important. This article gives an overview of the importance of these skills in the successful practice of orthodontics.

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## Introduction

Soft skills and hard skills are essential in the practice of dentistry, while hard skills deal with technical proficiency, soft skills relate to personal values and interpersonal skills that determine a person's ability to fit in a particular situation.<sup>1</sup> Soft skills are personality traits and social graces you display in different situations.

Soft skills are very important because they indicate your ability to work amicably with others and build meaningful relationships, help you to solve problems, stay organized and gain confidence.

They generally make your work a lot easier and make you better and more efficient.

These soft skills include but are not limited to:

- i. Effective communication skills
- ii. Teamwork and Leadership
- iii. Work ethic Dependability, Commitment, time management, Motivation.
- iv. Conflict resolution
- v. Integrity etc.





As members of a team, the operational word here is WE and not I. A team is made of different individuals with different abilities, strengths, temperaments, and weaknesses. The leader of the team must recognize each member's special gift and use it to the advantage of the group while playing down weaknesses of the members. We must keep the atmosphere calm, friendly and non-competitive, remember we are all in the same team. There must be emphasis on politeness and mutual respect.

The leader must recognize his position as the one to bring all members of the team together to achieve their common goal. The leader must be in charge and not abdicate that responsibility and should set goals and communicate the vision of the team effectively. The leader must Know the team members and give appropriate responsibility therefore ensuring success and not set up the team for failure.

A leader must be humane, compassionate and kind but firm. Kindness is not a sign of weakness, neither is it an outdated trait. We must learn to praise publicly, criticize privately, to keep morale up. He must be polite, fair, and just, showing no favoritism because people are more willing to listen if they see you as fair, just and concerned about their welfare.

The leader must maintain the cohesiveness of the team. Keep the team together by encouraging bonding and discouraging gossip, back biting and divisions.

#### i. **Effective communication skills**

This is the ability to pass a message or an idea across to others in a skillful manner, such that the message is understood by the receiver without creating conflict. Patient centered communication is very important in achieving treatment success in orthodontics.<sup>2</sup>



#### ii. **Teamwork and Leadership**

Teamwork can be defined as the collaborative effort of a group to achieve a specified task in a most effective and efficient way. A team is just as effective as the leader.

### iii. Dependability, commitment, time management and motivation

Our commitment to our patient and the clinic should not be in doubt. We shouldn't be motivated only by financial gain. Our commitment to the wellbeing of



our patient must be obvious. Any task assigned to us must be undertaken with all seriousness and attention to detail, therefore earning us a reputation of dependability. We must also respect other's privacy and time and learn to keep appointments. We must exercise discretion in all circumstances.

### iv. Conflict resolution

This can be defined as a formal or informal process by which two or more parties find a peaceful resolution to a disagreement or dispute.

Conflicts are inevitable in relationships and so the fact that a conflict has arisen is not the problem. How



we go about resolving it and preventing an escalation is the challenge that must be skillfully managed.

The bible in Proverbs Chapter 15 and verse 1 declares that a soft answer turns away wrath. It is imperative to answer or proffer opinions in a very soft tone of voice, to stem rising tempers and not inflame the situation.

Also, when there is a disagreement, we should also seek first to understand the other person, before seeking to be understood- (Seven habits of highly effective people- Stephen Covey)

In business dealings, in this case, the doctor-Patient relationship, we must never forget that the customer is always right, it is our duty to delight our customers, in this case our patients. A satisfied customer would always refer others your way, they are your unpaid advertisers.

We must be very careful not to burn bridges in any relationship as we never know where this may come in handy later.

### v. Integrity

This is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.

Be honest in all your dealings. Make clear agreements and be unambiguous and don't assume anything. Write it all down and make sure each party understands and signs the agreement. Then always KEEP to agreements.



As Orthodontists, do not cover your colleagues' patients. Insist on referrals before taking over cases.

Do you undercut your colleagues or run-down other practices just to win over patients? If you are in doubt about a case that has been referred, speak to your referring colleague. Do not criticize your colleague in the presence of others, most especially before patients.

Encourage younger orthodontists just coming into the profession. Help them to start off, by paying them a fair wage and imparting much sought-after skills. Orthodontics is a long-term profession; a good name is far better than riches.

### Conclusion

Soft skills are ever so important, they are often overlooked, however with them you establish a good reputation and grow your business and without them your technical skills (Hard skills) would not be beneficial to you or anyone else.

**References**

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