

Soft skills for mathematical teachers

Do we really need to learn soft skills? You can agree with me that you need as much theoretical training as you can get, as life itself will provide for the exercise sessions.

Teachers are human beings. Pupils are human beings in a critical period. Parents are human beings. We all know that even people who love each other have to make some effort not to quarrel because everyone has a bad day, is tired or frustrated. None is perfect. Mistakes do happen. Tolerance is required, people have different points of view and usually everyone has their reasons.

What are soft skills? Maybe simply wisdom and a positive mindset, aimed at preventing conflicts and at getting the best out of a situation (no matter how bad the situation). Thus avoiding escalations, letting people free to give their best. Being non-judgemental and investigating “Why?” something happens. Acting irreproachably, trying to improve. Caring about people, or at least respecting them.

Honestly, soft skills improve my well-being, my productivity, my relationships in the professional and private life. Occasionally, they are so effective that they look like miracles. It’s not a miracle: usually, things are not as bad as they may seem at first sight, and there are further alternatives or compromise solutions. And an optimist attitude brings you forward.

If you allow me a recommendation, I train with the Percipio Skillsoft learning platform. There are plenty of short courses (one hour) subdivided into short videos (2-3 minutes). This format is very practical because it fits any schedule. Authors of books are interviewed and give recommendations with a variety of perspectives. Here two things I have learned:

Acceptance. Many problems are simply due to the fact that life is not what you think that it should be. Is this obvious or deep? Probably both. Your pupils are not always what you expect them to be, your colleagues or your family members neither. And neither are you.

Active listening. Sometimes people need to vent, and if one asks them the good questions or puts order into their thoughts, they may find the solutions by themselves. Listening is a sign of respect, and it is also the best way to get extremely useful information.

There are further ways of learning soft-skills, for example with the books aimed at teaching parents how to communicate with their children. And here is my CCC principle: *Communicating is vital for Collaborating and Compromising*. Understanding is key, and the first thing you need to do for solving a problem is correctly identifying it.

Back to teachers: Long-term colleagues are like neighbours, and conflicts should be prevented or solved prior to escalation. Angry parents should be handled with care. Pupils may open up and present a multi-layered cake of issues (this opportunity of helping them should not to be missed).

Let me conclude with two questions:

- Do you know the difference between the replies “Yes, but...” and “Yes, and...” ?
- Do you make use of irony, which is “the iron weapon” of communication?