**3 Critical Skills Needed to Advance in Your Career**

**And all three will improve everything in your life**

As both an educator and learning consultant, I have had the opportunity to work with businesses and organizations of all types. Time and again, I have heard the same thing from supervisors, HR departments, and executives across the board; a person’s ability to listen, communicate, and to plan effectively is fundamental to their success in the workplace.

You may be a gifted architect, a brilliant engineer, a genius when it comes to teaching, or have an amazing business plan, but without competence in these areas, you will find it challenging to advance in your career.

These types of soft skills can be particularly difficult for those of you who are divergent thinkers, or that don’t quite fit the mold of a nice round ‘peg’ in a workplace designed for conformity.

Let’s take a look at each of these skills and examine why they are so important and what you can do to strengthen this invaluable skill set that is so necessary for success.

**Written Communication**

This area is particularly challenging for people with dyslexia and written expression disabilities.

Whenever I think about the importance of written communication I remember a client of mine who came to me for advice about how to support a talented engineer that worked under her supervision. The man was a highly skilled and much-appreciated member of his team but was [chronically underperforming](https://susanfitzell.com/my-employee-is-both-a-high-performer-and-under-performer-and-how-that-can-happen/)when it came to reporting and documentation. This was causing major delays on important projects.

He was excellent at what he did, but his struggle with written communication was causing frustration in the workplace.

Good writing is like oil on the gears of a complex machine. Without it, everything just grinds to a halt. Projects do not advance, misunderstandings abound, and solutions to problems will remain elusive.

For many people, writing causes great anxiety. You have to organize your thoughts, stay focused to get the task done, and try to remember all kinds of details like grammar and spelling. Luckily there are ways to make the job a little easier.

**Strategies to help improve your written communications in the workplace:**

1. **Use technology to your advantage.** [Text to Type](https://susanfitzell.com/amp-your-writing-energy-with-speech-to-text-apps/) software is a great tool for skipping over the tedious task of typing. Using grammar and spelling tools make proofreading easy.
2. **Create time blocks for writing to help you focus on the task at hand.** This may be 30 minutes to respond to emails or 40 minutes to work on that report.
3. **Find a trusted friend or advisor to look over your writing.** They can give you feedback before turning anything in.

**Planning and Goal Setting**

If you have ADHD, this may feel like your Achilles heel.

In the workplace, we are constantly pursuing one goal after another. Depending on your line of work, you may be working as part of a team or by yourself, but the work you do is fundamental to achieving the larger objectives of the company — otherwise, you wouldn’t be there!

If you are an entrepreneur or freelancer, planning and goal setting are even more important to your success.

We often make achieving our goals more difficult than necessary. It is easy to fall into patterns of procrastination, become distracted by other tasks, or fail to prioritize what needs doing when.

**Tips to help you plan more effectively and achieve your goals:**

* If you have any doubts, clarify exactly how your work is helping the company meet its goals. It’s important for you to understand why doing what you do matters.
* Clearly identify your long-term “big picture” goals and [create clear short-term](https://susanfitzell.com/goal-setting-a-proven-strategy-for-motivating-students/) goals that will keep you on track to achieving them.
* If you struggle with procrastination, consider coming up with a reward system for completing tasks successfully.
* Create a daily list, organizing tasks in order of priority to [manage your time.](https://medium.com/the-learning-strategist-iq/10-surefire-ways-to-manage-your-time-at-work-6848466ab453?sk=34b6b4ea3f142aaf0f9fd17046d69a1e)

**Active Listening Skills**

Active listening is one of those interpersonal communication skills that will put you to the test if you have ADHD or are on the Autism Spectrum. It requires focus, attention, and most importantly, interest.

But of all the soft skills you should learn to master in the workplace, this is one of the most important. So, what is it, exactly? And why does it differ from regular listening?

Active listening means that you are *visibly engaged* in hearing what the speaker is saying. Your body language and facial expression communicate that you are hanging on to every word. You ask questions. You demonstrate that *you want to understand the person speaking to you.*

Active listening skills in the workplace directly correlate to employee satisfaction. Active listening between coworkers impacts your perceptions, emotions, and general attitude as you go about your daily job duties. In short, it promotes a healthy workplace and a positive work experience for everyone.

From a strictly practical standpoint, it also allows you to clearly understand instructions, goals, and expectations as they are explained to you.

**Keys to practicing active listening in the workplace:**

1. **Use the right body language.** If you can, try to maintain eye contact with the speaker. Other ways you can show you are listening include nodding your head or leaning toward the speaker,
2. **Ask open-ended, clarifying questions.**This may sound like, “Would you further describe…” for example.
3. **Summarize what the speaker is saying.** This sounds like, “If I understood you correctly, you were saying…”
4. **Remove distractions.**This could be as simple as moving the conversation to a location that allows you to focus on the speaker.
5. **Take notes during the conversation.**This may help you stay focused.
6. **Avoid finishing the speaker’s sentences**. Allow them time for pauses without interrupting.
7. **Avoid judgment.** Avoid reacting emotionally to what the speaker is saying.

**Skills for Life**

Active listening, planning, goal setting, and written communication are all critical skills you need to advance in your career. They are also skills that will help you as you make your way through life. Whether you are just starting out in your career, a seasoned professional, a student, or someone who simply wants to improve their life skills — these tools will help take you where you want to go.

**References:**

* [Safren, Steven A., Sprich, Susan E., Perlman, Carol A. & Otto, Michael W. Mastering Your Adult ADHD. Oxford University Press, 2017. Retrieved 17 July 2021](https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780195188196.001.0001/med-9780195188196)
* [Doyle, Alison. Important Active Listening Skills and Techniques. 24 November 2020. The Balance Careers. Retrieved 19 July 2020](https://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780195188196.001.0001/med-9780195188196)

Copyright © 2021 Susan Fitzell & Aim Hi Educational Programs, LLC. First published September 30, 2021.

#####

Susan Fitzell, M. Ed, CSP, is a nationally recognized presenter, author of nine books for teachers, trainers, and parents, an educational consultant, and CEO of Aim Hi Educational Programs, LLC. As an independent consultant and coach, Susan offers the personalization, continuity, and consistency necessary for true change in any organization. She works side by side with teachers, school administrators, and business leaders as a coach and trainer, employing Brain Power strategies that take learning to the next level.

For more information, visit Susan's website at [www.susanfitzell.com](http://www.susanfitzell.com/).

**Permission to Reprint**

Aim Hi Educational Programs  
PO Box 6182  
Manchester, NH 03108

1. Permission to reprint articles by Susan Fitzell, at no charge is granted with the agreement that:
   * The article bio be included following each article used.
   * One copy of the publication in which the article is published be provided to Susan Fitzell.
   * A fee per article will be expected for articles published without the closing bio and contact information; $300.
2. Permission is also granted for reasonable:
   * Editing content and industry specific example exchange.
   * Length.
   * Article title change.
3. Electronic publishing of articles must include a live, click-able link to http://www.susanfitzell.com

Any questions, please email to [sfitzell@susanfitzell.com](mailto:sfitzell@susanfitzell.com).