

S³ PLAN

SOFT SKILLS SUCCESS PLAN

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If you are like other smart, ambitious people then you already know that your personal and professional development planning are mainly self-directed activities. Other people will play a critical, supportive role in the process by offering tools, tips, techniques, advice, and guidance, but there is only one person who can do the work—YOU. The *Soft Skills Success (S3) Plan* is a valuable tool that will help you tremendously if...you do the work.

Regardless of your goals, one of the most crucial aspects of developing an effective plan to achieve your personal and professional goals is focusing on developing your soft skills.

“Soft Skills are personal abilities that improve human performance and facilitate effective interactions amongst people.”

—Al Duncan, Co-host, *Skill Talk™ - The Soft Skills Success Show*

Experts ranging from psychologists to business leaders; educational and spiritual leaders, agree that soft skills have the greatest impact on your level of success. Let’s play around with this idea.

GAMETIME

Let’s play a game. Think about skills that anybody would need to become successful. Now, you have 60 seconds to write down as many of the most important skills and characteristics you think can help people become successful. Write your answers in the blanks below. (Don’t cheat! You only have 60 seconds.)

Are you ready? Get set..go!

Let’s look at your list. What kinds of skills did you write down? Did you write down skills similar to communication, leadership, or teamwork? Did you write down characteristics like determination, persistence, or adaptability? Take a look at the list on the next page. Circle words that are the same or similar to the ones you wrote down.

Communication

Teamwork

Persistence

Decision-Making

Problem Solving

Dedication

Networking Skills

Creativity

Adaptability

Collaboration

Leadership

Emotional Intelligence

Determination

Focus

Motivation

Innovation

Grit

Interpersonal Skills

Consistency

Discipline

Open-Mindedness

Resourcefulness

Organization

People Skills

Resilience

Initiative

So, how many of your words were the same or similar words to the ones on the list?

Did you know that regardless of their profession, when successful people are asked to name the most important skills for success they typically list soft skills? Even those who aren't familiar with the term "soft skills" still include many soft skills on their list of what it takes to become successful.

With that in mind, your *S3 Plan* will be designed so that you can:

- Immediately begin working on identifying and strengthening your best soft skills
- Find the most in-demand soft skills for your profession
- Create the action steps for accomplishing your goals and objectives.
- Develop a process for monitoring your progress

THE POWER OF WRITING AND PLANNING

Duncan Nugget® #1: Write and Succeed

You tend to accomplish a lot more when you put your goals, ideas, plans, and the necessary action steps in writing.

As part of your *S3 Plan* you will be writing down:

- Your definition of success
- Your strengths
- In-Demand soft skills in your profession
- Your goals and objectives
- Your actions steps and the soft skills needed to get them done

FINAL THOUGHT BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Remember, nobody has ever mastered ALL of the soft skills and no one ever will because each of us has our own unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. Your aim is to focus on the best combination of your strengths and the skills needed to achieve your personal and professional goals.

PART 1: DEFINE SUCCESS

Success is a tricky word. A lot people want “success”, but few can accurately define it. And even worse, many people are trying to live life based on someone else’s definition of success. Not cool.

**Million-Dollar Question:
What is YOUR definition of success?**

Think about that question and write your answer in the blanks below.

Refer back to your definition often as you finish the rest of your *S3 Plan*. Your definition of success will help you decide on the best goals and action steps for your life. Also, your definition of success may change from time to time as you grow and experience new things in life. Is that okay? Absolutely.

PART 2: BUILDING ON YOUR STRENGTHS

It is human nature to focus on the areas that you believe need improvement. One of the biggest misconceptions about success, however, is the faulty assumption that your greatest room for growth is in your greatest areas of weakness. Not true. Great people spend most of their time focused on and working on what they do best. Your talents are one of the keys to building a competitive advantage in life.

**Duncan Nugget® #30:
Focus on your strengths; manage your weaknesses.**

Write down your 3-5 strongest soft skills.

PART 3: IDENTIFYING IN-DEMAND SOFT SKILLS IN YOUR PROFESSION

Whether it is building a particular skill set or searching for keywords to put on a resume, when people are trying to figure out what soft skills they need to achieve their goals and objectives they often seek advice from their peers, parents, teachers, mentors, other professionals, or a combination of them all.

That’s a great idea because although 10% of your learning comes from education, 20% of your learning comes from others.

But did you know that 70% of learning occurs from skill-based and job-based activities? So, the real question is how do you find the soft skills that actual companies and organizations are looking for? It’s simple. And you probably already know this: you need to do a little bit of research.

QUICK & EASY RESEARCH PROJECT

Go do a quick online search for 5 to 7 job descriptions for positions you would be happy to have. Write down all of the skills listed on the job descriptions. List the technical skills (i.e. programming, typing, creating spreadsheets, etc.) and soft skills (i.e. communication, creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, organizational skills, etc.) in separate columns. **If a skill appears on more than one job description, only list it once, but next to it also write down the number of times it appears.**

Hint for entrepreneurs: If you plan to start your own business then research the skill sets of five successful CEOs and/or entrepreneurs in your industry. Remember, you can also include job descriptions for jobs and internships that you are applying for on the journey to starting your own business.

Soft Skills

Technical Skills

1. Did any soft skill(s) appear in every job description? Write them below. Obviously, those are some of the most in-demand soft skills.

2. What other soft skill(s) appeared more than once? Write them below.

3. Of the soft skills listed, which ones do you believe are areas of strength for you? **Hint:** Earlier you learned that great people spend most of their time getting better at what they do best.

4. How do you know that the skills you listed in your answer to question #3 are your strongest skills? Write an example of a time when you demonstrated those skills.

5. What soft skills did you see listed that you know are not your strengths and you want to work on them? **Hint:** Remember, nobody is master of ALL soft skills. It's ok to have skills that need improvement. The key is finding the right position that allows you to focus on your strengths while managing and—to the best of your ability—improving on your weaknesses.

PART 4: GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

Now it's time to focus on developing your process for goal achievement. Notice the word "achievement". We are not talking about goal setting, we are talking about goal achievement. What's the point of setting goals if you are not taking the steps to achieve them?

If you ask 100 successful people what they did to become successful they will probably give you many different skills and principles. But the real secret is in their routine or process.

Million-Dollar Question: What do successful people actually do from day to day that helps them achieve their goals?

Some kind of way—intuitively or purposefully—they have developed a process that helps them achieve their desired goals.

Here's a simple process for goal achievement you can use until you develop your own:



Duncan Nugget® #380: It's ok to plan from the top down. But... to create a strong foundation, you build from the bottom up. Soft skills are the foundation of success.

It is not possible for you to take the consistent action steps that lead to goal achievement without the right soft skills and that's why, whether they realize it or not, successful people spend a great deal of time using and sharpening their soft skills

THE CASE OF THE SUCCESSFUL STUDENT

Let's take a quick look at that process in action. Maybe you know someone like this.

Imagine that there was student named Celie. She had a **career goal** to become a videogame designer. So, she majored in computer science with a minor in interactive entertainment. Her **short term goals and objectives** were to graduate with honors and to do two internships to get relevant work experience. Some of the **consistent actions steps** she took were to always show up to class on time, study for 2 hours for every 1 hour of class time, do research and read up on the top companies as well as current trends in the industry. And of course... she played video games. Duh!

In order to stay consistent with her **action steps** she focused on these **soft skills** that she was pretty good at (her strengths): time management, self-discipline, creativity, and focus. She even did a decent job of managing and improving other **soft skills** that were not her strengths such as decision-making, collaboration, listening, and writing.

Celie wasn't perfect. In fact, just like all successful people, she made mistakes along the way. Every so often she acted aliterate (yes, that's a real word. It means able to read but unwilling to do so). She went to the club a few times when maybe she shouldn't have—like on the night before an exam. Sometimes she didn't study as hard as she could have. Once she thought she found the love of her life, but it didn't work out. He cheated on her right before finals. Jerk.

And other times even when she did her best, things didn't always go the way she wanted them to. But no matter what happened, she stayed determined and always managed to get back on track by following her *S3 Plan*. She did her best to follow the process and eventually she received an offer for a new position working at Nintendo. And today, Celie is President & CEO of her own company. Her **mission** in life is to bring joy, happiness, and relaxation to people via interactive gaming. And...she is dating a good dude who knows how to act right.

Not bad. Not bad at all. Now, let's put the process in action for you!

CAREER GOAL(S) AND MISSION

1. What is your main career goal and/or mission in life? (Long Term Goal)

HINT: Be SMART! Make your goals **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, & Time-Bound.**

OBJECTIVES AND SHORT TERM GOALS

1. What are the 3-5 main things you want to accomplish during the next 2-4 years?

2. How will those goals help you to achieve your main career goal or mission?

3. What resources do you need? Write down the resources you will need to help you accomplish your career goals and how you plan to get those resources. For example, in the story you read about Celie, she needed relevant job experience so, one of her objectives was to do two internships. **HINT:** Resources can be people, education, external training programs, books, etc. Select the people and other resources you think will have the greatest impact on your success.

CONSISTENT ACTION STEPS

“Success is nothing more than a few simple disciplines practiced everyday.”

—Jim Rohn

Earlier you read that 70% of learning comes from skill-based activities. With that in mind, your daily action steps should be focused on building your soft skills and the technical skills you need



to succeed in life. You will learn and achieve the most by taking consistent action—even if you are making mistakes along the way.

Duncan Nugget® #368: Normally, it's not the first mistake you make that causes you the biggest problem, it's the repeated mistake—the one you keep making over and over—that causes you the biggest problem.

Write down 3-5 simple things you can consistently do to help you to achieve your main goals. (Think about the action steps that Celie took. And think about the things that successful people you admire do on a consistent basis. What action steps did they take to become successful?)

Let's get back to a crucial part of your goal achievement process—the foundation: soft skills.

A REALLY QUICK LESSON ON SOFT SKILLS

Have you ever wondered how many soft skills there are? There are well over one hundred! That's way too many to keep track of. Seriously. You can primarily focus on the in-demand soft skills in your career that are your strengths and weaknesses. In fact, it's much more effective to think of soft skills in groups or clusters. If you think about it, any soft skill that you have listed in your *S3 Plan* will fit in one **or more** of the following five clusters:

- **Communication Skills** such as presentation skills, active listening, body language
- **Decision Making & Problem Solving Skills** such as creativity, critical thinking, resourcefulness
- **Teamwork & Collaboration Skills** such as project management, professional networking
- **Self-Management & Professionalism Skills** such as time management, Emotional Intelligence, determination, integrity
- **Leadership, Influence, & Persuasion Skills** such as conflict management, delegation, selling, team building

REQUISITE SOFT SKILLS

REMINDER: *It is not possible for you to take the consistent action steps that lead to goal achievement without the right soft skills.*

1. What are the 3-5 main soft skills you need to complete the action steps you wrote down on page 10? (Example: To study consistently requires self-discipline, focus, and time management.) Which are strengths for you? Which are areas of improvement?

2. What action steps will you take to improve the strengths that you wrote on this page and on page 4?

3. On this page and page 6, you listed some soft skills that you want to work on that are NOT your strengths. What is one action step you can take to manage and/or improve in those soft skills? **HINT:** Even if you don't have answer to this right now, you have to come up with one eventually so, do some research and ask some successful people you know.

4. How does consistently completing your action steps relate to the definition of success you wrote on page 4?

HINT: Some people prefer to keep track of their goal achievement using a table like the one below. If that looks like something you would like to use you'll find a blank on page 13.

SAMPLE TABLE FOR TRACKING CELIE’S GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

GOAL OR OBJECTIVE	ACTION STEPS	REQUISITE SOFT SKILLS	EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS	TARGET DATE
Obtain my degree in Computer Science	Research the best schools for video game design	Creativity, critical thinking, decision making	Completion of required classes, graduation	May 2017
Graduate with honors	Study 2 hours for every 1 hour of class	Self-discipline, time management, grit	Transcript, test scores, feedback from professors,	May 2017
Complete two internships to gain relevant work experience	Do research on and read up on the top video game design companies in the industry. Also, play lots of video games	Networking, collaboration, active listening, resume building	Internship offers and interviews, work projects	Summer of 2015 and 2016
Start my own video game design company	Read 5 books on entrepreneurship. Take a course on business management	Creativity, problem solving, determination, focus	Business plan, fired my boss! Building a good team	January 2025

BLANK TABLE FOR TRACKING YOUR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

GOAL OR OBJECTIVE					
ACTION STEPS					
REQUISITE SOFT SKILLS					
EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS					
TARGET DATE					

Congratulations! If you actually completed your S3 Plan then you have created a powerful tool for yourself that will help guide you to success. Of course, things rarely go exactly the way we plan. So, when things get a little crazy, adapt, adjust your plan, and always remember...

Duncan Nugget® #21:
Failure is only permanent if you quit.

ABOUT S³TEM

Soft Skills for STEM (S³TEM) is the premier soft skills training and development program for STEM students and young professionals.

Program highlights include:

- National S3 Tour - Monthly seminars at colleges and universities around the world.
- Annual Lessons Learned S3TEM Workshop providing various opportunities to share experiences and personal and professional skill development
- A free, virtual Success Lab that provides videos, micro-learning activities, and practical soft skills building tools for individuals and groups.



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