Formalize your job

Standardization is getting more complex and demanding. However, often, you yourself may not even realize all that comes into play when you participate in the preparation of a new standard.

Way beyond technical

A good standards professional needs to be a technical expert but also needs to be familiar with the company's technical and business objectives, strategy and vision. To get the best out of the standards that are being developed, it is essential to understand the company's products and the processes that are used to create them, as well as the functioning of major business units, including quality assurance, procurement and manufacturing. By no means is this just an engineering job.

As a standards professional, you also need to have a good knowledge of the standards bodies which develop standards that are relevant to your company (understand how they and their committees are structured, their processes and procedures, whether they are global, regional or national). This is important for your company's standardization strategy.

Finally, you need to understand how your company's customers or suppliers are integrating external standards your company works with.

A complex combination of skills and know-how

Successful contribution to standardization work requires expertise, know-how and skill sets. It also involves many different tasks. Make sure that your management understands the complexity of your job (in addition to how your work contributes to the bottom line).

Get it in writing

Do you have a formal job description that includes your standardization work? This is the first step to get recognition internally for what you do. It will allow you to build your role as a standards professional in your company and industry. Developing a job description may sound taunting, but it is not that complicated… But if you don't do it, probably nobody else will.

Hereunder is a brief example of some of the skills and expertise needed to successfully contribute to standardization. You could personalize and add items to this list to reflect your own expertise; i.e. individual tasks you accomplish before, during and after each meeting as well as those that are part of your standardization job in your company. Together this should give you a starting base for your job description and a good way to explain to management what it is you actually do. Another way to go about it is to ask others in standards meetings if they would be willing to share their job description with you and use that as the starting base.

Once you have a draft ready, review it with your boss. Identify gaps where you would benefit from training and then develop a training plan. Thereafter, keep your job description current, tracking new skills as you add them.

This can be an important career development tool for you and a valuable tool for your company to train or hire junior standards experts.

Example of skills and expertise needed for successful contributions to standardization:

Accomplishments	Know-how and skills needed
Situation analysis – understand the background of the standardization need; identify differing interests around the table and potential solutions.	- analytic skills - insights into corporate needs and overall industry requirements - interpersonal skills - technical competence
Argumentation – develop a line of reasoned arguments backed-up with points of logic. Tactfully challenge the view expressed by others you disagree with/ handle objections to your arguments; identify common ground.	- overall technical competence in the field under discussion - detailed technical competence to understand the merit of (all) proposed solutions/technologies - insights into corporate and technical objectives, strategy and vision, as well as an understanding of products and technologies that would be affected by the standard - interpersonal and people skills - ability to comprehend different cultures and mentalities - language and verbal communication skills (if English is not your mother tongue) - emotional control
Get an understanding for when to make concessions that are acceptable to your company.	- negotiation skills - full understanding of corporate objectives, strategy, vision and needs - decision-making skills
Successfully contribute to the content of a standard.	- In addition to technical know-how, you need presentation, speaking and writing skills, i.e. the ability to use clear language to carve out a competitive advantage for your company or/and protect your interests. - collaboration and teamwork - active listening and facilitation - project management - problem solving - ethics and reliability
Regular feedback on progress and consultation with peers and colleagues. Internal sharing and communication.	communication and people skills

To summarize, in addition to technical competencies, the following hard and soft skills are required to become a successful standards professional:

- ability to build and hold a logical argument
- analytical skills
- communication and people skills (speaking, presentation and writing)
- negotiation and problem-solving skills
- emotional control
- ethics and reliability
- language skills
- decision making
- project management
- ability to collaborate and participate in a team
- understand corporate objectives and strategy
- a basic level of politeness and diplomacy

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[i] Partial excerpts of articles published in ASTM International by Laura Hitchcock, with permission.