

3 tips for graduates entering the digitally-driven workforce

Graduates often hear the same advice on repeat. Write your CV like this, don't post inappropriate content on social media, dress professionally for an interview, maintain eye-contact, don't have a weak handshake etc.



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And while this is good advice, not many graduates are getting the advice they really need to succeed in a world increasingly driven by technology.

From self-driving cars, to chatbots taking the place of call centre agents, and drones delivering that pair of shoes you ordered online, technology is changing the way we live, work, and communicate. But what does this mean for students and what can they do now to remain relevant in the future?

In celebration of Youth Month, Microsoft recently engaged with Zeta Yarwood, a leading career coach and former recruitment specialist in the Middle East to find out how university students and recent graduates can prepare for the not-so-distant future world of work.

1. Today you need more than a degree to be successful in your chosen career path

With over 10 years' experience in coaching, management and recruitment – in multinational companies and award-winning recruitment firms – Yarwood knows the secrets of career success. And, she's seen first-hand the shifts that have taken place in today's modern workplace.

Gone are the days where students study for a degree that will set them up with a job for life. "Forget the notion of choosing one job for life," she says. Before entering the world of work, students must ask themselves one very important question: 'Will my education prepare me for a meaningful career, and will that career even exist by the time I'm ready to join the workforce?'

It's also important to question whether your degree has equipped you with skills both hard (physical and/or theoretical knowledge of how to perform a job role) and soft (emotional, cognitive skills that inform your approach to work).

This is important because automation could replace certain hard skills, while, according to Yarwood, "Companies are putting more emphasis on softer skills such as emotional intelligence, communication, critical thinking skills and leadership qualities than ever before." These skills aren't always taught at universities, and are often developed over time and through lots of practice.

And the research tells similar story. Microsoft recently collaborated with the Economist and the Intelligence Unit to [survey](#) education professionals globally, from teachers and administrators to principals. The survey found that emotional well-being is a predictor of employment success, and emotional literacy is crucial for self-awareness and navigating through life.

The report also found that as artificial intelligence (AI) transforms the job market, the importance of human skills like creativity, interpersonal understanding, and empathy is becoming more and more valuable.

2. Focus on developing a specific skillset

Another key consideration is that the conventional four-year degree – widely regarded as the benchmark requirement for a prosperous career – is becoming less relevant in many fields.

In countries where no free tertiary education is offered, the cost alone of a four-year degree could exclude many people from obtaining a qualification that could set them up for future success. Instead of insisting that students study a degree for four years, they should pursue more compact, affordable and real-world options.

For example, students can study for a 'micro or nano-degree' which, as the name suggests, gives them specific skills, often in science, technology or math subjects. The demand for these skills is increasing rapidly in the Middle East and Africa to meet the needs of growing economies.

These degrees are obtained in much less time than traditional degrees — and offer a more affordable price tag. Think of them as versions of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), only more inclusive, more comprehensive and with a qualification at the end of the course.

There are many programmes available to youth that encourage lifelong learning and continuous upskilling. For example, the Microsoft Virtual Academy 4Afrika offers youth a unique online learning experience – free of charge. Online courses are streamed in real-time, enabling you to interact with established industry experts from across the continent. Technology and business courses are available, designed in Africa, for an African audience, to meet your individual needs and organisational goals.

Microsoft's Digital Skills programme also offers students curated digital skills resources from digital literacy courses to computer science tutorials and more. And the Microsoft Cloud Society programme, which is a one-stop learning platform academy, offers a range of modules to hone your cloud skills.

3. **Work towards using data creatively**

A recent World Economic Forum (WEF) report, titled 'The Future of Jobs', predicts that 35% of the skills needed to succeed in working world will have changed by 2020, regardless of industry. Creativity was also ranked number ten on the list of critical skills – and in 2020 (which is just next year) it will be the third most coveted skill after complex problem-solving and critical thinking.

It doesn't matter what your dream job entails, demonstrating that you are able to use data in original and creative ways to solve important problems will be vital to your career success.

Teaching, learning and research, whether in humanities, law, the sciences, medicine or engineering requires us to engage with data. Now is the perfect opportunity for students to take advantage of this perfect storm of creativity, technological megatrends and advanced communication platforms to figure out the best ways to collaborate in conjunction with technology.

Becoming career fit

The secret for a bright and prosperous future lies in students' ability to be flexible, adaptable and always ready to learn, unlearn and relearn. Think about yourself as a package of skills and abilities, not as a defined role or occupation.

The Middle East and Africa's young people are its biggest asset. With their natural agility, ambition, interest in technology and innovative spirit, they truly can lead the region in the digital revolution and succeed in the future world of work.

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