To make yourself employable

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Recently, Satish, a computer engineering graduate, was unable to get a placement in the IT industry but had an offer for a marketing job. He was worried about giving up his passion and getting into an unrelated industry. This is not just his case: as per sources, 60% of engineering graduates don't get into their chosen industries. With education emerging as a lucrative business, there's been a mushrooming of colleges offering engineering and other degrees, resulting in an increased supply eligible candidates. However, in a subdued employment market, candidates are compelled to choose whatever jobs they get. Let's examine the various dimensions of this crisis.

Firstly, the manufacturing sector which used to absorb a large number of engineering graduates has been stagnant for a while and is in no position to absorb the increased supply. The IT industry, a major employer, is also going through an increased automation and consequently, lowering overall demand. As a result, there's demand only for graduates with employable skills.

Secondly, the curriculum of engineering and other courses hasn't changed in line with the industry requirements. A recent ASSOCHAM-McKinsey study showed that only one out of 10 students with degrees in humanities and one out of four engineering graduates are employable. Another report reveals that due to lacklustre business sentiments, B-school campus recruitment this year has gone down severely with only one out of five students landing in employment offers. The report also mentions that 20% of teachers do not measure up to the standards of the National Council for Teachers' Education [NCTE], which presents another dimension of the present crisis.

While the business outlook remains grim, students have to be better-skilled to start their career. Therefore, the key question is what are employable skills and how should you go about acquiring them?

Recruiters seek to match candidate profile with the job profile while making a selection. To be able to land a job, you need hard skills or application skills based on your stream of education. However, to be effective in the job, you need soft skills like communication, interpersonal relations, problem-solving and decision-making, time management, self-motivation etc., complementing the technical or hard skills. For example, if you specialise in Marketing with an MBA, you need all the soft skills mentioned above for professional success. Similarly, a doctor must be proficient in communication skills such as probing and listening skills, confidence building, motivating skills, whereas an engineer must be proficient in problem-solving and decision-making, interpersonal skills, time management, numerical skills etc.

How to acquire job-specific skills

These are the four common soft skills that make you employment ready:

Planning and time management: This involves the ability to plan considering the availability of resources and the ability to plan and complete tasks within a time frame.

Communication skills: These include effective listening, speaking, writing and presentation skills. Developing interpersonal skills and the ability to empathise with others are also important.

Leadership skills: Establishing a common vision, taking an initiative and getting tasks done by others through persuasion and motivation, supporting others and building a strong team are some of the key elements required to lead a team.

How to develop these skills?

■ Joining a personality development institute that can customise a programme depending on your chosen career can help to a great extent in developing essential skills. Learn an additional language, especially if you wish to study or work abroad.

■ Take lead in your college activities such as seminars, debates, case studies, mock parliaments, cultural activities etc to develop strong communication skills.

■ Be part of a college sports team which keeps you fit and helps develop your abilities to work in a team.

■ Active participation in course-related projects, summer projects etc helps develop project management and presentation skills. Participation in various environmental and social projects help build one's personality with a deep understanding of the importance of values and ethics.

■ A part-time job helps you earn money while you learn and improves your exposure to the professional world.

■ Effectively network with leaders related to your career through business sites such as LinkedIn and keep yourself updated.

■ Seek a mentor to reconfirm if your aptitude and skill set actually support your dream career.

Students should critically analyse current trends, evaluate long-term opportunities in mainstream and offbeat careers and decide the right career path. A strong line up of above soft skills will keep you better-equipped to kick-start your career in any field.

(The author is a career consultant)

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