

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST SKILL SET

FUTURE-PROOF YOUR CAREER

EVEN AFTER YOU LAND A JOB, industries change and job climates fluctuate – which means that paycheck may not be a sure thing. Future-proofing your career by being marketable, well-networked, and flexible could be critical to surviving in the future. Sure, hope for the best, but anticipate the worst: Take these steps to be as employable as possible.

MIX IT UP

Diversifying your skill set is key to career future-proofing. After all, “We live in a world of grayed lines,” said Brittany Dawson, staffing consultant at Emerald Staffing, a staffing and recruitment service company. “Everything is a hybrid of something.”

Jobseekers qualified to manage a range of tasks are top picks for employers. Better yet, they aren’t pigeonholed into one position – or in trouble if their fields suffer or change. Diverse skills can also increase job security; employers value well-rounded employees who can contribute to multiple departments and evolve with the company.

But be careful: Being a jack of all trades can mean you dip into a lot of crafts and are master of none. You need to know your stuff to stay in the game. “Make peace with the fact that too little versatility is limiting and too much can appear watered-down,” Dawson said.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SKILLS

So, how do we decide which skills are worth learning or will be relevant in the future?

“Do your homework,” Dawson said. “Familiarize yourself with the up-and-coming trends.”

M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E

“Mickey Mouse Degree” is a term used to describe a useless university degree. ft.com





- Read current events and industry publications.
- Attend conferences.
- Research related job descriptions and notice the required skills.
- Find a mentor.
- Invest in a career coach.
- Connect with others in your field but outside your own company.
- Ask employers which skills new candidates are lacking.

There are a few safe bets, however. Sherry Jordan, president and consultant at Northwest Coaching Group, Inc., a business consulting and personal coaching company, said, “There are some things people will always need, even in an ever-changing world, such as communication skills, negotiation skills, skills to influence other people, and skills to create trust with other people.”

MASTER NEW SKILLS

Fortunately, there are many avenues for learning new skills. “There’s almost no excuse to not figure out a way to master [new skills] today,” said Jenny Foss, career strategist at JobJenny.com, a career and job search consulting company.

- **Start with your company.** Take advantage of training programs and classes on the company dollar, volunteer for special projects, and help people in other groups.

- **Consider adult learning,** continuing education classes, certification programs, and online tutorials. “Honestly, there are so many online learning opportunities, like Lynda.com,” Foss said. “You can sign on and be taking a class in less than 10 minutes.”
- **Volunteer.** It’s a simple way to “learn the ropes on a non-committal basis,” Dawson said.
- **Be open to new experiences,** even if it scares the pants off you. “Be willing to fail,” Jordan said. “We know that experiences, even when we fail, are what helps to move us forward, helps us to succeed.”

NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK

“Staying top-of-mind with people in our professional network and in our industry is half the battle,” Foss said. Connecting with the right people provides important recommendations, company knowledge, and information about job openings. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, 80% of jobs aren’t advertised, which means you need the inside scoop to even hear about most openings.

It’s easier than you think. Collect business cards, remember names, make friends, use tools like LinkedIn and BranchOut, and for Pete’s sake don’t burn bridges.

EMBRACE CHANGE

Above all, future-proof your career by

being flexible. “In general, people resist change,” Jordan said. “But in order for us to survive, we must make the best choices possible and be willing to change and keep up.”

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BRITTANY DAWSON

Dawson pointed out that change is inevitable. “Those who ebb and flow with adversity will form a resiliency that will separate themselves from the pack.”

Foss agreed, reflecting on lessons from the recent recession. “When the economy took a big dive, the people who either made it through or rallied the most quickly were the ones who were able to reinvent or adapt.”

Future-proofing your career isn’t just a good idea; it’s a necessary step to protect your future. “You have radical responsibility for the long-term growth and success of your career,” Foss said. “If your company helps you, that’s great, but never, ever expect a company to take it upon themselves to make sure your skill set is current for the long haul. It’s on you.” 💰