

The Importance of Skill Building

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A recent Harvard Business Review study found that a huge “skills gap” exists between the skills employees need, but don’t have. For example, 32.8% of employees in the Information Technology field and 23.6% of employees in the Management field reported that they don’t have all of the skills they need to successfully do their jobs.

If you can take control of your own development, and put a continual focus on growing your skill set, you’ll gain a competitive advantage amongst your peers. If you’re in the job market, this will also give you a leg up amongst other candidates. The good news is that there are several resources at your disposal which can help you expand your skill set.

Here are our top 5 suggestions to help you:

1. Use a SWOT Analysis to map out your development goals and formulate a plan:

Strengths

- What skills do you currently possess that help you or will continue to help you in your career?
- What do other people (your boss, colleagues, professional network) see as your strengths?

Weaknesses

- What skills are you lacking that would be beneficial to develop?
- What are technologies “in demand” in the marketplace that you don’t have exposure to?

Opportunities

- What forums can you use to develop your skills?
- What are the current trends that you should educate yourself about?
- For your primary role, what are the top 3 skills which employers seem to be requesting?

Threats

- What obstacles do you face in achieving these skills development goals?
- Are you running into roadblocks when trying to access training to obtain desired skills?

2. Take training courses.

Continue to take courses geared towards your industry of choice and work on renewing all certifications. You can get training through your company, online training providers such as Plural Sight, online communities such as MS SQL Tips, and certification providers like CompTIA or PMI.

3. Attend Webinars and/or Watch Videos.

The Internet is stock full of information about new technologies, so peruse Ted Talks (an online video library with presentations from SME’s on business, careers, professional development and various technology subjects) OR browse YouTube for similar videos.

4. Use Social Media to follow key companies or trends on Linked In and Twitter.

Companies like Microsoft have their own learning handles (i.e. @MSLearning) which publish free tips and webinars.

5. Join User Groups or Professional Organizations.

There are Online Communities (GitHub, Stack Overflow, MS SQL Tips), User Groups (Java User Groups, .NET User Groups, SQL Server User Groups, etc), Professional Associations (Helpdesk Institute, Project Management Institute (PMI), IIBA), and more...

Staying on top of current Industry Trends is also incredibly advantageous to your skills development. Subscribe to professional magazines or journals or bookmark online technical websites to receive frequent updates on the new trends and skills in the tech industry! You can research tech trends reports, such as Deloitte Consulting’s annual Tech Trends Report. This report provides an in-depth look at 2014 Tech Trends and where the industry is headed. There are numerous other industry reports that you can reference for additional information!

Remember, continually focusing on developing both your soft skills and skills related to your specific discipline will be rewarding, and give you an advantage throughout your career, so try to block off time weekly or monthly to outline which skills you want to focus on enhancing, and then take the time to actually develop those skills.