

Do you have a “best before” or “use by” date?

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The careers experts at Lawson Williams continue to offer tips, tricks and advice on building your chosen career.

In previous articles we have discussed the pace of change we are all facing in our work. Experts are saying that the total body of work now doubles every 5 years which means that new knowledge, skills and attitudes inevitably have to be learned in order to keep pace with required changes in business practices, processes, technologies and products to meet increasingly more discriminating customer demands.

Top 5 competencies sought by employers

This article focuses on the top 5 competencies sought by employers based on a wide range of international research. I believe these competencies are a good place to start if we are to be the best we can be now and into the future, keeping up with the pace of change. If you are to develop and/or sustain a career in any industry, never before has your “best before date” or your “use by” date been so important.

Our last article looked at communication as the Number 1 competency sought by employers. The reason: employers are looking for certain behaviours from us and most of these require effective communication, such as...

- Motivation - motivators want to leave their mark and aspire to large collective goals – to do this they must communicate.
- Curiosity - curious people want new experiences, knowledge and feedback – this won't happen without communication.
- Insight - insightful people are able to gather and make sense of information. Gathering information requires communication.
- Engagement - Engaging people communicate with emotion and logic.
- Determination - determined people fight for difficult goals despite challenges, they can't do this alone, they must communicate.

No 2 Competency – Continuous Learning

Tom Peters calls it cultivating “towering competence” – becoming the very best at what you do, by continuing to learn and hone your skills and capabilities to the point where they become highly regarded and sought after by your co-workers and professional peers. Continuous Learning (CL) means we keep the “raw material pile” of our brain freshly stocked, which enables us to come up with more and better ideas and innovations – which every business needs today. New ideas and solutions are a primary way you can add value to your job, and therefore increase your success.

Because employers are looking for the competency of CL it means that learning is no longer just something we do. It has to become something we consciously practice, we need to become the best at learning, to enable us to sustain a career in the future world of work and be attractive to employers.

The benefits of CL to employees.

There are several benefits to taking a continuous learning approach to life

- Improved performance – the more you learn about something the better you will be at it
- Increased value to your employer – the more you can do, the more you can contribute to the success of your organisation
- More career flexibility – it will be easier for you to move in new directions when you want or need to – either within or outside your current organisation
- Higher self esteem and motivation – how could learning not make you feel better about yourself?
- More creativity – with greater knowledge and experiences, you will have more internal resources to draw on for new ideas.

CL also applies to organisations as a whole.

Survival in today's competitive global markets requires companies to continuously improve. The development of a CL culture can help ensure survival. But the development of this culture requires a rethink in how learning and development happens within your business: only 15% of all learning required to function in most jobs is acquired through traditional classroom training.

Small to medium sized businesses struggle with the development of CL culture primarily due to lack of resource. These organisations however can no longer leave learning to chance for either themselves or their employees.

Organisations of all sizes shouldn't be surprised that new employees will in the future be asking for and attracted to your learning strategies and culture.

The benefits of becoming a CL organisation.

- Encourages knowledge creation
- Fosters knowledge sharing
- Builds innovation and best practices
- Helps discover hidden knowledge and expertise
- Reduces “relearning”
- Promotes a sense of “team”
- Contributes to business success

To avoid the “best before” or “use by” date becoming an issue in your career you must become the best you can be at Continuous Learning.

Being a continuous learner doesn't just happen, it requires practice and planning.

John Lawson is founder of Lawson Williams Consulting Group. He initially studied Biotechnology at Massey and is a professional member of NZIFST. He now enjoys leading a team of recruitment consultants, helping people like you develop satisfying careers.

