

Dear All

In June 2020, President Trump made an important announcement – he passed a new law that said the federal jobs need not ask for degrees anymore, but go by skills. With technology becoming important in every industry, we are seeing a fundamental debate at the workplace – what should one value – a Degree or a Skill? Here are my learnings on this important future debate:

1. A degree and a skill in my opinion are two sides of the same coin. A degree is a certified documentation of a 'relevant' skill.
2. It takes 1800 hours to complete a degree. This is equivalent to working 8 hours a day at a job for a year!
3. There are many jobs where a basic degree is mandatory basis a certain knowledge – like a Doctor, a dentist, a vet, a lawyer.
4. Why are people asking this question on jobs vs degrees? Technology, specifically digitization is making things go faster and hence old experience is being replaced by new skills. The life of a management concept is 12 to 14 months, so one needs to unlearn and relearn almost every year.
5. When President Trump made the announcement, there was an interesting statistic that was published. America has 160 million people on the employment rolls, of this 160 million, 50 million do not have access to promotion and higher income jobs because they do not possess a degree. When companies downsize, they typically tend to let go off people without a degree.
6. Fields that require constant improvement and creativity rely more on skills than degrees. The news industry is an example, any planning industry is an example. Teaching is another as one needs to present the latest examples to students to make the subject interesting and contemporary. Pilots do not need a degree to fly a plane. Being an author require no degrees. Being an actor or musician requires no degrees.
7. Many people quote Zuckerberg and Bill gates as examples of people without degrees making it big. Yes, they made it big because they had innovative ideas that solved something significant. Even then Bill Gates himself has said that his education was incomplete without attending college. 'A college has multiple experiences and that is in itself a life shaping experience' says Gates.
8. When you are in a job, a skill helps you execute the job, meet deadlines and close targets. A degree doesn't help you do that.
9. If you need degrees to count, then the quality of education has to be outstanding. Institutions cannot just churn out assembly line style degree holders. Even if institutions did that, they must push for practical experience of their degree aspirants.
10. The job market needs skills today. Companies like Google, Apple etc. have already started relaxing the degree rule. Entrepreneurs of every kind do not look for degrees when they hire people, they look for experiences. Degrees signal a particular competence of studiousness, that might not hold as more students opt for online courses, short term courses etc.
11. I think we will see new ideas and trends in hiring when organizations hire for skills vs hiring based on degrees.
12. In a future world, I think we will see more jobs that depend on acquired skills, creativity and experience will not require degrees.
13. The trouble with skills is that they cannot be evaluated on paper and most success of professionals is based on continuous skills display and upgrading of skills.
14. I personally see executives taking a lot more short courses to develop simple base knowledge and then using that to build experience. I think companies will also need to get more experimentalize in a skills led success world.

I'd really like you think of what skills will make you succeed at work.

Happy to get feedback

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