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Opinion Op-Eds

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## Four keys to staying employed in the future



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The world of work is changing at unprecedented rates. In the United States, only 27 percent of people work in the field in which they majored in college. By the time today's high school students are 38, it is predicted they will have held between 10 and 14 jobs — and we don't even know what those jobs will be. One third of the jobs today's students will encounter don't exist. In addition, up to 50 percent of the current jobs could become automated in their lifetimes.

Despite these statistics, students are barraged with antiquated messages about preparing for their futures: Your college major determines your future. A particular degree guarantees you a certain job and income. Play it safe. Major in something "traditional" and you'll always have a job. But some of the most important tools students can acquire are not mainstream. Here are strategies students can use for successful vocation and life navigation:

**Become a Student for Life:** Learning how to learn is the single most important skill to carry students successfully into the future. Given the unprecedented change that employees will face throughout their careers, constant retraining will be important. A passion for reading, writing and creativity will make employees competitive. Curiosity is also critical. A deep desire to always ask "Why?" and "How?" shows employers genuine interest in growth and development. Those who seek to learn more will stay ahead of the curve.

**Embrace the Liberal Arts:** Many colleges offer a liberal arts and sciences curriculum. The term liberal arts comes from the Latin phrase “artes liberales” (freeing of the mind); a belief that studying a broad array of subjects gives students true flexibility. Students who engage this curriculum usually pick one major, but are exposed to a wide range of subjects. Studies show that liberal arts graduates have strong skills in critical thinking, writing, analysis, quantitative data and communication. Among the top 10 skills required for success listed in the World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs report are complex problem solving, creativity, coordination with others and cognitive flexibility — skills learned through liberal arts. Students study human nature, societies, belief systems and other issues critical to a well-rounded education. CEOs increasingly are hiring liberal arts graduates because they realize the need for their skills. In fact, Infosys, the global technology consulting firm that is opening an innovation hub in Hartford, actively sought a liberal arts partner and chose [Trinity College](#). Infosys President Ravi Kumar said, “Building a new hybrid talent pool, which draws on broad-based liberal arts foundations and promotes cognitive diversity will add immense value to the technology consulting industry and address an important skills gap for the 21st century.”

**Become Robot Proof:** In his groundbreaking book “Robot-Proof: Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence,” Joseph Aoun argues that many of today’s jobs will be automated. While most believe this will only impact low-skill labor, the changes will affect many other sectors. Work in legal research, data analysis, accounting and medical imaging are all within “robot’s reach.” A robot-proof education, Aoun says, equips students with a creative mindset to invent, discover and create. He believes that students should study “humanix,” a curriculum that cultivates literacy in data, technology and humanities. This will help them work alongside artificial intelligence and make agile transitions during times of change. Scott Hartley, author of “The Fuzzy and the Techie: Why the Liberal Arts Will Rule the Digital World,” says, “In many cases, technology will not replace human workers. It will liberate people to spend more time on aspects of work that require human skills, such as complex problem solving.”

**Become Culturally Competent:** The world of work is becoming increasingly global. Consider a company like Facebook, headquartered in California with thousands of employees on six different continents. Today’s young people will move in global circles. A student today might well attend high school in Jordan, get a college degree in America, study in Argentina and land a job in Singapore. The more students become familiar with different languages, belief systems, religions and identities, the more they will be prepared to work and compete cross-culturally.

There has never been a greater time to embrace the future. This generation of students will make critical discoveries and resolve dilemmas that seemed insurmountable. Take action now, for as the Roman Philosopher Lucius Seneca reminds us, “luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”

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