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ALIGN YOURSELF WITH A BETTER CAREER

A new personality assessment tool that measures attributes rather than skills and experience is gaining traction and winning raves as a way of increasing diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Photo by Ryoji Iwata



BY CARTER HAMMETT

For many of us, the decision to commit to a specific career is one of the most important and nerve-racking decisions we'll probably ever make. It can also be one of the most challenging undertakings we can engage in. The sheer volume of choices out there can be simply overwhelming. And when you realize that a staggering 50% of the jobs available today didn't even exist a decade ago, that just adds to the potential anxiety. So where do you turn? Certainly, career counsellors can help guide you along the way. They can help you decide what to major in, what careers will generate a sense of purpose and also where the jobs will be in five-to-10 years from now. Many career counsellors use tools like career assessment instruments to help you identify themes in your life which can help you narrow your choices. Not all of these however, were created equally. Not all of them have been peer reviewed, for example. One of the downsides to these instruments – especially self-scoring ones – is that it's easy to project who you want to be into the mix, rather than who you are now, at this very moment. At the end of the day, good career assessment tests provide quality information that enhance

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

HOW TO MAKE THE GAPS IN YOUR RESUME WORK FOR YOU



SONNY WONG, M.ED., RP
in: sonny-kh-wong

As a result of COVID, a lot of people have lost their employment. Depending on how long you have been out of the labour market, you may be wondering how to handle the employment gaps in your resume. This gap triggers some concern for those individuals because the common social narrative implies that the gap is a negative reflection of their professionalism. When those individuals seek out opinions about how to address their employment gap – it can add more fuel to their

worries. However, hopefully this article will help individuals make their own decision and be more comfortable with their situation.

New Professionals. If you are a new professional in your field, it is common for you to move from one contract job to another to explore your professional growth, secure income, and gain clarity about your own career identity. For new graduates, it is hard to find stable work, therefore, there will be periods when you will be out of work or engage in contract work. What is wrong with this? Nothing. However, it may become problematic when your resume gives off the impression that you can not hold down employment. Of course, employment consultants will provide you with resume styles which may take the focus off

the employment gaps. But to a skilled human resources professional, employment gaps will be evident no matter how well you may have concealed them. Note, it may be time to self-reflect on how you are making career decisions.

Environmental. If there is one thing that Covid may have taught us, it is that we cannot control everything but we can have faith in the future. If your employment gaps coincide with periods of unstable economic conditions, then the reason for that gap is self-explanatory. How you are evaluated is very much dependent on the hiring manager's preferences. Some will be able to associate your gap with external environmental conditions and still interview you, while others will just move on. Furthermore, the candidate pool can be enormous, and therefore you may

not be screened in for an interview due to other reasons rather than just that employment gap. It is not personal but environmental. It is time to activate your optimistic explanation style. Try your best to avoid internalizing factors which are out of your control.

Personal Illness. Life has its ups and downs. Employment Insurance Sick Benefits may be available with the supporting documentation provided by your family doctor and/or your employer. The eligibility criteria differ from province to province. When you are receiving Employment Insurance Sickness Benefits, your first priority is to rest and take care of yourself. Why this point is highlighted is because of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



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INSIDE:

- SOFT SKILLS OR RESILIENCY SKILLS
- TIME SAVERS AND SHORTCUTS
- UITC'S STUDENTS
- LIFE'S CHANGING SEASONS

- ALL THAT MATTERS STAYS WITH YOU
- MACRO DECISION MAKING AFFECTS MICRO LEVEL COURSES
- DEAR ELCEE



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SOFT SKILLS OR RESILIENCY SKILLS?

BY LISA TRUDEL

For the past 10 years, I have worked with a career centre called Achève. Our office is located at 595 Parliament Street and it is still there even though since March of 2020 all staff have been working remotely from home. Despite this, Achève has found a way to keep everyone very connected by using Zoom, MS Teams and emails. I never feel alone and a day never passes that I do not have a conversation with one of my colleagues.

Recently my colleague, Aydolu Simsek, who is a Resource and Information Specialist with Achève and a graduate of the George Brown College Post Diploma Career Development Practitioner Program, sent me a very interesting article by Dr. Ann Villiers, who is a career coach, writer and member of the Career Development Association of Australia. In her article titled “Why We Should Stop Using Soft Skills” Villiers presents an excellent case that the expression “soft skills” is unhelpful, inaccurate and imprecise. She encourages teachers, researchers, and career coaches to join the trend and to stop using this misleading term.

The expression “soft skills” typically refers to communication and interpersonal skills and implies that these skills are light-weight and that they “require very little effort and no special knowledge”. In reality, these skills are all heavy-weight skills and include

persuading, mediating, and negotiation. Villiers suggests that by using the term “soft skills” we perpetuate the false idea that there is “little rigor in learning and applying emotional intelligence and team leadership”.

What is the alternative to the expression “soft skills”? Villiers recommends that specific words such as people skills or social skills is not only a trend but a needed international movement to create a more consistent and accurate terminology that is inclusive. I am committed to diversity, equity and inclusivity in all aspects of the workplace, career coaching, and language and maybe it is time to delete the outdated expression of “soft skills”.

I looked up the definition of “soft” and read the words: gentle, low, dim, vague, understated and pale. Squeezed in between was the word “resilient”. Perhaps the expression that we all need to use in 2021 is “resiliency skills”?

To find out more about career planning and employment preparation, contact your local Employment Ontario Career Centre and find out if you meet the criteria to use their free services.

Lisa Trudel, Career Specialist with Achève (formerly the Centre for Education and Training), wrote this article. You can contact Lisa at ltrudel@achev.ca

HOW TO MAKE THE GAPS IN YOUR RESUME WORK FOR YOU

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the obvious employment gap. And that is okay. Remember, the hiring committee will evaluate you overall. If you have had stable employment and you have good references, they will most likely see the obvious skills and accomplishments you have gained during your professional life. Be certain that you have your skills/achievements crystal clear on your resume and cover letter in relationship with the job posting. And describe rather than claim why you are the ideal candidate ready to re-engage your vocational calling responsibilities.

Employment Gaps – but no gaps at all. Just because you may have employment gaps – you can be a busy professional doing something else. Employment gaps are not negative when HR and hiring managers see that you have been active during those times. Part of your time is engaging in a full-time job search. The other part of your time can be community involvement activities, professional development, or self development. This is when you may want to create another section on your resume to fill the gap. If you fall in this circumstance, and you can not financially take courses, that is okay, there are numerous free e-tutorials. Alternatively, you can engage in meaningful volunteer activities. Research shows that helping others improves your mood. Your positive outlook will help make your interview stand out.

Assumptions. Assume we know what others think of us. You want to make sure that your application does not leave any room for

the employer to make assumptions about you. When you have constructed a resume accommodating the employment gaps – do not just stop there – move on to the cover letter. Do not assume that they will not read your cover letter. Use this one-page document to address the gap without saying there is a gap. Simply explain how you used your “gap” to engage in meaningful activities. Just imagine this scenario. While you were engaging in course work or community activities – you discovered your vocational calling or a person which led you to apply for this company and that position. Imagine the pre-screening points you may gain when they review your documents. Remember one thing, your resume and cover letter is a self-marketing tool. Be sure to convey only enough of the self, to market your own uniqueness as it relates to the company’s values and the position’s requirements.

So, there you have it. We talked about common types of employment gaps. The purpose of this article is to have you move from gathering others’ opinions to having you consider key factors to facilitate your own decision. Hopefully, the considerations I have outlined will help you define the terms and strengthen the impact of your professional profile.

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.

TIME SAVERS AND SHORTCUTS

BY LISA TRUDEL

When I was in Grade 2, I discovered what a “shortcut” was. Instead of walking to school along the side of the road, my brother showed me a path through a farmer’s field that could save me five minutes of time.

When I was in Grade 9, I found out what “Coles Notes” or “Cliff Notes” were. I was in an English Literature class and was told to read two classic novels and then write a book report on each. The novels were: “Wuthering Heights” by Emily Bronte, and “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee. I struggled to read them. Then a classmate shared a secret and very popular timesaver that every student seemed to be using. It was a slim paper-backed book that summarized classic novels. Instead of actually reading the novel, I could flip through “Coles Notes” and then write my book report using the knowledge from the summarized version. This shortcut was written in easy-to-understand English and was a big timesaver that resulted in an “A” on my report card. I thought my teacher never knew about “Coles Notes” but she probably did.

When I was in Grade 12, I found out what an “alternative route” was. In the early 1970’s when I graduated from High School,

all students had to talk with the Guidance Counsellor about what would happen after graduation. Some students chose to take a year off or a gap year and went hitchhiking in Europe, some chose to go directly to University, and some chose immediate work that only required being a High School graduate. Other students chose to attend a community college which the Guidance Counsellor called the “alternative route”. Instead of a 4-year university degree and student debt, community colleges in the early 1970’s provided a one or two year fast track low-cost program. You could achieve a Diploma that was considered practical experience in order to jump right into a job upon graduation. That was my route. It was an alternative time saver and a shortcut to the workplace.

Today when assisting job seekers with their resumes, I often hear the question: “Is there a shortcut to writing this resume?” You might think that the answer is to simply list solo words in point form such as: “hardworking”, “trustworthy”, “computer skills” and “problem solving”. However, when left alone and exposed, these words do not describe very much. Since potential employers want to read a story that explains who you are, using a 2021 timesaver

might be the solution to create an impressive resume. Here are two shortcuts to consider:

1) Read job postings.

I recently read a job posting that stated “We are committed to employment equity, and fair and accessible employment practices. We encourage visible members of the BIPOC community, the LGBTQ+ community, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds to apply and self-identify” It sounded very current, and if you are dedicated to supporting diversity inclusivity, I recommend adding a version of this line to your resume depending on who you are and what you are aiming for. For example, in your “summary” section at the very start of your resume, you could conclude this section with this line. Job postings always provide the most current expressions. Use them as a place of research and then borrow a good line if you see it.

2) NOC: This stands for the National Occupational Classifications.

It is Canada’s national system and directory for describing occupations. The NOC lists more than 30,000 occupations and titles in 500 unit groups, organized according to skill levels and skill types. You can access it at: www.noc.esdc.gc.ca

For example, if you worked as a Bank Teller in your home country, you could review code 6551 for Customer Service Representative and in the summary section of your resume you could state: “Obtained and processed information required for services including opening accounts and informed customers of banking products and services”. This type of descriptive line is much more powerful than solo words.

In summary, you cannot take a shortcut with your applications, however you can find resources to assist you in writing descriptive lines for your resume, and for your cover letter. Do not shortcut your resume, instead use an alternative way of writing it so you can jump successfully into your job search.

To find out more about resume timesavers and general employment preparation, contact your local Employment Ontario Career Centre and find out if you meet the criteria to use their free services.

Lisa Trudel, Career Specialist with Achève (formerly the Centre for Education and Training), wrote this article. You can contact Lisa at ltrudel@achev.ca

ALIGN YOURSELF WITH A *BETTER* CAREER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the decision making process which should lead you to better and clearer career goals.

A recent arrival to the party and one that's been gaining a lot of traction lately is ALiGN. Developed by the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) and powered by Magnet, ALiGN positions itself as a test that matches job seekers with employers through personality attributes instead of the more traditional approaches of skills and experience.

"It's like a pre-screening tool for employers," says Jessica Dubelaar, project manager, inclusive hiring at Magnet. "It allows employers to consider individuals who have had barriers to employment (including people with disabilities and new comers to Canada). They might not have the experience but they will have the aptitude and potentially succeed based on personality."

Highly visual in nature, people who complete an ALiGN assessment receive a colour-driven and highly personalized framework to foster self-awareness while increasing the effectiveness of their relationships at work. The so-called "spark portrait" also includes an overview of careers that might be interesting to participants based on personality preferences and strengths and these show up in mandala awash with colour and meaning.

Red, for example is driven and action-oriented. Green offers a people focus, while blue people are highly detail-oriented and organized. Yellow people tend to be "big picture" thinkers and spontaneous.

ALiGN also embraces paradox and thus the complexity of human dynamics. "You can be

both introverted and extraverted," says Dubelaar. "The binary perspective is more realistic."

"ALiGN is psychometric personality assessment that matches employers to talent," says project coordinator at Ryerson Magnet Elizabeth Mohler. "I'd say it's unique because of the three types of selves that it describes."

Those three "selves" are the Underlying, or how you are at home; the Everyday, or how you present yourself to the world, and the Extended self, or the personality that functions under stress.

Perhaps the most interesting of the three is the Extended self, which is seldom presented in personality assessments. Certain traits, for example, can be derailers, which are just the logical continuum of our strengths. So, yellow, for example, can indicate creativity, which, when used well can be an indicator of strong conceptual skills and radical approaches to different contexts. However, the Extended self, when taxed, can also get lost in detail and certain personality traits can shift from a positive to a negative, depending on the personality.

Results from the assessment are transferrable to other contexts too. For example, attributes that come up on a profile can be transferred to a resume to align with the job being applied for. These same attributes can be used as selling features during a job interview as well.

Funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), and working in collaboration with social innovation platform Magnet (<https://magnet.today/>) as well as the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University, ALiGN caters to a wide-ranging audience interested in

federally-regulated sectors that include, financial institutions, telecommunications and transportation.

Employers working in these sectors evaluate the most desirable behavioural characteristics in specifically-targeted occupations and collaborate with OTEC to assemble "ideal candidate profiles" for these positions. Job seekers complete an online psychometric assessment to identify personality traits and workstyle preferences before Magnet's technology measures job seekers against all candidate profiles in the system and then invites them to apply to roles that match their job fit characteristics.

Finally, employers receive candidates with the knowledge that they are well-suited for the job.

The project is focused on increasing the pool of qualified candidates from employment equity groups and increase understanding of the barriers to employment faced by populations that include people with disabilities, Indigenous people and women.

With this line of thinking, employers will be able to increase the presence of diverse applicants, creating a more inclusive and pluralistic organizational culture in the process. The initiative also aims to stimulate insight on how employers can obtain talent with non-traditional education and experience. Examples of this include the fact that, because of the solitary and repetitive nature of trucking, people with high functioning autism (Asperger's Syndrome) have often been successful in these types of roles. The energy and enthusiasm people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can make them

ideal candidates for jobs that require shift work.

For folks with disabilities, it's hard to get experience and they may have gaps on their resume or periods of inactivity due to health issues. ALIGN allows you to be matched based on fit rather than skills and experience. For employers, this provides the opportunity to be open minded when hiring diverse talent. If training or mentoring can be provided this population can be successful, given the chance and the proper supports.

Starbucks was an early adopter of the tool, and made a commitment to use it while hiring Syrian refugees. ALiGN was used to stream folks into barista training in partnership with a local employment agency. Among other variables, the tool indicated which people had the energy to interact with a wide volume of different people as well as the ability to remain organized in a high pressure environment.

"The tool helped to get folks in to non-traditional roles. It's a great tool for helping them reach their commitment and set people up for success," says Dubelaar.

So far, feedback has been excellent. Newcomers who experienced ALiGN generated a satisfaction rating of between 85-and-90 percent.

"In a post-COVID-19 world, some jobs won't exist in the same way," says Mohler. "We'll have to figure out where to go next. ALiGN might be one way of helping employers consider alternative forms of hiring." For more information on ALiGN, visit the web site at: magnet.today/align



CAN'T FIND THE SPRING ISSUE OF LEARNING CURVES? GO ONLINE.

Learning Curves along with many of its partners in education and community services, has been affected by COVID-19. Our Summer issue drop-sites continue to be affected. Unfortunately, we cannot effectively cover our usual distribution of the paper: a print run of over 16,000 located at over 650 sites in Toronto and the GTA.

We would be happy to send you hard copies of the Spring issue or drop them off. Simply contact us at learningcurves@hotmail.com.

We thank all our readers, and our advertisers without whose support Learning Curves could not have existed for the past 20+ years. Look for us in all the usual places as the province opens up. Many of our back issues are online at www.learningcurves.org

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INTRODUCING... SOME OF THE REMARKABLE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY IN THE COMMUNITY

From time to time, you may have seen an article about University in the Community (UitC) in Learning Curves and wondered what it was and whether it was something that you might like to join.

UitC is a free, liberal arts program comprised of about 25-30 people all of whom are keenly interested in learning and in being active participants in ideas that shape their communities, their city, and the world. It is an initiative of the Workers' Educational

Association and is supported by the Faculty of Arts and Science at the University of Toronto.

Who are the students of UitC? People who believe in lifelong learning. People who ask questions. People who make our city a more humane place to live. Here, below, in their own words, a few of the students will tell you something about who they are.

To find out more about UitC, all it takes is an email. We'd love to hear from you! universityinthecommunity@gmail.com



Osman at the doorway to friendship



From left to right: Robert, Osman, Mary, and Nenke

A WARM LOOK CAN TOUCH SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE

BY DR. OSMAN O.

One very hot August day, my wife and I were walking on Bloor Street. We'd been out for a long time. We were thirsty. While we were talking about a drink, a sign that read "Community Café All Are Welcome" caught our attention. We were curious and went inside. It was not like other cafés that we knew. There were eight or ten large round tables with people sitting around them.

I made eye contact with someone from afar, just at the entrance through the door. With his warm and sincere gaze, he invited us to his table. His name was Robert T. He was one of the most witty, most positive people I have ever known. We left that day with very positive thoughts. We liked the social environment.

Something unusual caught our attention that day. Those who brought treats such as tea, coffee and fruit to the table were almost all volunteers, women who were about my mother's age. In the country I come from, older people usually sit at the table and young people serve them. However, these people enjoyed serving their guests despite their age. We learned that the Community Café is only open between 2 - 4pm on Wednesdays. Luckily, we had passed by when it was open. From then on, we went there whenever possible. We were always greeted very warmly. We made many friends there.

After our first meeting that day, we never lost touch with Robert. He helped us a lot, as he did everyone else. His friendship allowed us to meet different people. Our contact with the University in the Community was also thanks to him. We attended this program for seven semesters without missing a class. Well-known names in their field came as speakers. It has been a very useful program.

I am an academic. I was a communication professor at the university in my country. This program not only renewed my contact with the academic environment, but as a journalist and columnist for more than 30 years, it deepened my observations of this country and opened new horizons for me.

Here is something else that is characteristic of Robert. If he hears of a subject, an event, or a book that he thinks you might be interested in, he informs you in case you might not have heard about it.

Let me give you a few examples. When the former US Vice-President and environmental crusader, Al Gore, came to Toronto, we were unable to attend the event. Robert brought me a signed copy of Gore's book, Truth to Power. He also brought me a signed copy of Istanbul, a book by Turkish author and Nobel prize-winner, Orhan Pamuk, and presented it as a gift.

Knowing that my wife is a good cook, Robert suggested different recipes and provided us with relevant magazines. He also personally showed us places where we could shop for halal food because he knew that we are Muslim. He told us where we could find things that we needed. This is very important information for newcomers to this country.

Robert and his wife Nenke have a special place in our lives. They are in constant touch with us and make sure that we are never left alone. When I went to Amsterdam, I found the house and the street where Robert lived when he was young, and sent photos to him.

When Robert caught COVID-19, we were very concerned. Later, he received physical therapy at Bridgepoint Hospital. Although he could not come to the window because he was connected to oxygen, we stood outside the hospital almost every day and prayed for him to recover. As I write these lines, his treatment continues in the hospital. We pray for him to recover and return to us as soon as possible.

Let me go back to the beginning.

One of the friends Robert introduced us to at the Community Café was Mary Katsuno. She was 91 when we met, but she was serving guests like a young girl. Her husband Tony, is 94 years old and very healthy. They both had incredible

life energy. It was a great pleasure to chat with them. When they invited us to their home, they offered us something that brought tears to our eyes. They put some of the tools that might be needed in a home on the table. They offered them to us saying that there were only two of them and that they didn't need to have two of the same thing in their house. They said, you just came to this country, you may need these, please take them. We will never forget this.

During the pandemic period, Mary and Tony could not leave their residence for over a year. We could not meet in person. But we stood in front of their building many times. They came to the window. Each time, we talked on the phone and each time we waved to each other.

We have good memories of many people we have met. Far too many, unfortunately, for me to list here.

You see, you enter a café for a cup of coffee, you are welcomed by a sincere pair of eyes and warm conversation, and then doors open in your life. It is impossible to believe that what we experienced was simply coincidence.

Canada is an immigrant country. It has been a very important tradition here that those who come before help those who come after. This situation also helps newcomers adapt to their new country in a short time.

LIFE'S CHANGING SEASONS

BY ADRIANA G.

Many years ago, on a cold and snowy day in February, I came to Canada.

My way from the airport was slow and the view impressive. I just wanted to jump out and eat that white stuff.

But as reality sunk in, I lived in-between adjusting to my new city and remembering everyone and everything I had left behind. I spent several months crying, learning and adjusting.

Snow became rain, I didn't know either of them. I came from a dry and desert climate, with mountains and ocean. The seasons changed, each of them with magic and challenge.

The amazing spring, beautiful parks and the immense variety of flowers helped me settle.

When I started working, I realized how diverse this country is. Living here has given me the opportunity to meet people

from different parts of the world and to learn about their culture, music and food.

On my first trip back to my birth country, I noticed that as life continues, everything and everyone changes with time.

Life is not an easy path and sometimes the decisions we make change our lives for the better. We need energy and resilience to fight adversity and to see that on balance, satisfaction, joy and optimism will win over frustration, sadness and failure.

I am aware that my family values and the educational formation that I brought with me, and the beautiful grandchildren that were born here, have helped me in the whole process. I am grateful for that every day. Let me end with this quote: "If you don't have what you love, love what you have."

ALL THAT MATTERS STAYS WITH YOU

BY SARA K.

My name is Sara. I was born in 1948, in Argentina, just 3 years after the end of World War II. People were searching for countries where they could live peacefully and start new families. Everybody was looking for somebody that they had lost track of during those tragic times.

My father came from Lithuania with only two siblings. The rest of his family perished in the Holocaust. My mother's family had emigrated from Russia to escape the pogroms.

My parents met and married in 1947, and my sister and I were born. We were a middle-class family. My parents had very high moral values. By example, they showed us the value of respect, of helping others, and great love.

My childhood was a very happy one. I had lots of friends and lots of fun. But the best days were when my father took us to museums, the theatre, concerts. To finish the afternoon, we had a delicious hot chocolate with croissants.

My mother was a very active person who was involved in many charities and allowed me to participate in them. And how rewarding it was! She was the one who pushed me to get a better education so I studied until I graduated from University.

In 1973, I went to Israel to experience a different kind of life. When the war started, I decided to stay to help train other women who were needed to take over the men's jobs. I felt scared. We could not have lights on at night, the windows had to be covered, and the alarm sirens sounded quite often. I saw how close

death was and understood then that the best way to live is to enjoy each day to the fullest.

In 1975, I moved to Colombia. Already married, my 3 children were born in Cartagena.

Life was not easy. The culture and the people were completely different from what I knew but I washed my brain and told myself that the best way to adapt was to be involved in all kind of activities. I participated in charities, I worked in an art gallery, and I felt happy. I lived in Colombia for 25 years. Always I showed and encouraged my children to be strong and to fight for whatever they wanted to accomplish in life.

In 2001, I moved to Canada. Once again, it was not easy but being strong helped me to adapt more easily. I found a good job, painted and did mosaics in my free time, and met new people. Now that I am retired, I have more time to do whatever I like.

I often talk about my life with my grandchildren and tell them what I did and what I do: by always treating people with respect, helping others, and loving your family, your life will be more meaningful.



Adriana on a trip to Quebec



A young Adriana with her dog Carozzo



Sara in Toronto



Sara on the beach in Argentina

ONE OF MY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

BY RUMANA K.

Growing up in Eritrea as a female was very hard. Observing strict tradition was especially true for girls who lived in small cities but it was a reality for girls who lived in big cities in Eritrea too.

In school, girls had to wear dress uniforms. The uniform had to be worn way below the knees. Most of us followed the official dress code but we always tried to be creative by adding a modern and fashionable touch.

I grew up with my aunt. She raised me to act like a lady in the way I spoke and walked. As a child, it was very hard not to be spontaneous and most of all not to be able to act like a child.

In school, our curriculum was clear. We were allowed to participate in sports activities if we dressed in sports clothes. At the beginning of the year, I signed myself up for volleyball. I

prayed to god that my aunt would never find out. I was afraid that if she found out I would be severely punished. She thought that sports were not for girls because they were not supposed to jump like boys. I took the risk anyway.

The only problem was that I needed the proper attire for the game: a pair of pants. But nothing could stop me. With or without proper pants, I was going to play.

I presented myself early in the morning for the practice, with my bag, a needle, thread and an old skirt. On my arrival, the coach asked me if I was going to wear pants. I said "no". He said "then you cannot participate in the game." I looked at him and said "I will." He said "then get ready". At this point I took my old skirt out of the bag and cut my skirt into four longitudinal parts and quickly started sewing the two ends


in the hope that I could move my legs freely.

The coach was impressed with my determination and I guess he had a bit of sympathy too. He gave me permission to join. I was so happy that I jumped up and headed to the washroom to change. I was ready for the game with my skirt-pants.

The game started at 8:30am. I was ready for the ball. My team was given the first chance to throw the ball and the other team responded. We were all tense, specially me. I said to myself: "I need to make a good impression and this is my chance." But after ten minutes, a girl from the other team threw the ball out of the compound. The coach asked me to get it. As I ran to get it, I tripped over my skirt-pants and fell like a sack of potatoes. Everyone burst out laughing.

I burst into tears. I did not want to stand up despite my coach's order to come with the ball. I hugged the ball and would not let it go. I thought I had lost my chance and that would not be able to play again.

A girl from my team came over to me and extended her hand for me to stand up. I refused because I knew that I had ripped my pants. Then almost all the girls from my team came to my rescue to show their support. That made me feel better.

Slowly, I saw the other team approaching. I felt upset but I believed that some of my team understood though some did not. When my coach extended his hand to me, that one gesture boosted my self esteem. 



Toronto Education Workers/Local 4400 supports Adult Education programs offered by the Toronto District School Board (including but not limited to):

- **Essential Skills Upgrading**
- **ESL/LINC Programs**
- **General Interest Programs for Adults**

along with many more, for more information visit:
<https://tdsb.on.ca/Adult-Learners>

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June is Seniors' Month

Baby boomers:
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school, university, college, library, community
centre and tell them what programs you would like
to see offered.

LEARNINGCURVES

Summer is Not a Down Time for Learning

The spring term for colleges and university open access
(continuing education and part time evening) have
start dates that run into June, July and August.

The schools (adult day schools) run on four
quads (fall, winter, spring, summer)
English language programs have continuous intake.

Community based programs for the most part
have continuous intake year round.

Career Colleges have continuous intake year-round.

Phone and ask what's on, don't miss out.

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HOW THE MACRO LEVEL OF DECISION MAKING AFFECTS THE MICRO LEVEL OF COURSES FOR ADULTS

BY WENDY TERRY

Canada – A Learning nation Dec., 2020 Report

Often as adult learners we are focused on finding a course at a time we can make it, that meets a specific learning need, the micro level. But there are activities going on at a macro level which shape what we are offered at the micro level. Canada-A Learning Nation report describes the work of the Future Skills Advisory Council, an advisory council to the federal Ministry of Employment Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. This report came out in December 2020 but I just found it scanning the net for what I can't remember now.

In past, I have written about the lack of Canada-wide and province-wide information associations for adult education so that no matter what level you work at: program management or front-line teaching or what sector university, college, school, community program, career college you would have some sense of what was going on in the field of adult ed. There used to be an Ontario Association for Continuing Education, and a Canadian Association for Adult Education but not anymore, not since the 1990's. There were also associations in each province but not anymore. So we find out what is going on by happenstance.

So what did the Council advise the Ministry to do? They developed five priorities.

One, Helping Canadians make informed choices: Two, Equality of opportunity for lifelong learning: Three, Skills development to support indigenous self determination; Four, New and innovative approaches to skills development and validation: Five, Skills development for sustainable futures. www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/future-skills/report-learning-nation.html In the Introduction they note "We live in a complex global environment characterized by rapid technological innovation, climate change, and unforeseen events"

So how specifically could each of their priorities shape what course adults access at the micro level.

One, Helping Canadians make informed choices

Priority One notes that Canadians need labour market information to make training decisions. They note "It is essential to create tools that organize LMI (Labour market information) in user-oriented ways, so people can find precisely what they want as simply as possibly-without information overload." Good luck with that one, the problem with being referred to a website is so often it takes so long to read through it to find specifically what you want to know. You want to talk to a real person. The last sentence in this section (Recommendations 1.1) comments that "Success will not only involve new tools and technology, we can also draw on the wealth of expertise held by Canada's career counseling professions." And we would add employment counselors experience.

Also in Section 1.1 of the Recommendations section for Priority One, they note, "We need to leverage data science, artificial intelligence and other new technologies to aggregate and analyze large data sets. ... Looking forward, LMI (Labour market information) tools would make it easy for people to enter information on their skills, experience, interests, goals and personal characteristics. These tools would then generate personalized, credible pathways for learning skills development and employment opportunities." Sigh this seems way too utopian, magical even.

Take ONCAT, the Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer founded in 2011 whose task is to "enhance academic pathways, reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among Ontario's public colleges and universities and Indigenous Institutions" On the ONTransfer.ca website, there are 268,110 course equivalences and 1997 transfer pathways. Sounds like information overload but you can talk to a Transfer Advisor. Thank heavens.

However, we have been watching this site since its founding to see if they are listing equivalences for Continuing Education courses, ones not noted as an equivalent to a day school course. So far, they have not taken this on. I have just checked in again.

If you read the ONCAT site, you can see the constant work such a data base requires to develop and maintain as well getting educational institutes to supply data, which is an issue. So to add your personal information, even if you were self aware enough of your characteristics, goals, interests, etc. to such an educational database that is also linked to employment opportunities to give you a personalized pathway as suggested above in Recommendation 1.1 sounds like a Herculean task.

The Workers' Educational Association, publisher of Learning Curves, has always pushed for access to career counselors and or employment counselors as they can help you know yourself better, they know their local labour market and educational providers to help you develop a personalized pathway. In 1994 I was a member of the Premier's Task Force on Lifelong Learning which lead to the formation of the Ontario Career Counselors Association. Why not fund these service providers where they work to spend more time helping their clients instead of investing in more data bases?

In Section 1.2 of the Recommendations section for Priority One, they note "LMI (Labour market information) needs to shift from a focus on occupations, tasks, and credentials to a more comprehensive focus that includes the skills required to be successful as jobs continue to change."

In Section 1.3 of the Recommendations section for Priority One, they note, "Collaborative discussions among colleges, polytechnics, universities, other training providers and employers are advantageous for the development of learning and training that meet the changing labour markets needs." Again good luck with this one, as a Past President of the Ontario Association for Continuing Education and a past Board member of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, I found adult education sectors are not into talking with one another. For instance community colleges do not talk to or accept course credits from career colleges. Community programs do not have an association where they talk to one another as they are competing with one another for students from the adult population. Universities and College do talk more to one another as they have developed bridges from college diploma programs into university degree programs. School boards rarely talk to colleges or even community programs as they are all offering upgrading programs and therefore competing for student enrollments. Each provider is looking for enrolment in their specific program, as that is how they are funded. If they collaborate, will they then lose enrollments to their fellow programs.

Two, Equality of opportunity for lifelong learning:

For Priority Two to promote equality of opportunity for Lifelong Learning, structural and systematic barriers need to be removed. In this part of the report they point out "The evidence is clear that many groups are under-represented in growth occupations...". In the Recommendations 2.1 section of the report, they recommend "that employment and skills development programs, services and supports be explicitly designed to be inclusive and address the distinct barriers and circumstances of under-represented groups These programs, services and supports should also link them more clearly with skills and work most likely to be in demand." In the action areas summary to they note "Apply user-centered design."

Community based programs are most often focused on user-centered design. For example, The YWCA Toronto runs a program to train women for the skilled trades. The skilled trades are well paid and as older workers are retiring so

there are promising job prospects here. To find a comprehensive listing for community programs go to 211 Toronto Select Employment and Training and you will be lead to a sub menu that includes Academic Upgrading; Apprenticeship; Career Counseling (Pathways); Employers Staffing Assistance; Internationally Trained Professionals; Job Search support/training; Newcomer Employment Programs; Older Workers; Self Employment/ Entrepreneurship; Work Experience and so on.

In Recommendation 2.2 they suggest to include access to "wrap around supports". These are the supports such as daycare and transportation assistance that help individuals overcome some of the practical challenges when they want to develop skills and get jobs. Again community based programs are more likely to include these supports. So as before check out the 211 listings listed above.

In Recommendation 2, they note that "Many Canadians want to learn in th the workplace rather than pursuing classroom learning outside of work hours." Most colleges have a Corporate Training department. Search Corporate Training in the website for a college, have a look, then talk to your employer about how the college could help them offer on the job training.

In Recommendation 2.3 they suggest "... governments should examine a broader range of fiscal tools that could be used to support individuals like the Canada Training Benefit." Learning Curves wrote up this Canada Training Benefit development in the Spring 2020 issue page 3. www.learningcurves.org

Learning Curves always recommends our readers to go to the Financial Services of their school, explain their situation and ask if there is financial help. There often is even for Continuing Education students, ask.

Three, Skills development to support indigenous self determination;

At the beginning of Priority Two, the report states "Canada is not a land of "one size fits all" solutions." That diversity includes the learning needs of indigenous persons. I would recommend our readers go the report and read this section.

In Recommendation Section 2.1 the first Action area notes "Embrace the philosophy of "nothing about us without us." Ensure Indigenous Peoples , governments and organizations are at the centre of designing, developing and implementing culturally appropriate support to strengthen success in post-secondary programs and certifications."

In Recommendation 3.3 they note "almost 40% of Indigenous Peoples live in rural and remote communities. Under Priority #2 the Council underlined that improved broadband access is essential to future skills and employment opportunities for everyone in rural and remote communities. This is equally true for the Indigenous..."

Four, New and innovative approaches to skills development and validation:

Well in Recommendation 4.1 I learned some new adult education terms, for one: nimble training models. The report notes that: " The old approaches to training do not always meet the needs of rapidly evolving workplaces, which is driving the demand for more customized, just-in-time training solutions that are more responsive to these changes" Nimble training is the new concept.

Other terms that come up with this idea are micro-credentials, upskilling, reskilling, modular programs, flexible entry dates, continuous intake and... In my latest analysis of courses it seems to me I saw glimmers of micro-credentials and flexible entry dates. For the Fall issues of Learning Curves I will have a more systematic look

Five, Skills development for sustainable futures

In Priority 5 they note that "Canada's smallest employers face some of the economy' biggest challenges... However, those employers often lack the resources needed..."

Often when we think of adult education we think of getting a course or credential that moves us up in a large organization. However small and medium-sized enterprises are key in every Canadian community. They gave a good statistical picture of this. "Of Canada's 1.18 million businesses, 98% employ fewer than 100 people and almost three-quarters, have fewer than nine people." They go on to note: It's also important to recognize the contribution of the non-profit sector to Canada's economy. In 2017, almost 2,400,000 Canadians were employed in the public and non-profit sectors..." In the Action for 5.1 area they note we should "Simplify training solutions for SME (Small and Medium –sized Enterprises). We add, it would be good to develop outreach initiatives to SME's, to show them how "nimble training models" could help them meet their organization's learning needs. Then develop it for them. Learning Curves would like some nimble training to learn how to market our community paper through social media.

In Recommendation 5.2 the Council advises we "develop and expand access to training for digital skills and emerging technologies in particular artificial intelligence. Thank heavens they gave a definition of Artificial Intelligence and it's significance. "Artificial Intelligence, a class of technologies that are able to learn on their own, will be especially transformative over the coming decade" And I just got caught up with Zooming and ordering on line now I have to do AI.

They go on to note "The recent pandemic showed that digital skills are essential to ensure organizations across all sectors can continue to operate applying new business models..." SME's had to switch to taking on line orders and curb side pick up.

They go on to note that "Cybersecurity... is an important issue that often requires digital sills development beyond the capacity of small employers. Learning Curves, a social enterprise, that funds the WEA it's publisher was recently hacked. Our President who now works from home, told me the rate of hacking of computers for those working from home has skyrocketed. I need to now learn basic cybersecurity. I need to look for this in this fall's continuing education offerings.

In Recommendation 5.3 they advise us to "Develop skills strategies to support Canada's successful transition to a low carbon emissions economy. I can see this adult education change taking place at my car dealership, an SME, their mechanics are being given time off the job to go to training sessions on how to service electrical vehicles.

In conclusion, the Council challenges people to identify how they can take action on these issue, to help drive "how best to convert good ideas into effective action; how best to turn today's good examples of into tomorrow's common practice; and how, to spark creative thinking to tackle the challenges that we have yet to solve..."

This federal advisory Council's recommendations at the macro level will affect what courses adults will be offered at the micro level.

Check out these federal macro-level groups for more big picture developments and think how they might affect you at the micro-level:

- Future Skills Council
- Advisory Council on Economic Growth
- Labour Market Information Council
- Future Skills Centre
- Essential Skills Framework
- Forum of Labour Market Ministers

WALTER'S LONG ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

A SHORT STORY BY MINA WONG

Walter Davis definitely took many years to accept the importance of self-sufficiency. In February 2021, he finally stayed with a full-time, graveyard-shift job in data processing. Although he found the work monotonous, he managed to pass his probation earlier this month.

Walter told me just yesterday: "It feels respectable to be independent, to pay my own bills."

Now, that's a dramatically different Walter from the irritable and lethargic twenty-something I once knew. When we first met long ago, he was quarrelling with his wife, Diana while she lulled their infant to sleep.

That day, I had just helped my friend, Andy move into an apartment. After settling in, we ran into Walter and Diana next door. Although not in a good mood, they still introduced themselves and their month-old daughter, Riley.

Andy became good friends with Walter and Diana, but the couple argued non-stop over money problems. Since Walter still had no income three years after his army discharge, Diana reluctantly cut short her parental leave to work again.

The whole time Andy lived next door, Walter stayed home with Riley, but that meant Diana alone supported the family with her school secretary's salary. Whenever she urged Walter to find work, he would make feeble excuses, including "I shouldn't work weekends". He would even suggest, "I'll stay home if you go to work."

When Andy moved elsewhere, Walter was attending government-funded computer classes after which, he started a data processing job at a bank. But it only lasted a week with Walter's daily complaint, "Too boring, too long hours."

Exasperated by Walter's immature work ethic, Diana soon moved out with Riley. The end of their marriage also coincided with Walter's eviction for not paying rent. When Andy looked for him, Diana directed him to city shelters for homeless men.

After their divorce, Walter continued to rely on shelters. Unemployed, he seemed preoccupied much of the time, even when Diana let him see Riley. One day, nine-year-old Riley said, "Dad, you should get a job, any job. I would be so proud of you."

Walter was in tears over Riley's plea, but he still didn't seriously look for work. Then he met Sophie, a nurse who let him stay with her for a while if he could look after her house. But they were soon so romantically entwined that Walter thought Sophie might permanently provide for him.

After a year, Sophie had grown tired of Walter cherry-picking chores. She

herself cooked and cleaned after work while Walter blissfully potted around. When Sophie finally threw him out, Walter returned to city shelters where he met Samuel, a social worker who took him in, along with another man needing housing.

Samuel's intentions were to improve marginalized people's self-care, social responsibilities, and independence through respect and dignity. In his house, everyone shared chores, but soon, Walter only chose those he liked, leaving everything else to his housemates.

Samuel was a patient mentor, but after tolerating Walter's childlike languor for two years, he asked him to leave. Still, remembering Walter's family, he thought Diana and Riley might be able to help.

Without even blinking, thirteen-year-old Riley summed it up: if Walter didn't shape up this time, she could no longer see him, and, "He can work like other dads. He's just wasting his skills, always waiting for someone to look after him."

Telling Walter what Riley had said, Samuel advised him that he might find him proper housing if he could manage to keep a job. But he added, "Otherwise, you will lose Riley's respect, and even all contact with her."

That Riley, the most important person in his life could disappear, suddenly pushed Walter to a perilous tipping point. The next day, he told Samuel he would give data processing another try, perhaps with a refresher course.

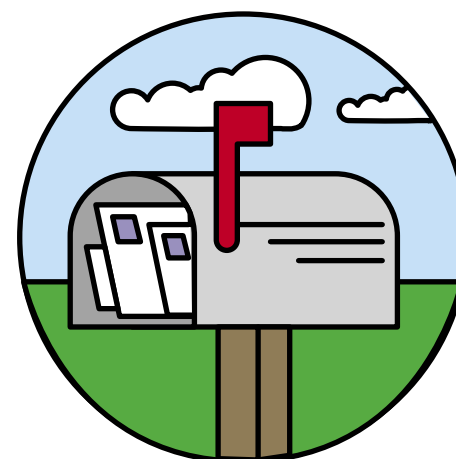
A job in banking came sooner than he had imagined. Three months ago, he passed a data processing skills test with high marks. Working the midnight shift from Tuesday to Saturday, he would record bank transactions and convert them into a database.

Like many years ago, his job was unvaried with long hours, but this time, Walter was learning to find new meaning in work. With regular wages, he will move into his own apartment next month. His conversations with Riley are also more mature now that they can invest in each other's life and future.

Walter was teary-eyed when Riley said last week: "Dad, I am so proud of you. From now on, we will help each other through ups and downs."

With Walter's new commitment to self-reliance, he may even surpass his own career expectations. With Riley in his corner, he can certainly work toward a future blessed with happiness and success.

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.



Dear Elcee

Dear Elcee is a feature in every issue of Learning Curves.
Send your questions about education, training, careers, jobs to:

Elcee – The WEA of Canada
157 Carlton Street, Suite 205
Toronto, On M5A 2K2

Dear Elcee:

My son recently told me he was considering a career in the Armed Forces. Needless to say I was quite surprised as he has never mentioned that to me before and I don't know anyone who is in the military. He is 19 and in his first year of college. This past year, with the pandemic, has affected his studies and the direction he is heading. Can you give me any information on this?

Seeking Info in Scarborough

Dear Seeking Info!

I have to say that this is my first query regarding entering the Armed Forces. The first thing I want to say is that the Canadian Armed Forces is an honorable career choice but does require a very special person to take on that role.

First, to join as a NON-COMMISSIONED MEMBER (NCM) you must be between 16 and 57 years old, a Canadian citizen and have completed grade 10. To join as an OFFICER, you must be all of the above and working towards or completed a Bachelors Degree.

There are a number of ways to join. There are civilian positions, reservist and part-time options. I highly recommend going online to www.forces.ca to explore the options or, if possible, visiting a Help Centre. Their website will even allow you to chat online.

One of the great advantages of joining the Armed Forces is the training that is offered. It is important for your son to have some idea of the career path that he would wish to enter and to research if that is a transferable career upon his retirement.

This is not an option to choose lightly. Being in the Armed Forces is not only a job but a lifestyle and not for everyone. Few career options will require both a physical and mental contribution. Research is imperative. Joining

the Armed Forces involves a huge commitment. Recruits start out in basic training which can be difficult. There is a lot of travel and moving involved. While that may be attractive to some, it can be a challenge to others. I highly recommend your son check out the indeed.com website which will have some first hand accounts of life in the military. Current and former members of the military talk about the pros and cons. It is best to keep an open mind. Just like google and yelp reviews some may be less objective than others.

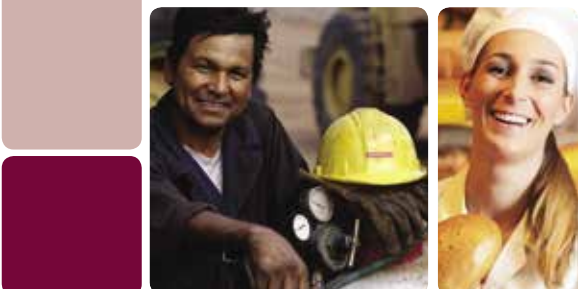
We are all going through a difficult time during this pandemic. What is a little over a year feels like a lifetime. Many people are going through a period of reassessment about their life goals. I encourage everyone to not make quick decisions at the best of time, but now more than ever, to do research and think long and hard before making changes. Do research, talk to people and then do more research! Im hoping everyone is staying safe, getting vaccinated and looking forward to brighter days ahead!

*Dear ELCEE is written by Deborah Noel,
deborahjnoel@gmail.com
Send her your questions.*

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.

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