

LEARNINGCURVES

CONTINUING EDUCATION | JOB TRAINING | LIFELONG LEARNING

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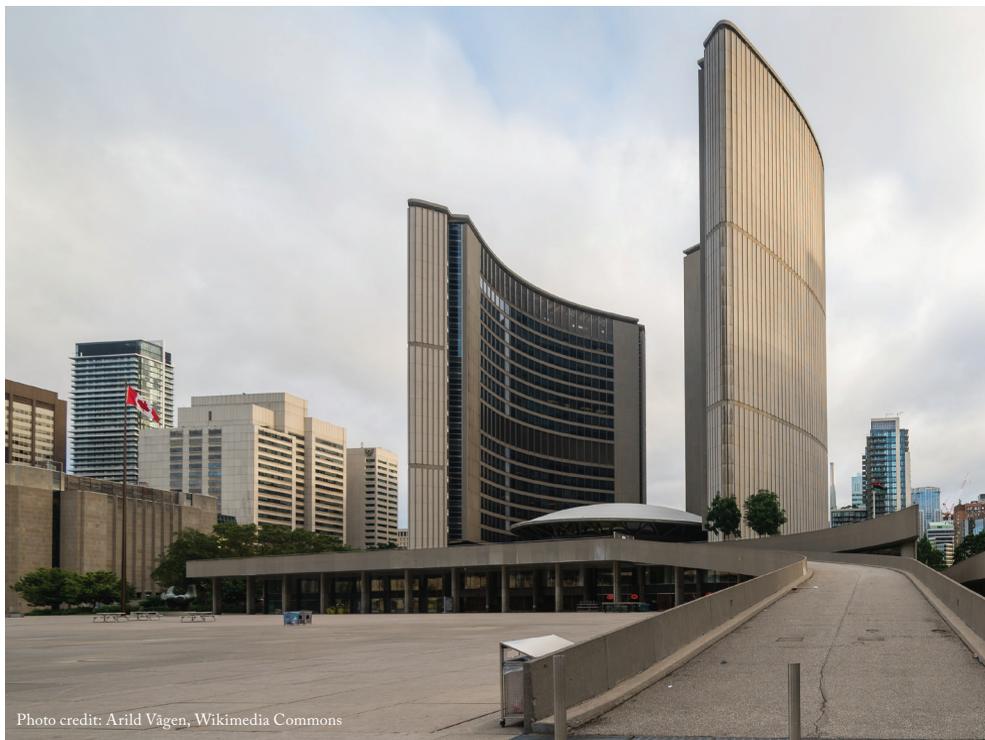


Photo credit: Arild Vågen, Wikimedia Commons

JUNE 26TH YOU VOTED FOR THE MAYOR OF TORONTO

Usually, municipal elections are the most complex as you vote directly for the Mayor of your city, a Counselor for your Ward, and a School Trustee (Public, Catholic, or French Public or French Catholic) often by ward. This time you only voted for the Mayor of Toronto, a by-election. The Mayor elected on October 24th, 2022 resigned. Mind there are 102 candidates for this one position!

Olivia Chow is the new Mayor of Toronto.

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DOES AI WANT YOUR JOB?

BY LISA TRUDEL

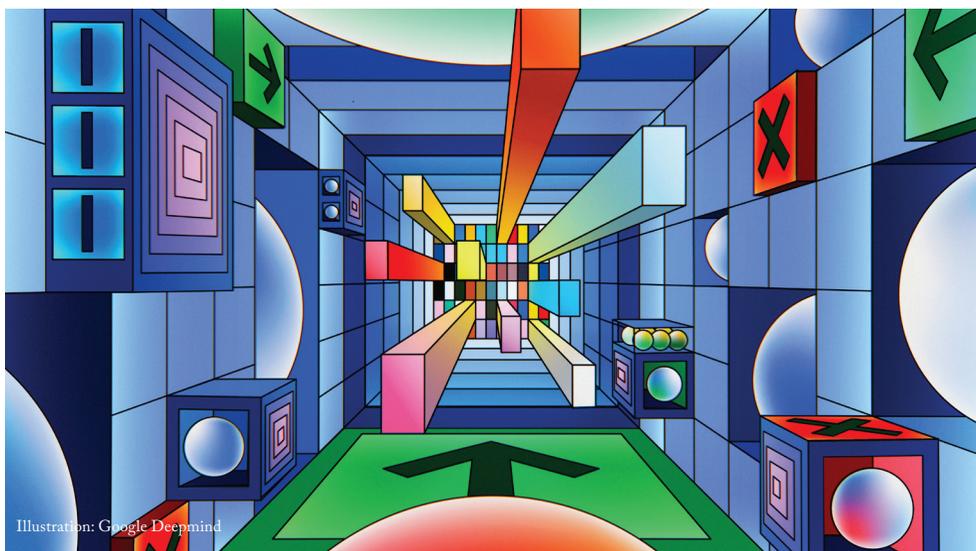


Illustration: Google Deepmind

Have you noticed there are more blogs and podcasts than ever before discussing how AI (artificial intelligence) will soon affect almost every profession? This is because it is true. However, will AI really fully replace people? Maybe not yet.

There is undeniable evidence that robots are appearing in our everyday lives. My sister was recently greeted in a restaurant by a waist-high machine that then served her dinner.

Last month at my doctor's office the medical receptionist was a self-serve patient check-in kiosk similar to the ones at the airport.

According to career trend experts, there are several jobs that will be impacted by AI in the next 10 years including writers, finance professionals, and customer service:

Writers: ChatGPT and other AI chatbots have arrived, which means robots now have

the language to generate ideas, create stories, and write texts in seconds. Hopefully, a person will still be needed to review what AI generates and will edit and revise what is written into a compelling story.

Finance Professionals: Many routine financial tasks including managing bookkeeping duties, preparing tax returns, and analyzing market trends can be handled by a robot. However, it is possible that Accountants will still be needed to organize and strategize.

Customer Service: Self-check-out kiosks, online banking, online shopping, and automated Chat Agents have already replaced thousands of frontline jobs even though statistics state that most customers still prefer to interact with a person.

You might be asking: "How do I fit into this new world of work?" There are two answers to this question. The first answer is to adapt and embrace AI. Everyone will be affected by AI so you need to ensure your source of income is not replaced by a bot. Instead, figure out which

technology tools are relevant to your occupation and then learn how to use them. Always keep moving forward by learning new skills.

The second answer is to turn in the opposite direction and to talk with people. Human interaction is still incredibly valuable. The following is a list of 4 people you can turn to:

1) Mentor: This is a person who advises and talks with you, and who works in the same occupation you are aiming for. A mentor can facilitate a discussion of options so you can make well-informed career and educational decisions, and can help to build your self-esteem. For example, if you are rejected after a job interview, your mentor can help you gain back motivation and revive your self-worth. Rejection can be hurtful and mentors can ease emotional pain by affirming your values and best qualities.

2) Sponsor: This is a person who advocates for you at the company where you work. A sponsor is very different from a mentor. The

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DOES AI WANT YOUR JOB?

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sponsor invests in you, while the mentor gives to you. A sponsor is usually someone influential at a senior level within your company where you might have an entry-level job or mid-level position. Your sponsor, who should be a powerfully positioned company champion, makes themselves look good by persuading the decision-making team that you are a valuable asset and should be considered for promotions. Your sponsor is part of your at-work alliance team and can open doors for you by connecting you with the key players who decide who should advance in your company and who should not.

3) Role-Model: This is a person who has traits you admire and inspires you to be your best self. There are some role models you may never meet and some you talk to on a daily basis. Role models can be someone who has achieved great things or someone who lives a life you aspire to. Real-life role model examples include Oprah Winfrey, Malala Yousafzai, and Viola Desmond (who is celebrated on the Canadian \$10.00 bill). Common role models in daily life might include parents, aunts, teachers, and a great boss.

4) Coach: This is a professional you pay to assist you with your career. They listen, they talk to you and they navigate ideas for your career including providing occupational choices,

educational decisions, writing resumes and cover letters, and can assist you with your LinkedIn Profile. Career Coaches offer instruction and can help you focus on goals so that eventually you attain your objective. Most coaches will provide you with a structured plan and encourage you by monitoring your progress on a regular basis for a specific length of time. You can research local Coaches and their pros and cons by visiting: <https://www.findmyprofession.com/career-advice/coaching-services-toronto/>

There is also a 5th person you can turn to and this is a Career Specialist you can access at no cost if you use the services of Employment Ontario. Employment Ontario helps job seekers who are unemployed, not in school, and who fit the eligibility requirements outlined by the Provincial Government. If you want to find employment or need career planning assistance, check: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/employment-ontario> and discover if you meet the criteria to use these free services.

This article was written by Lisa Trudel, Career Specialist with Achève at 100 Lombard Street in downtown Toronto. Achève is funded by Employment Ontario. You can contact Lisa at ltrudel@achev.ca

YOU VOTED: TORONTO'S NEW MAYOR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In the Fall issue of Learning Curves, the front-page top-of-the-fold story was titled October 24th, Municipal Election Day. I tried to help our readers and myself understand the whole municipal election situation for Toronto and the GTA. You may want to look at this story by going to <https://learningcurves.org/vote-election-day-october-24th/>.

In that article, I focused on adult students bringing it to the attention of their councilor candidates and school trustee candidates that they oversee funding for adult education and you as an adult student had specific needs. Now in this by-election, we specifically focused only on the Mayor and the position that oversees all. The Mayor needs to understand the adult education funding aspects of their job. The Mayor needs to understand the adult education funding aspects of their job. Just after being elected, Mayors are more open to ideas. Let Olivia Chow know what she could do for you and other adult Learners.

How do cities can help you as an adult learner?

For one they fund public libraries and decide on their hours of operation. They run a What's On program which has lots of current topic presentations. They also fund Recreation Centers and offer General Interest courses and decide on hours of operation. They also fund specific learning programs at community associations. Go to 211.ca to search for programs listed under Employment and Training:

- Academic Upgrading,
- Apprenticeship,
- Career Counselling,
- Internationally Trained Professionals,
- Job Search Support/Training,
- Newcomer Employment Programs,
- Youth Employment.

Go to the City of Toronto website and click on Mayor and City Council. Email them you would like to see for you as an adult student. They are still listening as they develop plans for the city. 

Adult Continuing Education Programs for the



DURHAM CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Check out the following learning
opportunities – Serving Durham Region

www.con-ed.ca

High School Credit (OSHAWA CAMPUS; AJAX CAMPUS)
Personal Support Worker, Childcare Assistant,
Custodial Services, ESL, Linc, Computers for ESL
Correspondence (at home learning)
Adult Upgrading - Literacy and Basic Skills (MLITSD Funded)
Night school, Summer school, E-Learning, Computer Courses
Microsoft Office Specialist Training

Oshawa Campus 905 438-0570 & 905-626-6631
Re-engagement Program Oshawa 905-438 0570
Ajax Campus 905-683-7713 & 905-626-6631
Reconnect Program - Ajax Campus 905-666-1146
Whitby Giffard Centre Campus ESL & Linc 905-666-1255
Welcome Centre ESL & Linc 289-481-1336
Adult Upgrading LBS Program 905-438-0570 Ext. 57156
International Languages 906-683-7713
Prior Learning Assessment (PLAR) 905 430-0570 & 905 683 7713

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THE WORKERS'
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THE IMPORTANCE OF PURPOSE: MOTIVATION AND SUCCESS IN ADULT EDUCATION

BY GALINA GRIGORYAN

Hello, everyone! My name is Galina. I am 41 years old. I have been living in Canada for 3 years, and many things have changed in my life in terms of both my place of residence and my activities. Today I want to share my story in the hope it will help someone in finding balance, navigating education, family, and personal time in adult learning.

By education, I am a teacher, but I have always worked as a sales manager. I have always enjoyed this profession and it brought me a decent income. However, moving to Canada had implications for my lifestyle. In order to work in the same profession, I did not have a sufficient level of English. I also had a young child whom I had to take to and pick up from daycare. The global pandemic also had a big impact on our family because I couldn't take my 5-month-old child to daycare, which meant I couldn't go to work either.

All of this made me think about retraining in a field where I could be independent of the traditional office schedule from 8 to 5 and have control over my own time. I started by

learning English and simultaneously taking an online course in the IT field. Now, my level of English allows me to study English-language courses in QA testing, after which I plan to find my first job in the new profession.

Pursuing education and overcoming challenges

It was very challenging to start studying and to change my mindset. I grew up in a society where we were taught to acquire one profession and work at one job for our entire lives. But I clearly understand that we now live in a rapidly changing world where we need to stay informed and adapt to always-shifting realities. Learning and the ability to adapt to circumstances should become a priority for modern individuals of any age.

Looking back, I see a huge difference between my 20-year-old self and my present self. They say wisdom comes with age. And indeed, I feel much wiser than I did 20 years ago. Now, I consciously choose my occupation, and try to understand and plan where my education will lead me. I look with a cool head

at my chances of finding a job that matches my preferences and allows me to enjoy life.

Deciding on the choice of courses for studying was difficult given the vast array of options offered in Canada. There were several questions that needed to be answered before starting my education:

- Should I go to college or take short-term courses?
- How much will the education cost, and can I afford it?
- What amount of time I will need to dedicate to my studies, and how will it fit into my life?

I have to do a lot on my own because the time allocated for studies cannot cover the entire volume of the necessary information to be competitive. And time is not abundant. There are household chores that require my attention. I am a mother of an 8-year-old son, and I love spending time with him. I am a wife who needs free time to communicate with my husband. I am a friend who enjoys spending time with like-minded people. And I am also an individual who needs a certain amount of time for myself and my hobbies.

Therefore, finding myself as a student in adulthood made it necessary for me to carefully structure my day, and allocate time for studying, family, and leisure in order to find a balance in life.

During my student years, I didn't have these concerns. I didn't think about whether I would work in my field of study. I didn't try to grasp the entire volume of knowledge given to me; I simply enjoyed my youth.

Cultivating Resilience: Overcoming Obstacles in Pursuit of Professional Growth

I had to teach myself how to effectively manage my time and knowledge to achieve desired results. At this point, I have encountered several difficulties associated with the need to learn in a completely new field at an adult age. The main challenge is the lack of time. Family and children come into the picture, demanding attention, and daily chores take up a significant amount of time.

I have also noticed certain psychological barriers within myself – my brain resists learning something new, complex, reading, watching, and solving tasks. It tries to escape, procrastinate, and seeks sleep. It's difficult to overcome these barriers and move forward. Simply forcing oneself doesn't work in the long run. You might be able to force yourself once, twice, or three times, but at some point, there will be an inevitable setback and an inability to continue.

It's important to understand why you need to do it and to find meaning in it. Understanding why you're investing your time – to find a fulfilling job. Why do you

need a job – to earn money, to achieve self-realization, to be of service to others, to do something you enjoy? Decide it and go for it.

If the goal is set correctly, there will be an interest in reaching that goal – skillfully structuring your day, finding a free moment in the busiest schedule, possibly sacrificing sleep, and giving up some leisure time, socializing, or time spent on social media.

While interacting with students from different countries, I have noticed that the experience of one's home country has a tremendous influence. We have all lived in countries with different attitudes towards education, behavioral norms, and the hierarchy between teachers and students. I grew up in a society where the teacher was considered the authority – one could hardly ever argue with them, and they were to be respected and obeyed. If a student didn't understand something, it was their problem, and they were expected to find a solution independently. Of course, this is a generalized view, and I had many wonderful teachers during my childhood who cared for their students with love. However, the overall atmosphere of high expectations and the necessity to meet them played a significant role in shaping my character.

In Canada, I see a more forgiving attitude toward students' mistakes and shortcomings. Here, a very humane and understanding approach is practiced, taking into account each individual's unique qualities. I believe that is wonderful. However, I believe the path to success lies in having a clear understanding of the purpose of education and meticulously carrying out all the assignments given by the teacher. After all, the teacher is a guide to new possibilities. So why would one invest time and effort if they don't attempt to extract the maximum from their education?

Investing in one's education brings the realization that the whole world is open to you. And at the age of 41, I clearly see that it is never too late to follow your dreams, and learning in adulthood has many advantages. I am more determined, efficient, and persistent than many young students who don't fully comprehend how the knowledge they acquire will be useful to them in the future.

Galina Grigoryan is a participant in the Bridging for Immigrant Women Reskilling into IT Coding Professions, C-Women.

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 Spring 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 Summer 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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- **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>**

**Adult Education transforms lives
and provides new opportunities!**

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

BY GINNY RANA

Sarah had been busy looking at schools in Canada for her two children. She and her husband, Bob had recently received their Permanent Residency and were very excited at better prospects that awaited them. Holistic education, superior career opportunities, and better quality of life were the primary considerations. Sarah was especially thrilled while looking at the Canadian schools and could not wait for the day when her kids would begin their learning journeys in one of them. Her husband, Bob trained and working as an IT Analyst in Shanghai was looking up job openings in Toronto. He was in close touch with an employment and settlement agency in Toronto. The agency was helping Bob with employment advice and sharing job postings. The labor market looked promising for IT professionals; he had already applied to a few openings and was eagerly awaiting a response.

Upbeat as life was for the kids and Bob, things did not look equally optimistic for Sarah. Inadequate professional experience and too outdated, Sarah was clearly at a loss for options. Occupied in tending to her family, Sarah had stopped working almost six years ago. True, she was eager to start working again, but how, where, and what were the primary concerns. Perplexed, she spoke to one of her school friends, a faculty member at a post-secondary learning institution in GTA. "Why don't you go back to school for a start?" suggested her friend.

"Back to school at 39?" said Sarah, "you can't be serious. I don't want people to make fun of me." With that, she put an abrupt end to all discussions on the subject.

The conversation ended but the thought stayed. The next day onwards, Sarah started looking up courses related to her educational background in Psychology. Soon, she found many interesting courses in Behavioural Psychology. The subject had always been Sarah's favorite and not before long, Sarah was back to school.

At school, Sarah discovered that she was not alone; there were many mature learners just like her. Some were even older! She loved the chance to learn all over again. Busy as she was managing home and college, she had so much to look forward to each day. She was pleasantly surprised at how easily she was able to adapt to hybrid learning without any prior experience.

Intimidating as it had first seemed, Sarah was not only able to keep up with the course commitments but could also devote time to her family. The two-year diploma helped her with fresh knowledge, and she was now up to date with everything in the industry. The final semester had a coop component, which provided hands-on experience in a school setting. Getting a chance to practice her newly acquired knowledge, Sarah felt confident that finally, she was ready to take on the challenges of being a working mom. Not only was she able to gain work experience, but also got the opportunity to know people and form connections. Barely four months after completing her program, Sarah was working as an educational resource facilitator at a community

living center near home. Heading back to school has been a life-changing experience not just for Sarah, but for many others.

Going back to school can upscale credentials and boost your resume in many ways

Depending on your career and education goals, you may choose to pursue a certificate, degree, or professional certification. Additionally, there are several part-time and full-time courses; associate, bachelor's, or master's degrees, diplomas, and undergraduate programs to choose from. You may find career-specific programs and enrolling yourself in one of these is the best way to stay ahead in the game. Some such programs include:

- culinary arts,
- computer science,
- business administration,
- accounting,
- medical assisting, and nursing.

An associate's or bachelor's degree can be a good idea if you don't have one or if you took college but didn't graduate. These degrees can help you qualify for higher-paying jobs. Moreover, there may be courses that were unavailable while you were in school but are now available. These can be a good fit with your existing qualifications. Earning an extra credential can help you move up in your career or shift to a new second career or even a better job role that you may have been contemplating. Not just the latest job knowledge, you also get an opportunity to learn to use the latest technology and enhance digital proficiency.

For a newcomer, starting a new life with a stint at school can have multiple benefits. You learn the latest industry knowledge, use of modern technology, Canadian work culture, workplace communication, and building professional networks. Many programs also offer immigration pathways and can help students find employment in in-demand professions.

Going back to school can be your life-transforming journey. However, it is important to embark on this journey after adequate research in terms of finding the right program and college. While looking at various programs, it is worthwhile to consider future career options that the program may present on completion. To ensure that your program delivers the desired outcome, it is essential to keep a few things in mind.

1. Manage Time

Going back to school and trying to fit it into your daily routine may not be easy. It might be difficult to manage classes and classwork, alongside work and family responsibilities. However, remember that there are several options to choose from. Depending on the time you have on hand, you can choose a part-time, online, or flexible learning program. Many programs also allow you to study right from the comfort of your home.

2. Managing Costs

If you are worried about how to pay tuition and fees, there is good news. Better Jobs Ontario, Canada Student Grant for Full-Time Students, scholarships, and financial assistance are some ways to manage the additional costs. You can also check if your employer offers a tuition assistance program. You can even explore the option to work while you study.

3. Fear of Not Fitting In

The fear of sticking out or not fitting in can be quite nerve-racking for some adult learners. However, learning institutions have a wealth of resources and support to cater to diverse learning needs. Academic advisors, counselors, and peer mentors are some supports most colleges offer. Abundant online support in terms of IT/tech support, assignment/study help, and peer tutoring is available for easy access, even outside and beyond regular college hours.

4. Make Time for Yourself

As adult learners try to balance personal, professional, and learning commitments simultaneously, it is easy to feel burnt out. Try to make time for yourself, take adequate rest, and practice self-care.

Whether it is to finish a degree, upgrade skills, advance a career, or enhance knowledge, going back to school can open a world of new opportunities waiting to be explored. As a newcomer to Canada, it is the best way to get acquainted with the Canadian work culture and master the tricks of the trade.

Looking back, Sarah says, "Heading back to school was the best decision of my life."

Returning to school has changed so many lives for the better, translating dreams into reality and transforming aspirations into achievements. Just remember, it's never too late to start!

This article was written by Ginny Rana, an international student pursuing Social Services Worker (Immigrants & Refugees) program at Seneca College. A published writer, Ginny completed her first-year placement at ACCES Employment, North York, and is currently working as a volunteer with Canadian Red Cross. You can contact Ginny at ginnyrana15@gmail.com



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ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL: MICROCREDENTIALS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

BY IRYNA PALTSEVA

The realities of the modern world dictate their own rules. Several decades ago, the life of an ordinary person was simple and straightforward: go to school, get an education, find a stable job, and work until retirement. This was the career path for millions of people on our planet.

However, today the world is changing so rapidly that many people struggle to adapt to the new rules and find themselves falling behind. New professions with high demands constantly emerge while many well-known and stable job types become outdated. The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in recent months has shaken not only the IT industry (which is accustomed to shocks and innovations). It hit almost every sector of business, ranging from the restaurant industry and customer service to the management of multimillion-dollar companies.

Evolving Careers: Navigating the Changing Landscape of Work and Education

Naturally, people experience tremendous stress – how can they avoid being left behind in life and remain relevant to employers?

There is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question. Nevertheless, one obvious solution is the constant pursuit of self-improvement. It is no longer enough to rely on knowledge acquired 20, 10, or even 5 years ago to function effectively. Technical knowledge is completely updated within 2 years and becomes outdated within 4 years.

But what can be done? An adult who needs to provide for their own sustenance, support a family, and often pay a mortgage for a home cannot afford to quit everything and go back to university. Moreover, college education itself costs a considerable amount of money, not to mention the several years of life that need to be devoted to obtaining a full-fledged education.

As practice shows, in many situations, obtaining a college degree is not necessary. Employers are quite satisfied with microcredential programs. These are special short courses on specific narrow topics that allow individuals to "brush up" their

knowledge in a particular field in just a few months and obtain the desired certificate.

We have already discussed in detail the fact that microcredentials are the next "big thing" in adult learning (<https://learningcurves.org/microcredentials-the-next-big-thing-in-adult-learning/>). But where exactly can you obtain the desired education?

Microcredential Revolution: Gaining a Competitive Edge in the Job Market

There are several institutions and organizations in Toronto, where you can receive microcredential certificates. Here are a few options:

University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies offers a wide range of professional development programs and microcredentials in various fields. They provide flexible learning options, including online and in-person classes.

Centennial College provides microcredential programs in areas like healthcare, business, technology, and more. They offer a combination of online and in-person learning options.

George Brown College offers microcredentials in fields like business, health sciences, community services, technology, and more. They have flexible learning options, including part-time and online courses.

Humber College provides microcredentials in areas such as business, healthcare, technology, and more. They offer both online and in-person learning options.

Toronto Metropolitan University Chang School of Continuing Education; offers microcredentials in areas such as business, technology, design, and more. They have a variety of certificate programs designed to enhance professional skills.

These institutions have a long-standing presence in Toronto and have built relationships with employers in the area. However, it's important to note that individual employers

may have different criteria and preferences when evaluating microcredentials. It can be helpful to research specific industries or companies you are interested in and see if there are any specific microcredential programs or institutions they tend to value. Additionally, gaining relevant work experience, networking, and showcasing your skills and achievements can also play a significant role in impressing employers.

Thriving in the Digital Age

In colleges, programs that require in-person attendance are usually offered. However, we live in a post-COVID world where many programs remain in an online format. If you are more interested in remote learning or if your family situation doesn't allow you to commute to a university (as is often the case for mothers with young children), globally recognized programs for asynchronous online learning can come to your aid.

Regarding online education, there are several reputable websites that offer high-quality courses. Here are some of the best websites for online education:

- Coursera (www.coursera.org): Coursera partners with top universities and educational institutions worldwide to offer a wide range of courses in various subjects. They provide both free and paid courses, and you can earn certificates upon completion.
- edX (www.edx.org): edX is a platform that offers courses from renowned universities and institutions. They provide a vast selection of courses across multiple disciplines, and many of them are free to audit. Certificates are available for a fee.
- Udemy (www.udemy.com): Udemy is a popular online learning platform that hosts a wide range of courses taught by instructors from around the world. They offer courses in various categories, including business, technology, personal development, and more. Prices vary, and you have lifetime access to the courses you purchase.

- LinkedIn Learning (www.linkedin.com/learning): Formerly known as Lynda.com, LinkedIn Learning offers a vast library of online courses across various subjects, including business, technology, creative skills, and more. It is a subscription-based platform that allows you to access all the courses with a single membership.
- Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org): Khan Academy focuses on providing free, high-quality education for anyone, anywhere. They offer courses mainly in mathematics, science, and computer programming, targeting students from K-12 to higher education.
- FutureLearn (www.futurelearn.com): FutureLearn offers a wide range of courses from leading universities and institutions worldwide. They provide both free and paid courses, and you can earn digital certificates upon completion.

These websites are highly regarded for their course offerings, instructional quality, and user-friendly interfaces. However, it's always a good idea to read reviews and explore the course descriptions and syllabi to find the most suitable courses for your needs.

There is no doubt that the rapidly changing world calls for continuous learning and adaptation to stay relevant in the desired field. Microcredentials and online education have emerged as effective tools for acquiring new skills and knowledge in a shorter time frame. By actively pursuing microcredentials individuals can equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to the demands of the modern world, staying competitive and achieving success in today's dynamic job market.

Iryna Paltseva is a Ukrainian Freelance Writer who relocated to Canada under the CUET (Canadian-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel) program. You can contact her at: irashel3@gmail.com.

IT'S THE SPRING THING

BY SAMANVITHA ORUGAN

"Pull the windows open, nice weather is here, with the sky oh so blue and a tinge of grey splattered around in an artistic smear, accompanied by the musical backdrop coos of the birds returning after almost a year, so spread the word to near and dear, and welcome the fun without frost fear."

Hearing this impromptu rhyme from my little niece repeatedly that she picked up from her English classes made me grin ear to ear. It compelled me to walk up to the window by the study pausing from a long day of work only to see her jump up and down

the trampoline in the backyard, waving frantically at me whenever she was up in the sky while the sun shined on along with her.

"You should come, join me, Aunty," she hollered; I just let it go by waving back a no; she repeated her gesture while I just stayed and looked on. It's been months since I got out of the house when the sun was still out, the sky was still clear, and the afternoon breeze playfully twirled my hair because I could not afford to leave work behind and not juggle between the meetings. As the deadly virus is still somehow around, the winter seemed longer, the nights seemed quieter,

and the mornings followed seemed gloomier.

After some time of zoning out, I felt a tug, a small pair of hands pulling me down to the backyard; halting her did not seem like an option; placing her hands on the waist, she said again, "Come join me, Aunty" letting my guard down, a laugh escaped from my mouth. I began jumping with her. "Keep your arms wide open, Aunty," she instructed, and I followed. Her happiness radiated onto me as I began reciting her rhyme, giggling she repeated the last line after me "So spread the word to near and dear and welcome the fun

without frost fear... It's a spring thing, Aunty."

From then on, this became our afternoon jam; after long cold winter days and nights, embracing spring was more than a delight.

Samanvitha Orugan is an avid storyteller who likes narrating stories about people, emotions, and places. She believes our world has innumerable tales, some hidden, some not, but all waiting to be told. She can be reached via emailsamanvitha.krishna@gmail.com

LEARNING ABOUT NEEDS, GOALS, SELF-DIRECTION, AND SUCCESS

A SHORT STORY BY MINA WONG

My name is Gabriel Henry. I was born in Thunder Bay and lived there until the end of Grade eleven.

My parents were teenagers who split up and left town when I was four months old. In the absence of immediate family, my mother's fourth cousin, Mary Henry raised me on her fixed pension. Mary did her best with me but being elderly, she could only do so much. Then she died of old age when I was eighteen. Poor and on my own, I left for Toronto in search of big-city opportunities.

A shiny beginning...

Toronto was fun for several years. I didn't mind a waiter's crazy shifts; I even bunked in dark, musty rooms. But without a proper education, I didn't know how to get ahead. At a downtown diner, I met Todd who said I was gorgeous "like a movie star". After tipping me generously, he invited me to dinner at the CN Tower with a big surprise: "Come and live with me."

Soon, I moved into a bright and airy penthouse where my life was turning around with Todd in charge. "You belong here with me. Just let me worry about everything."

At thirty-four, Todd was twelve years my senior. A successful stockbroker, he was bold and dapper, although sometimes nit-picking and a bit quick to criticize. He liked fresh-laundered clothes and a squeaky-clean apartment. He appreciated fine foods and artsy decor. He wanted to take care of me, and he made most decisions about our life together.

Todd was protective of me. He didn't want me to work. He also asked many questions about my acquaintances whom he hadn't met. Slowly, I decided it was simpler if I just associated with his friends without making a fuss. Some three years later, I was restless about going back to school and working again. I suggested that I could try a part-time job first.

Todd was amused. "But where would you do that?"

When I mentioned a neighborhood agency where my skills could be assessed, and where counselors could help me find work, he turned puzzled. "Oh, you want minimum wage? It's a jungle out there. Do you really want all the stress?"

In tears, I begged Todd to understand that I wanted an education and a career. I also said I was interested in drama, and a downtown college had just the program for me. Sobbing, I asked how he could be so mean: "You've just reduced my dreams to low wages, brawl, trouble ..."

Todd seemed to regret his hasty criticism,

and seeing my distress, he softened a bit. "Okay, if you're serious about this stuff, we'll talk about it later." But every time I mentioned college courses, Todd would say something like, "You know, we can spend that money all on you at the Stratford Festival." In the end, I never set foot in any school. I also realized if I wanted an education, I'd need to pay for it.

Fifteen years later...

After fifteen years with Todd, I'm middle-aged, married, and living in a beautiful Art Deco penthouse. We enjoy well-invested assets, excellent fitness facilities, and exotic holidays. But I have neither a career nor concrete plans to go back to school. I have also molded my whole world around a single identity: Todd McIver's spouse.

A fitness magazine shows me how people self-direct to achieve goals based on how well they can meet their needs. These needs start from basic ones such as food, water, and shelter, to higher ones such as identity and sense of belonging, to even higher ones such as self-esteem and significant relationships, to ultimately their highest desires and success – as lower needs are met.

I haven't looked at my needs very much outside of marriage. My life revolved around it, and we've vowed to take care of each other for life – even if things are not exactly suited to me. Todd's happiness and our marital stability have always come first. At this juncture, how should I tell Todd about my needs and goals? How can I help him see that I've matured since I was a twenty-two-year-old waiter? Furthermore, can Todd understand that having my own success may make me a more interesting partner to him?

My dilemma needs guidance from people who can help me. I remember how my teachers always supported Aunt Mary and me back in Thunder Bay. I wish a teacher or counselor could give me some advice now.

But I'll try talking with Todd first. We have a lot to sort out as mature adults, such as learning about needs and how to meet them – for ourselves and each other. I'm hoping Todd and I can work things out and still take care of each other like we've solemnly promised. I'll try discussing these matters calmly and respectfully as evidence of my maturity. These would be the first steps in self-direction and maybe the kind of success I want.

Gabriel Henry's story was told to Mina Wong



Dear Elcee

Dear Elcee is a feature written by Deborah Noel of Learning Curves. Send your questions about education, training, careers, and jobs to deborahjnoel@gmail.com.

Dear Elcee:

I am a 43-year-old woman working as an Administrative Assistant in a large corporation. For a long time now, I have been contemplating a career change into the non-profit field. I would like to work in a helping position that would allow me to utilize skills that might be of benefit to people in need. The hard part is that, while I could take some part-time courses, I cannot afford to go back to school full-time. In short, I am at a time in my life where I would like to have more meaningful employment. Do you have any advice for me?

-Unfulfilled in Uxbridge

Dear Unfulfilled,

I am so glad you wrote to us for advice. It is not uncommon for people at some point in their careers to desire a position that provides more personal fulfillment. I have some points for you to consider;

What non-profit sector? There are many to choose from. Do research first. Consider that along with non-profit agencies, many large corporations have foundations set up to assist with a particular cause. I highly recommend charityvillage.com for information on everything from sector profiles to careers and volunteering.

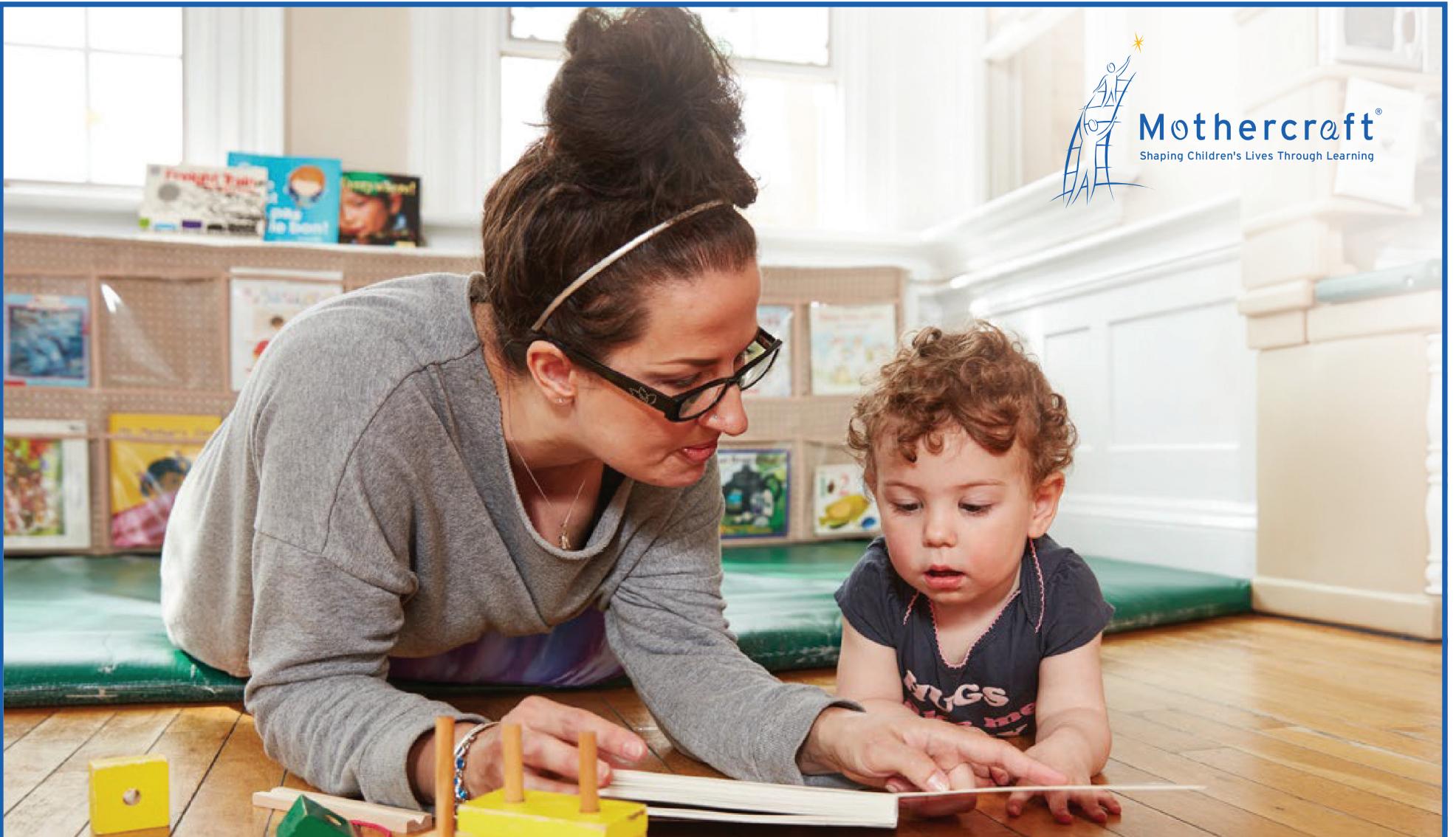
Say, for example, you have decided you would like to work with a settlement agency. Research these agencies and in what areas they hire. Most non-profit agencies require administrative support so there may be a direct route. Look at things such as salaries and benefits. Review job ads for qualifications required for the job you have in mind. What skills do you have that are transferable and what do you need to add? There may be volunteer positions you can take on to become more familiar with the community you wish

to serve. Many agencies often offer training prior to taking on a volunteer role. They will also ask for a criminal background and/or a vulnerable sector check. Be prepared with that information. Treat applying for every volunteer role the same as you would applying for a paid position. These are often your chance to shine!

Volunteering in different roles provides an opportunity to see if this is an area you would like to pursue. My previous volunteer experience as a Tutor provided the impetus to go back to school part-time to study Adult Education. This led to paying positions as a Tutor in both ESL and Adult Literacy. Neither of which I would have been able to secure without having that combination of education and frontline experience.

I hope this information helps somewhat. Change can be scary but also quite exhilarating. I wish you the best of luck on your journey.

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



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