

Publication: Channel News Asia Online

Date: 3 July 2017

Headline: Commentary: Young entrants to the workforce must look the part, speak the part

Commentary: Young entrants to the workforce must look the part, speak the part

SINGAPORE: A recent commentary on Channel NewsAsia argued that most hiring managers seek out agility rather than paper qualifications.

Readers have responded with mixed reactions. Some say this cannot be further from the truth, as technical competencies are still applied to filter out candidates before a first round of interviews.

Others lamented the tough competition in a tight labour market and the rising expectations of employers who seem to desire candidates to have both the paper qualifications and agility to adapt to new circumstances, in addition to significant working experience. To these readers, it feels like job demands never end.

LEAP TALL BUILDINGS, PLEASE

Such an environment can be daunting to a young entrant to the workforce, who has to figure out not only what he or she wants to do, but also how to come across as a credible candidate despite not having formal working experience.

A daunting environment it is, indeed. When asked what competencies are applied in shortlisting fresh hires, many employers describe a mixed bag of skills including problem solving, collaboration, and an eye on global developments, in addition to exam results that show academic mastery and semblances of early leadership abilities through a strong track record of co-curriculum activities.

It seems we expect our young people to know the part, speak the part and possess sufficiently high levels of IQ and EQ. It seems that employers expect hires to be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.

Back on planet earth, some employers have lamented to me of late two traits they had hoped fresh hires would possess before starting work that were sorely lacking: First, a global outlook and second, a strong story-telling ability.

OPEN AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Despite the backlash against trade in the Eurozone and the US, the fact is that the world has become increasingly borderless and looks to stay that way. So most companies, whether multinational corporations or small- and medium-sized enterprises, have connections and reach that are regional, even international. Teams span countries, and partners often work in a different timezone.

In this context, companies value young people who understand and can value add to their global strategy and operations. Strong candidates are those who can draw these connections between people, functions and systems across countries and tap on them for maximum synergy.

This is the reality of the future of work. In a small yet globally-connected country like Singapore, our workforce will inevitably have to interact with or work with people from various countries and all walks of life, be it superiors, colleagues, stakeholders or clients.

To engage them effectively to lead new projects, implement company initiatives or close sales deals requires respect, thoughtfulness and even empathy. Those working frequently with colleagues from a different country must be able to manage divergent perspectives and contend with a spectrum of ideas.

Publication: Channel News Asia Online

Date: 3 July 2017

Headline: Commentary: Young entrants to the workforce must look the part, speak the part

Those working in a foreign company will have to grapple with company rules and legacies that one might not understand or agree with at the onset.

In a world fraught with disruption and change, many young people are also being brought in to overhaul company systems or lead change management, including doing so as external consultants. Many companies are also setting up their own transformation offices and filling these with fresh graduates.

These positions come with an even heavier burden because these fresh hires will have to deal with existing mindsets and old ways of doing things, while they risk being perceived as an outsider, coming in without much industry experience. This is a tall order for a young person. They will have to manage anxieties of people worried that they may not keep their jobs and implement new work streams without appearing to lack in empathy, all while managing cultural differences.

For all these reasons, graduates with prior international exposure from an overseas internship, community service project or exchange programmes stand in good stead to capture new jobs.

Graduates who show that they have been able to solve problems in a cross-cultural context even before they start work demonstrate maturity. The signal they send to employers is, "I have the socio-economic and cultural currency needed in a globally oriented company and you will not have to spend resources to handhold me in this aspect".

STORY-TELLING

One feedback I often get from hiring managers is that Singapore Management University (SMU) students are articulate and confident, and that this is a rare but important skillset. The ability to impress a hiring manager with strong story-telling skills goes beyond an interview skill because of how much persuasion workers today need to exercise.

Employers cannot but agree that a good story always reinforces the storyteller's key message to his or her audience. Employers have long recognised effective story-telling as an important marketplace competency that drives and improves emotional engagement in the workplace and enhances one's effectiveness and performance.

This isn't a case of companies hiring individuals because they have a magnetic personality or because they're an extrovert; it is about whether individuals are able to connect with their teams and partners to drive projects. It is about whether they are able to get their points across in those rare project briefings to senior management. And it is about whether they make people feel like they want to work with the individual again.

When work teams are increasingly global, yet resources are limited, the ability to work with and connect well with colleagues and partners is an important skillset. For this reason, SMU is serious and requires students to learn story-telling techniques via a compulsory SMU Finishing Touch programme.

The world is anyone's oyster. Young people these days are go-getters but within a competitive environment, there is a need to stand out. At SMU, it is compulsory for all students to have global exposure and we would like to groom our students and help them develop these skills early so as to give them the extra edge to seize opportunities that arise.

Sim Cher Young is Director of the Dato' Kho Hui Meng Career Centre at SMU. The Centre offers a range of comprehensive services, programmes and resources for SMU students to chart their career directions.

Source: CNA/si

Publication: Channel News Asia Online

Date: 3 July 2017

Headline: Commentary: Young entrants to the workforce must look the part, speak the part