

The Advisory Alliance

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The Value of a Good Education: Knowing What You Need to Learn

When I entered kindergarten, I had at that time a limited vocabulary. My command of math and science was similarly limited, and my writing skills were quite basic. By the time I graduated from high school, I had significantly expanded my vocabulary through near daily exposure to writing and conversation. I even understood the potential application of calculus to various aspects of daily life. I had explored the structure of atoms, interactions in ionic chemistry, and the essential life-supporting systems of multiple life forms. From the time I entered kindergarten to the time I completed high school, my knowledge of multiple subjects, topics and issues increased by orders of magnitude.

And yet for all those classes, days and years spent learning, the time I spent learning about human motivation, about what makes people tick, what spurs creativity and innovation, how to lead and motivate others, how to foster collaboration and teamwork, how to resolve conflict, or how to just get along, would barely amount to a day, let alone a full course. And here we are at the edge of one of the most innovative, creative, person-centric times of our economy and history, and for the most part, most of us haven't even been exposed to this material. It's as if we've been on an eternal summer break.

Through the benefit of undergraduate work in business and psychology, post-graduate work in management and finance, and extensive client work in change leadership, I feel I've been able to make up for some of the lost time and opportunity. And perhaps more importantly, I've also been made aware of the potential impact of this liability. For many of us, schooling included education in math and the sciences, and that education has contributed significantly to economic leadership in various science-related disciplines, technology being one of them. But as our economy continues to move to a more knowledge-based economy, how are we to ensure that the same innovation and creativity that flourishes in the science sector similarly flourishes in the business/corporate environment? It would be a stretch to say that my calculus, physics, or history for that matter, would be of substantial benefit to me in leading and developing knowledge workers. So if not in chemistry, physics, history, etc., where does one find the ability to develop knowledge workers? More specifically, how does one develop knowledge workers in a time when the unemployment for quality talent is 0% or even negative?

In last month's [60-Second E-mail](http://www.cnsltng.com/newsletter/TAA60_050426.pdf) (www.cnsltng.com/newsletter/TAA60_050426.pdf), we cited the recent work of Deloitte Touche, which noted that successful companies are pre-occupied with the development of their critical talent. Why is that important to note? Because most companies have misplaced their focus on the "bookends" of the development cycle, specifically on hiring and retaining (i.e. compensating) their people. Deloitte notes that companies will spend 50 times more to recruit an employee than it will invest in his/her development. And yet we still expect employees to excel and compete on a world-class level.

So, again, how do you develop employees? Typically when it comes to the skills most workers now need to enable their company to compete effectively (e.g. analytical skills, creativity, innovativeness, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, leadership ability, self-management), it is NOT through training.

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Most people can relate to the "eulogy effect" of training. We sit, we listen to the eulogy (the trainer), and we are inspired and committed, really truly committed, to living life fundamentally different than the way we are now. Only to find ourselves back in our cube or office two weeks later trying to recall what it was he/she said that made me feel so inspired, and what it was that I felt so committed to.

Fundamentally, real lasting change takes time. Ask anyone who has tried to quit smoking, tried to start a new exercise program, or tried public speaking. Many New Year's resolutions are DOA by early February. For sustained personal change, one needs three components, as noted by the Center for Creative Leadership:

1. **Assessment:** In my job/role, what do I need to do? What am I capable of doing? Where do I need to develop?
2. **Challenge:** Real-life real-work assignments that stretch or challenge me.
3. **Accountability and Support:** Follow-up by another person to ensure I hold true to my commitments & Support/Coaching/Mentoring from another person to help me succeed.

Given this longer-term approach to true development of talent, is it no wonder that companies focus on hiring and retaining? At what point in our education and in our careers were we ever schooled or educated in the ways that reinforce and truly develop individual effectiveness? Most of us, especially those schooled in the MBA tradition, are more familiar with analyzing a process, a system or a machine and then coming up with a rational recommendation, than with trying to figure out how to engage and truly motivate people who can at times be idiosyncratic, unpredictable and even irrational. And yet that is precisely the challenge before us. If your company succeeds fundamentally because of the increased ability and capacity of your people, then the proposition before you is clear: Develop your people, or your competition ultimately will.

For additional thoughts on the new mind-set required in the knowledge-based economy, please see our recent editorial via this link: <http://www.cnsltng.com/press/Confines.pdf>

You can access this and past 60-Second E-mails, as well as subscribe to our mailing list, via this link: <http://www.cnsltng.com/detail.php?page=resources>

Until next month, best regards,

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