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# ARE YOU RELEVANT?

## ARE YOU GUIDING YOUR TEAM TOWARD RELEVANCE?

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IN A *WHOLE NEW MIND*, DANIEL PINK EMPHASIZES THAT THE VALUED SKILLS OF THE NOT SO DISTANT PAST DO LITTLE TO SUPPORT A CAREER TODAY AND TOMORROW.

In a recent presentation, I asked how many of the two hundred plus people in the audience were familiar with 3D printing. Fewer than ten percent raised their hands. With all due respect, the remaining ninety percent are following the lead of the dinosaur to extinction. They are dangerously close to their grandparents who saw no use for the personal computer, or their parents who viewed the early tablet as a plaything with no application to the workplace. They may never use a 3D printer, but it will impact their career in some form or another.

### **YOUR CAREER DEPENDS ON YOUR ABILITY TO REMAIN RELEVANT.**

It is a hard fact that your current and future employer do not need you unless you are both

currently relevant and committed to staying relevant into the future. Relevant means you are able to adapt to continuously changing business needs. It means that you are eagerly curious about change and changing. It means that you invest in yourself to gain new knowledge, learn new skills, and perfect new abilities.

The signs are all around. You cannot ignore them. On a recent trip to India, I presented a leadership class to twenty-nine managers. Each of them spoke at least three languages. Most had one master's degree. More than half had two! They are your career competition.

You do not have to go to India to see what we are talking about here. Look at the number of job postings today that seek Spanish, Mandarin, and other languages as an entry card for consideration.

Don't stop at language. Big data, analytics, robotics, and more await your interest and curiosity. And by the way, It used to be that a chair had wheels, a desk did not. It is increasingly more common to

see desks with wheels. Take it as a career hint. Those wheels say, "We need you to be flexible; to be able to jump from one team to another; from this priority to that one."

In *The Challenger Sale*, Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson, argue that sales professionals have to find new ways to show value to their customers. Their teach, tailor, take-control approach revolutionizes sales and selling. It is one of a million examples of professions changing under the feet of highly competent practitioners who nearly overnight become an endangered species.

TO BE RELEVANT MEANS TO EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED. IT MEANS TO BE READY BEFORE READY IS NECESSARY.

Relevancy starts at home. It begins with paying attention to trends within your organization. Marketing, R&D, and Customer Service often feel the winds of change first. If you are in one of those departments, it is important to pay attention to

what your colleagues are working on, talking about, doing, and forecasting. You need to constantly ask yourself how those conversations affect you and your career. If you are not in those departments, you need to make friends with someone who is.

It is not enough to look internally. You need to have your antennae out in your industry and your occupation also.

ONE QUICK WAY TO MAKE YOURSELF IRRELEVANT IS TO STOP ATTENDING PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES BECAUSE YOUR EMPLOYER WON'T PAY FOR THEM. YOU NEED TO INVEST IN YOURSELF.

Professional groups offer speakers sharing insights that often foretell what is coming. You say you do not have time to attend? If you expect to stay relevant, you do not have time not to attend.

Most professions offer some form of certification. Certification is no longer an option. It demonstrates that you have the base knowledge to operate in your field. Earning certification credits requires you to attend training and development programs that hone and expand your skills.

If you went to college or live near a college campus, you are a click away from resources that can tell you what is coming and how to recognize it. Higher education institutions offer lectures, presentations, and classes to help you discover what you need to do to be and stay relevant.

Fast Company, HBR Ideacast, and the Wall Street Journal shout hints from the rooftops daily, weekly, and monthly about what you need to learn to keep yourself relevant.

IN YOUR ROLE AS A WORKPLACE LEADER, YOU HAVE A MORAL OBLIGATION TO PAVE THE WAY FOR EACH MEMBER OF YOUR TEAM TO STAY RELEVANT.

The paradigm of work requires employees at all levels to continuously adapt to changing business conditions. They cannot do it through osmosis. It is your responsibility as a leader to place the requirement to remain relevant in the middle of table and talk about it frequently. You must be the one who talks about trends that forecast the future. You must connect the dots between what is and what will be with what each member of your team needs to learn and do to stay relevant.

One manager assigns a periodical, a website, or another resource to each employee. She requires each of them to bring one new insight to each staff meeting to share with their colleagues.

Another manager added relevancy to the agenda for one-on-one meetings. She requires each employee to come to each meeting with an example of what they are doing to learn new things to stay relevant in their current job.

An HR Director revised the performance review to include a section on relevancy. It took a cycle or two, but supervisors and employees slowly got the idea that relevancy is a requirement, not an option.

One brave manager encourages his employees to seek opportunities elsewhere. They seldom leave because they love working for him, but he believes interviewing for another job forces them to constantly think about whether they are relevant in the ever changing world around them.

IN THEIR INSIGHTFUL SEPTEMBER 2013 HBR ARTICLE, TOURS OF DUTY: THE NEW EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE COMPACT, REID HOFFMAN, BEN CASNOCHA, AND CHRIS YEAH MAKE IT CLEAR THAT SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT IS NO LONGER ABOUT STABILITY FOR EITHER THE EMPLOYEE OR THE EMPLOYER.

If you do not believe them, look around your office, your neighborhood, or your local coffee shop. It will not take long for you to figure out that the survivors are the ones who started adapting before others saw the need to adapt. They are the ones who take curiosity to a new level, inquisitive to a new degree, and try harder to do as a requirement. Are you one of them? Are you doing everything you can to help yourself and each member of your team to be among them? The choice and the responsibility are yours. The consequences mean too much to your career to ignore them.

There was a time when standing still meant falling behind. The new phrase is, *being only one step ahead is falling behind*. As a leader, you must keep yourself and your team two or three steps ahead.