CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Abandon the Past

By Douglas E. Welch

Every day in your career is truly a new day. The speed of change is running so quickly, the work you do tomorrow, and certainly next year, will not be the work you are doing today. This is especially true of high-tech careers. Tomorrow might bring a new technology that will make everything you do obsolete. Are you ready for it? Are you constantly looking and adopting new methods and types of work, or are you trying to hold on to old ways of doing business—falling further behind with each passing day?

Skills

Many high-tech workers are rightfully scared of their skills becoming obsolete, in some cases, before they even get to exercise them fully. Instead of fear, though, you need to understand that this is simply part of your career. No matter how hard you have fought to gain certain skills, there will come a day when these skills are no longer needed or desired.

What do you do then? Do you work harder to find those clients that need your skills, fighting for an ever-shrinking piece of the action? Do you bring your career to a standstill to dedicate your time to gaining new skills? Do you simply ignore the changing landscape and continue as you always have? It should be clear that all these options lead nowhere. Instead, you need to be willing, even eager, to abandon any skills that no longer serve your career, while constantly acquiring new ones.

If the thought of abandoning certain skills is frightening to you, it should be. That said, you sometimes have to do the most frightening things in order to grow as a person. Just like selling your favorite car, the one that you worked so hard to buy, abandoning hard-won skills can bring a sense of loss. In today's environment, though, you need to move beyond this sense of loss in order to develop your career.

Ongoing Change

If you are finding your career prospects faltering due to the changing environment (and who isn't today?), you need to look closely at which skills are holding you back. Are you still spending time developing your Web design skills when database management and graphic design skills are more in demand? Are you investing more and more time in outdated software instead of learning something new? Do you even realize this is what you are doing? If your job prospects are waning, this could be the cause.

Starting today, you need to begin gathering new skills. In some cases, this will mean investigating new ways of doing what you already do. In others, you might be investigating entirely new avenues of work. Both are useful and can help to improve your career. One way to gain a little direction in this area is to pay close attention to work that is outside your area of expertise, but work that attracts you in some way. Sometimes we ignore those things that are most interesting to us instead of seeing them as possible avenues for development. The fact that you find something interesting is a clear sign that you could develop it into a new part of your career. Would you like to do more graphic design work? Why not investigate the possibilities? Perhaps you could do some design on the site for which you have been hired to develop programming.

Each day will bring new areas to investigate, new software to try, new people to meet. Each day should open new doors to different parts of your career. In this way, constantly investigating new concepts and possibilities, you can prevent your career from becoming stagnated.

Just like an evergreen tree is constantly developing new leaves to replace the older ones, you should be developing new branches to your career, allowing the old ones to wither and fall when necessary. You don't see trees trying to prop up old branches. You shouldn't try to prop up aging skills in a market that no longer desires them.

It can be scary to regularly abandon the skills you have worked so hard to acquire, but when those skills are no longer serving your career, they can actually impede your future success. You need to be constantly looking forward in your career, letting old skills age into pleasant memories, while building new and different ways to expand your high-tech career. ❏