

How to future-proof your career

*The job market is in constant flux; industries change or become obsolete and new technologies emerge and disrupt. In conversation with **Jasmine Virhia**, **Grace Lordan** explains what strategies we can put in place now to make sure we hone the business skills necessary to keep us relevant in the workplace in the future.*

Q. Does the future of work look bright?

Grace is optimistic about the future of work. “People who are doing work that is routine or boring are going to be helped by technology. Physical labour is going to get easier on your physicality. Everything points to the fact we’re going to have machines substitutes for the harder bits, and complement the easier bits.” Grace’s concern comes in with how governments are responding, “governments aren’t doing enough to future-proof their population – in particular the transition period in the learning of skills. People need to live with a living wage while they’re upskilling for these fantastic jobs that will be created.”

Q. What skills can help us future proof our careers?

“If you want to be future proof, look hard at your soft skills.”

Many businesses are realising that soft skills are as important as hard skills and technical abilities. “Resilience is super important because the world of work is unpredictable at the moment. People will suffer knocks and it’s important that they don’t internalise them to the extent that it gets them down.” Adaptability, curiosity, and creativity are also skills Grace strongly encourages people to have. “Ultimately, becoming an expert in something but also being able to join the dots across disciplines which aren’t your own. Creativity is exposing yourself to the ideas of others and seeing a new way in which they can come together.”

Q. Small changes have a big impact, right?

“The small things you do regularly as habits is who you’re going to be in five years’ time.”

Grace suggests small steps rather than big steps in navigating your career journey – “there are very few overnight success stories and there’s nothing you can do that’s sustainable that isn’t a marathon. Often making changes that are too big sets us up for failure. Embedding habits in your week that are small enough that they don’t yank your happiness and disrupt your life really gives a sustainable solution towards career progression.”

Q. Not many of us know exactly what we want to do for the rest of our lives from a young age, so what if we don’t have to choose a single career path?

“If you know what you want to be, then you inevitably become it – that is your punishment, but if you never know, then you can be anything.” (Oscar Wilde)

The number of employees taking on multiple roles is on the rise for a multitude of reasons – people wanting to do more varied work, to retrain or learn new skills or for financial reasons – this is called a portfolio career. “The future of work is pushing towards a task-based approach. Portfolio careers are on the rise, so if you’re motivated by money, a portfolio career is definitely worth exploring.” Grace’s career advice for job seekers is to always look outside of linear titles (lawyer, doctor etc.) and to instead think about what tasks we enjoy doing and from there, think about what job or jobs would allow us to do them.

Q. What makes an effective leader?

“As a manager or leader, the most important thing you can do is pay attention to whether you equalise opportunities, visibility, and voice.”

Since the pandemic, record numbers of employees are quitting their jobs – this has been labelled The Great Resignation. Many are pursuing options which offer greater flexibility, but for many others it has been down to how their manager treats them. “One thing I’m really conscious of is that we wouldn’t need HR policies, government mandates and quotas if every single manager and leader were giving equal opportunities, visibility, and voice, and hiring from a wide talent pool based on merit.” Grace explains that ultimately, when you hire somebody, part of the exchange part is that you give people opportunities to shine and be seen.

Q. What is the importance of networking

“Regardless of what stage you are at in your career, not being scared of critical feedback is really important.”

Many professionals have succeeded in their career due to having a strategic network of people who open their eyes to different ideas, raise their profile and seek out new opportunities for career progression. “Networking is important. The worst thing someone can do for themselves is to only have one mentor; you need to get feedback from different people – the minimum amount you should have is three people who should be absolutely independent of each other. They should be your ‘challenge network’, where person A would say something different to person B who would say something different to person C. Having that lets us grow because we’re open to diverse opinions from people in our network.”

Watch Grace Lordan’s webinar on How To Future Proof Your Career, chaired by Jasmine Virhia:



Notes:

- This blog post presents highlights from the LSE Festival event with Grace Lordan. It appeared first on the [site](#) of LSE Online Education, where she is course convenor on LSE’s Inclusive Leadership Through Behavioural Science online certificate [course](#).
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