

On the Job

The 'Old Smart' isn't Enough

By Edward Hess

You might consider yourself a great intellectual, but book smarts won't be

all that relevant as companies increase their use of robots and smart machines. What *will* matter is being an adaptive learner. The following are the 21st century learning skills you will need to be successful in a tech-driven world.

*** Get comfortable with “not knowing.”** In a technology-enabled world, how much you know today will be irrelevant, because smart machines and the Internet will always know more than you. What will be more important is knowing how to learn—in other words, the smartest people will be focused on continuously learning. Develop your critical thinking and innovative thinking skills.

***Embrace open-mindedness.** It takes courage to enter the unknown and learn something new for the first time. To make that process easier, people will have to learn to separate their ideas from their self-worth. Changing a previously held belief doesn't mean you are a bad or stupid person. It simply means you've learned to adapt your thinking based on new information.

***Be an “inner-directed” learner.** In a tech-driven world, those who are able to be the most successful and fulfilled will be those who are driven by curiosity and a love of learning. You'll need to see learning as its own reward.

*** Don't be afraid to make mistakes.** As long as you aren't making the same mistakes over and over again, mistakes can be good. The key is making sure you're learning from them. And the faster and better you are at turning mistakes into learning, the *less* likely it is that some smart machine will replace you.

***Be willing to try.** People who are confident in their own ability to meet a challenge or take on the unknown (within reason) are more likely to try new things. This confidence is called “self-efficacy.” People can build self-efficacy by putting themselves in challenging situations that they have the ability to handle. As their confidence grows, they'll be more willing to take on even more challenging tasks.

***Develop your emotional intelligence.** Emotional intelligence is the ability to be aware of and manage one's emotions. But if you can't manage your own emotions, read those of others, or connect with the people around you on more than a superficial level, then you won't be a successful collaborator – and collaboration and teamwork is critical in today's workplace.

***Seek out constructive feedback.** Rather than getting the kind of specific, constructive feedback that can help us improve our skills, most of us receive guarded or politically correct feedback that is fairly useless in practice. Thoughtful and constructive feedback will only become more valuable as our workplaces become dominated by technology. Of course, all of this ties back to building self-efficacy and becoming more emotionally intelligent.

\

Summary

We're entering a world in which companies can no longer rely on traditional competitive advantages like location, capital, and lack of choices for customers. They'll need to rely on their ability to learn and innovate in order to compete.

- *Edward Hess is a business professor at the University of Virginia and author of "Learn or Die: Using Science to Build a Leading-Edge Learning Organization."*