

Why experience and potential can trump a degree

With the fourth industrial revolution, entirely new jobs and careers now exist, and it may be time for business leaders and decision makers to review their dated notions that any candidate with a degree is 'better' or 'more employable' than one without.



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“This mindset has led to an increase in jobs, which used to be held by those with a high school education, now requiring a minimum of a four-year bachelor’s degree,” says Natasha Terlecki, head of marketing and communications at Kelly.

“Of course, there are a number of professions for which specialised tertiary academic and practical training is necessary, such as those in the medical, legal, financial or engineering fields, this is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ requirement.

“However, many roles simply need workplace mentoring and the relevant skills, interests or experience – none of which can be acquired by sitting in a classroom. This is especially the case for careers of the future that we have seen come into existence in the last few years, such as ICT developers, Uber drivers and drone operators.”

According to the World Economic Forum’s ‘The Future of Jobs and Skills’ report, 65% of children entering primary school today will end up working in a completely new job type - one that does not yet exist. The fourth industrial revolution will bring rapid and exponential change to the world of work. The top skills required for the future include cognitive thinking, problem solving, collaboration and creativity, many of which are associated with both degreed and non-degreed individuals.

Fees create barrier

“Further support for the argument around employing non-degreed candidates is the unequal nature and exclusion barriers associated with the cost of tertiary education. The result of which in recent years, has resulted in numerous protests and demonstrations such as the #FeesMustFall movement. We need to re-think an antiquated system which is based on exclusion and provide educational paths that provide real (applied) knowledge and the skills that will be relevant in the digital landscape of tomorrow.

“Tertiary education was, historically, a clear shot way to guaranteed employment. However, in today’s world where there are more graduates than ever before, unemployment continues to rise. South Africa’s unemployment rate is at a 27.7%, the highest figure since September 2013.

“Furthermore, the cost of tertiary education often results in excessive student debt which, in turn, slows the economic benefit of a graduate joining the workforce and contributing to society.”

International swing towards talent

With this in mind, Terlecki suggests that hiring decision makers follow the example set by successful international businesses, Penguin Random House, PWC and Ernst & Young, and reevaluate their job specs in order to open doors for talented, hardworking candidates who do not have a degree behind their name.

“Employers who maintain a bias, which excludes those who have the skills or experience to their name but not the relevant tertiary piece of paper, are ultimately missing out on a potential pool of talented candidates with a passion for their field.”

“Who gets the job should depend solely on the requirements of the position at hand. So, stop and ask, ‘Is a degree necessary?’ What are the key skills someone with a degree would have that someone without one would not possess? How would these skills translate into the job function and could they be taught? Would a diploma suffice? What about years of experience, coupled with related certificates or on the job training?

“Misconceptions over the requirements of a four-year degree over skill, experience or alternate educational paths must shift, not only to create future job opportunities for a disregarded, yet often promising, group of job-seekers but also for businesses to tap into skills of the future and an innovative way of rethinking their hiring strategies.

“We should be educating businesses and our youth on a disruptive approach to formal education, from open-source and online e-learning platforms, to colleges, short courses, mentorships, internships and learnerships. This is the only way we will significantly contribute to a future of productive, skilled and employed South Africans,” Terlecki concludes.

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