

*Addressing Employability Concerns through skill development :
An HR intervention*

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Abstract:

The 21st century has opened up newer and greater challenges for prospective employment seekers – the question of their employability! Being qualified or meritorious in one's academic career no longer offers a passport to a plum job (NASSCOM report). The fangs of competition have bared themselves to such an extent that unless one is market- ready, well-rounded with skills that are conventionally acceptable and street-smart, the fear of being gnawed at or run down will be perpetual. Thus, one is left with options, either to join the end-less race for a suitable employment or to develop or hone skills that will help open up vistas for self-employment.

This article attempts to identify the skill sets as well as the prospective avenues for those who wish to take a detour from the race for employment and escape the ignominy of being branded “unemployable”; in the bargain we could be generating a whole new lot of Entrepreneurs!

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson, Poet

Introduction:

Employability – A Mass Concern

Keeping as a backdrop, the recent startling statistics offered by NASSCOM regarding unemployability of almost 50% of Engineering graduates, we, at B- Schools have yet another lot of prospective ‘failures’ knocking at our doors! A lot that are job rejects, but now aspire to hold coveted Management degrees. A new responsibility is thus cast on the B-Schools to render hands-on training to the promising few, from the lot. Thus, endorsing the thoughts of MD and CEO, National Skill Development Corporation, Mr. Dilip Chenoy, who said, “The youth have to be skilled to suit the requirement of the industry and training programmes have to be devised to bring out the competencies which are needed by the industry”.

This concern of employability is going to become even more paramount if not nipped in the bud. It is widely acknowledged that India will soon be facing a serious manpower crunch. The phenomenal growth that the Indian economy has witnessed in the last decade was largely driven by the growth in the service sector and particularly fueled by industries such as IT Services, ITES, Retail, Hospitality, Travel, and Financial Services. This growth is now threatened because the effectiveness and growth of India's talent pool has been seriously constrained due to a deepening soft skills crisis. As the employee base gets larger every year, the number of new hires required to sustain this growth rate has increased sharply, further exacerbating this situation.

These statistics point at the prospects of self-employment or entrepreneurship as being sound alternatives to employment.

Identifying Key Factors For Embarking On Entrepreneurial 'Adventures'

The need for a broad-based entrepreneurial class in India arises from the need to speed up the process of activating the factors of production, leading to a higher rate of economic growth, dispersal of economic activities, development of backward and tribal areas, creation of employment opportunities, improvement in the standard of living of the weaker sections of the society and involvement of all sections of the society in the process of growth.¹

Traits And Skills Required To Be An Entrepreneur

Every prospective entrepreneur must possess, in essence, at least 2/3rd of the following traits and skills in order to qualify:

[A] APTITUDE

1. Analytical ability enabling him to tell a prospective situation from a non- prospective one.
2. Risk calculating ability to foresee the pitfalls in the area.
3. Market know-how
4. Purpose-driven vision and ability to draw a workable plan.
5. Expertise (competence) in the subject- area of interest.

[B] ATTITUDE: SKILLS AND TRAITS

1. Creativity and innovativeness: Imperative to render that cutting edge.
2. Self Confidence and high Self- esteem: Low morale and blurred ambitions will take one nowhere. A strong conviction and a sincerity of purpose only can help in manifesting a dream into reality. steadfastness
3. Goal and Action Orientation and Steadfastness: A dream translates into a vision when driven by a passion and the right orientation. Consistency maintained in the journey of this vision even in the wake of turbulence, indicates a potential for strong perseverance. As is rightly said, "In life and business, there are two cardinal sins: The first is to act without thought and the second is to not act at all."
4. Intuitiveness: Along with hindsight one must have an inherent ability to foresee. Prospective opportunities as well pitfalls must be gauged well in advance. Although this

may sound idealistic, the skill can be honed over the years with a thorough study of the nuances of the business and a pulse on the market.

5. Team building and retention capabilities – An enterprise without a team will not move beyond sole proprietorship, thus stunting growth. Expansion entails team building and interpersonal relationships. With the fierce competition in the labour market as well, one must be adept with sound policies for retaining a well motivated workforce.
6. Problem Solving and Tenacity- Crises can visit in all shapes, sizes and dimensions. One must be prepared to face, brace and handle with grace, every problem that may crop up. Being tenacious during a low phase helps one in strengthening his resolve and surging ahead with renewed vigour.
7. Excellent Communication and Networking Skills- this is self explanatory.

Whilst the prospective entrepreneur would require pre-possessing most of the above mentioned skills and traits in order to start a venture. There are still a few that may be acquired through practice and networking. After all, careers are for those who would like to walk the treaded path, but for those who wish to blaze the trail and make path-breaking innovations, development of socially acceptable skill sets becomes imperative.

How To Garner A Market Using Your Skills

With a vision in sight, a finger on the pulse, an unwavering beat in the heart, confidence in stride and sincerity in gait, one can be assured that he need not simply watch and wait!

Plainly put- the ability to identify opportunities and charter one's line of action according to conventional market demands shall tell whether an individual is worth becoming an entrepreneur. The famous inventor and entrepreneur, Thomas Alva Edison has rightly said, "Opportunity is missed by most because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work"!

Although the HR perspective in the context of entrepreneurship may seem bleak, yet one can identify many a business idea, from some of the basic HR functions or by even borrowing rays from the wide spectrum of Human resources. The Outsourcing business that has ballooned into a multi- billion service market, today, is nothing but an exaggerated version of unassuming HR functions; be it Recruitment, Pay-roll, HRIS, Employee Engagement or the more peripheral area of Customer care.

The other functional areas that are waiting in the wings are Event Management, Public Relations, Intrapreneurship, Employee Branding, Negotiation and Counselling. These areas bear the necessary potential for being lapped up by entrepreneurs who do not wish to be ordinary employees of an organisation. However, the traits, aptitude and skills enlisted above must be borne in the right proportion and good measure in order to render credibility to the entire exercise.

It is for the candidate to conduct a SWOT analysis of himself in order to identify his inclination. Perhaps he must be unemployable in the conventional sense of the term, but he may be divinely gifted with a skill that could open up vistas for self- employment. Hence, rather than queuing up in the race for employment, such promising individuals must give quality time for an introspection, seek professional help if the need be and start opening up all the hitherto latent skills that he may possess and begin with a spit-n-polish exercise, in order to reveal his true calibre.

How To Transform A Talent / Skill Into A Business Prospect

Neither is there a miracle mantra being offered on a platter nor can one expect to bag prospects overnight. The manifestation of skills and attributes into tangible strengths is a slow and arduous process. It

requires systematic and consistent investment of effort and competence in order to get a foot-hold in the market.

After having performed the SWOT analysis on self, the subject must seek the help of a professional counsellor (if the need be) in order to get himself thoroughly assessed. By so doing, he would have already identified the inclination that he has. He could bear a technical, an artistic, an adventure seeking, hospitality or training and counselling orientation. Once the orientation is identified, it becomes easier for the subject to earmark the probable vistas he could dabble with before crystallising the core competency area; that would be the most viable business prospect before him.

This may seem a lengthy and cumbersome exercise. However, for one who is seeking to charter a course of self employment, it is an investment that would assure him sound returns. There are numerous Government schemes available, that render start-up aid for those intending to begin a new venture. This is not a fool-proof exercise though and there could be probable failures even after embarking upon this arduous skill-identification course. Nevertheless, he can always fall back upon the next-in-line skill that had been identified during the initial exercise. He is, thus, saved the trouble of going through the entire exercise all over again! To quote Lloyd Jones, "Those who try something and fail are infinitely better than those who try nothing and succeed". There will be criticism and cynicism galore, disappointments aplenty, suspicions flying over the roof and many a spoke in the wheel, but it's your foundation traits that will stand you in good stead in the face of rough weather.

Just as any other business plan would begin with a market survey, albeit, with a general approach, here, once the subject is armed with an idea of his core competency, it would be a lot easier for him to perform a gap analysis of the actual and the expected service and earmark his category, where he may set shop. Thus, rather than wait for someone to identify the need, the subject can do it himself thereby displaying his first trait that of proactiveness. After all one mustn't wait to strike when the iron is hot but make it hot by striking. His communication and networking skills will help harness the start-up resources, both material as well as human. Thereafter, he will have learnt the ropes and the tricks of the trade.

Conclusion

Although statistical reports suggest that most of the Indian graduates/ post graduates are unemployable, yet such a declaration need not spell doom for them. There are ample avenues available for those who wish to alter the fate they have been served with, thanks to the education system and perhaps their, hitherto, complacency. An attempt has been made here to go beyond the mundane tips provided by numerous authors, on improving skills and present a more realistic exposition of how to translate one's existing skills into workable business prospects. Whilst involved in this attempt to make a mark, he would be glad that he is doing precisely that what he is cut out for and where his heart lies. He would bear an independent and dignified disposition, head held high and a conscience, free from the bullying by bosses and the back-stabbing by colleagues, apart from washing away the stigma of being labelled "Unemployable"!

References :

1. Desai, Vasant, Dynamics of Entrepreneurial Development and Management, Himalaya Publishing House, pg.79
2. DNA newspaper reports, 24th November 2011 and 10th December 2011