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## Commentary: Forget about finding your passion, when the job offered doesn't match your dreams

Graduates and young people in the workforce enjoy a menu of options when it comes to finding a job. NUS' Centre for Future-ready Graduates' director Crystal Lim Leahy has three suggestions on how to choose what to do.



Students sitting around campus. (File photo)

SINGAPORE: In the future, instead of thinking in terms of careers, we will be focused on collective problem-solving. We will see every job as a problem that needs to be solved, that requires certain skills to unlock.

The portfolio or gig economy has arrived. Studies suggest that by 2020, 40 per cent of American workers will be independent contractors. In a 2016 report from Barclays, 24 per cent of workers under 34 had already worked in four industries. Compare this to our parents' generation, where it was the norm to work in the same industry for their entire career.

The linear concept of a "career ladder" is evolving towards a more complicated "career web", characterised by lateral moves as well as traditional promotions.

Yet with so much choice, many job-seekers have been struck by analysis paralysis. Psychologists call this "the paradox of choice". A famous jam study in 2000 by psychologists Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper illustrates this.

Shoppers were given either a display of 24 jams or 6 jams to choose from. The larger display attracted more shoppers, but when it came to making a choice, the 24-jam crowd were a tenth as likely to buy a jam as the people who saw the smaller display.

With more choices, it seems many remain stuck and don't end up choosing an option.

### FORGET FINDING A PASSION

It is common to hear youths talk about how it's hard to find jobs that align with their dreams and passions, or how they haven't "found" their passion yet. In my experience, most successful people don't find a passion. They grow it.

It's very rare for a young person to develop a singular clarity about passions and purpose early on in life. For most of us who are older, we know passions change. What you love at 30 can be very different at 40 or 50. What's more important and practical for most of us is to focus on cultivating curiosity and accumulating skills.

Each new skill or pursuit is a seed. The more seeds you plant, the better your chance of finding that one or two strong seedlings that will take root and grow into a mighty oak tree that becomes your life's purpose.

I have three pieces of advice to job seekers in a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world.

#### 1. DEVELOP A DIVERSE PORTFOLIO OF SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES. START NOW.

Scott Adams, the celebrated creator of the famous comic strip Dilbert, often talks about how he has layered a combination of self-described "mediocre" skills into a "talent stack" that is quite special.

There are people who can draw better, and people with better business insights than Scott Adams, but no cartoonist had the combination of both, which is what makes Dilbert so relatable.



Almost 400,000 people work in Singapore's financial district, as of 2013. (Photo: AFP/Roslan Rahman)

I too have a diverse combination of modest skills - business, banking, social-emotional intelligence, public speaking, psychology, writing, every one of which has contributed to my career. While there are more capable business people than me, many may lack emotional intelligence. Those with great ideas may lack the ability to execute their vision.

It is in our unique collection of diverse skills and experience that we amass enough expertise and experience to become a better architect of our career, and retain the flexibility to remain relevant in a constantly changing world.

The more skills you have, the better your competitive advantage. Be curious. Try new interests, join clubs, or take a new route back home from work. Research suggests that curiosity is one of the biggest drivers of human potential and success in life.

#### 2. DEVELOP EMOTIONAL AWARENESS

At NUS, our signature future-ready skills module Roots & Wings, which all freshmen have to go through, focuses on developing social emotional intelligence, mindfulness and personal leadership. These are sometimes called "soft skills". However, they are ones that arguably make the biggest difference to success at work, in relationships and in life, yet are hardest to practise.

Much of our programme is centred on developing and practising three types of mindful awareness - self-awareness, interpersonal awareness and awareness of the wider world around you.

In a VUCA world, awareness helps you build your sensor to pick up important data. You must be sensitive to people and situations around you, picking up critical information to guide your decisions and direction when there is no black or white, right or wrong.



### 3. BUILD A GROWTH MINDSET

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity. The most important way to develop resilience is to practise a growth mindset, a term coined by Professor Carol Dweck from Stanford.

A growth mindset essentially is a state of mind where you believe that if you put in effort, you can grow your talent. The opposite is a fixed mindset, where you believe that talent is inborn and that you're either a certain type of person with innate gifts, or not.

Career-wise, many young people seem to have a fixed mindset against certain fields, preventing themselves from even trying. Many may think, they aren't interested in numbers at all, and disregard the finance industry altogether. Many conclude that, if they fail in a subject or task once, they are just not cut out for that task or subject.

Yet, in a growth mindset, when you try something and don't succeed, you see your effort as having expanded the boundaries of your learning. You think, I haven't succeeded yet but if I keep applying effort, I can get there.

In a hypercompetitive world, the effort we put in is crucial. Angela Duckworth goes further to say effort is more important than IQ as it counts twice.

Her simple formula:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{“ Talent x Effort = Skill} \\ \text{Skill x Effort = Achievement,”} \end{aligned}$$

Pure talent without effort will never become skill. Pure skill without effort will not translate into results or achievements.

Of course luck, opportunities and other external factors come into play when it comes to success. However, like I always tell my students, a growth mindset will not guarantee success, but a fixed mindset guarantees failure.

So it's time for graduates to stop focusing on careers as an end-goal, or fixate on what their passions are, but stay open and opportunistic to seize each learning opportunity they are given.

Crystal Lim Leahy is director of the Centre for Future-ready Graduates at the National University of Singapore, which just released a [2017 Future-ready Report](#) on the current demands and motivations of students and employers.

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