

# Key Appointments

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## Reaching the top of the class

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"Human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others", writes Douglas Adams, "are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so."

Job applicants with a genuine willingness to learn are increasingly being pushed to the top of employers' essential attributes list. You can see it job advertisements.

"Technical skills not necessary - just a genuine willingness to learn."

"Experience would be a plus, though willingness to learn is far more important"

Why has a bent inclination towards learning become so critical? As job seekers why should you ask your self how you rate on your willingness to learn?

In today's work environment being qualified or experienced is no less important, but no longer sufficient. It's not possible to anticipate and be prepared for all the problems faced on a daily basis. Nor tomorrow's challenges.

Machines continue to replace some jobs but most of us need not fear. Computers might score a perfect ten for processing but the definite zero for their 'ability to learn' is a big downfall. "He's a machine" is a very one dimensional compliment.

For decades we've heard in today's business environment 'change is the only constant'. As customer expectations change new problems emerge and past solutions are becoming dated at an increasingly greater rate.

Many technical skills sets are in such short supply that employers accept new workers will need to learn their trade on the job. Such an investment needs to pay dividends. Those that are proactive in finding out 'what to do' and 'how' will quickly become productive and welcomed with open arms.

While getting 'stuck in' is commendable too often we learn by trial and error. Typically we seek help when we have tried and failed and have little other option. "Ok dam it, where's that manual?" Eventually we get there but not a strategy that oozes with efficiency. Acceptable outcome -not award winning.

Sometimes admitting we don't have all the answers is hard on the ego. Asking for help can be seen as a weakness or as indicating a lack of confidence. But asking investigatory questions indicates a desire to understand, and will always be admirable.

Effective workers appreciate that initially we must truly understand the problem. A capable, newly appointed CEO will resist making sweeping changes in their first month. Instead they will have an obsession with talking to key people, asking questions and building a thorough understanding of every facet of the organisation.

The challenge is the ability and desire to ask questions and listen. Not listen to see if what we hear confirms our views and if not ask others until we find a consenting view, but listen openly. Listen and reflect. Listen without judgment or assumption.



Top attributes: employers who are prepared to learn on the job are seen as increasingly important by employers. Photo: Fairfax

Ask the 'what' and 'how' questions but concentrate on the 'why'.

Required, is a real willingness to put ourselves in someone else's shoes (the client) and consider the situation from their point of view. Our acquired knowledge, values, and preconceptions makes this make this exceedingly difficult. An open mind requires a huge conscious effort and constant practice.

"Learning is not attained by chance, writes Abigail Adams, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence."

But people are incredibly obliging.

Those who know something we don't will take great satisfaction in sharing it. Even though most see the merit of speeding drivers being punished, so often information of a hidden cop is volunteered with a flash of the lights. I know something you don't.

But be warned - there are implications.

Renowned author Dale Carnegie of "How to win friends and influence people" is adamant that asking open questions and listening is the secret to immediate and high levels of trust and strong working relationships. Instant friends.

And it's contagious. One question leads to others and open and creative discussion. Robust and comprehensive solutions become apparent, problems get solved, innovation is rife.

It's a dangerous path - you might find yourself being targeted - so tread carefully and only those that are willing.

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