

Career guidance: 5 tips for high school graduates

Gone are the days when one selects a career path within one industry and studiously works at climbing the corporate ladder through a steady succession of jobs or promotions. The reality today is that people change not just jobs but careers as well, as their interests evolve and external factors force whole industries to change.



Image: Supplied

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted this, showing how quickly career paths and company growth plans needed to adjust to this adapted environment.

“The number one thing that I tell all prospective students is that you have to be flexible when it comes to preparing for your future. You need to realise that your studies post Matric are only the first step to success. Even if you don’t know what career you want to pursue just yet, there are many courses you can take that will be useful across multiple fields, whichever career path you finally choose,” says Di Charton, head of Department: Marketing and senior lecturer (Marketing & Advertising Communications), Red & Yellow Creative School of Business.

Below are her five tips to help high school graduates plan for a future career.

1. Stay ahead of the curve by researching future trends

It is important to stay ahead of the curve and be prepared for a future job, even if it doesn’t exist - many of the jobs advertised today didn’t even exist a few years ago. Therefore, research trends not only in an interested industry, but also general career trends that will enable one to map out a career trajectory.

“An interesting trend that has recently gained traction is the concept of a metaverse, all thanks to Facebook recently rebranding itself as Meta. The metaverse is a network of virtual worlds that are focused on social connection,” says Charton.

“The metaverse worlds will become the next natural evolution of the internet. Organisations will start looking at creating immersive environments where people can work and play. In order to prepare for this changing world, we need to be curious and continue to learn, grow and explore the world around us. Consider looking at a digital marketing course that covers digital marketing strategy, which prepares one in understanding the digital customer and designing customer experiences,” she continues.

2. Focus on building transferable skills rather than a specific job

It is no secret that technology is advancing at a rapid speed and this creates the possibility that certain jobs can become redundant. However, job titles might change, but the skills that have been learnt can be transferred over time.

“Courses such as copywriting, project management and creative thinking can really come in handy within any job space. These are skills that are always needed and stand the test of time. It is a journey that you go on and consistently revisit,” adds Charton.

3. Talk to professionals

By making connections with people who are established within their area of interest, and by asking the right questions, students can get a more realistic idea of what they can expect from a potential career path. Not only does this provide informed guidance, it can also result in learners building useful relationships that could one day lead to them getting a foot in the door.

“Most industry professionals are more than happy to share their experience or advice. Don't be afraid to ask questions and there are many resources available that give access to people in a specific profession. LinkedIn connections, Facebook groups or personal contacts are all good options and institutions like Red & Yellow also have an endless supply of knowledgeable people willing to give advice and help students find the right fit for them,” says Charton.

4. Break the mould

These days success comes not just from traditional, cookie cutter jobs. There are so many accomplished artisans and business owners who are masters of their industries. Students should not be afraid to think outside of the box and forge their own career path.

“If you have a passion or a hobby that makes you happy then use it as a foundation. Focus on studying something that you can use to turn an interest into a career. There are so many learning options out there, be it an entrepreneurial degree that will help you build a business, or a focused artisanal course to master a craft. Don't be afraid to study to be your own boss,” adds Charton.

5. Never stop learning

Education is key and everyone should take advantage of all the educational opportunities that come their way, looking at ways to grow and develop the skills that give a competitive edge in a chosen career.

“Remember, it is also fine to change your career path from one to the other. You should never feel like you are stuck doing something that you are no longer passionate about. However, learning skills that are always in demand and which are transferable mean that even a career change can mean moving upwards, rather than sideways in the career ladder. If you are still uncertain of what course you would like to take, look at courses such as a Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) degree, as the fundamentals will always have value in any career,” Charton ends.

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