Upskilling yourself script

In today’s episode, we will be discussing how to better yourself and your skillset through various options! Whether you’ve had loads of jobs or no jobs there is always time and valid reason to learn a new skill or even improve skills you already have to a new level. Today we’ll cover why you should learn new skills, what new skills would be good to learn, and how you can learn these new skills.

First, why should you upskill yourself? Well you can never put a price on self-improvement so learning any new skills will always be a worthy use of your time. However, we understand that it’s not as simple as this so let’s give it some more official justification. For any new jobseeker, they may know all too well the pain of applying for a lot of jobs and then not getting anywhere. Particularly if you’re a jobseeker who has just left college or university and haven’t had much or any job experience then their CV might look a little bare. While the qualifications you may have could be impressive, experience normally trumps everything (to an extent). When a company is looking over the many applications they receive then they won’t do an in-depth examination of a CV that some may hope for, they will look at your experience and your qualifications. Your skillset that you gain from courses can 100% be considered a part of your qualifications. So one reason to upskill yourself is to have an edge over your peers in terms of your qualifications. Another reason is that you may have once considered yourself knowledgeable in a certain area but its been a long time since you have practiced it or you’ve been away from work for a long period of time or whatever! You can take a course to retune yourself to that skill or advance yourself to a new level. For example, say you’re doing a fairly technical job that requires expertise with a certain programme. You may have learned how to use an older version of that programme or a new update has come out in your time off work that means you feel like you are not sure what you’re doing anymore. You can refresh yourself on the programme by taking a course at your current level or maybe the next level up so you learn how to be even better at your job! Another reason is that you may just not be sure what to do next. You could have just left education or a job and want to take some action and learn a new skill. It’s an excellent use of your time plus you can choose whatever skill you would like to learn then. Also, it could bring some light to something that you’ll end up enjoying but just don’t know it yet. This could then lead to new career opportunities or at the very least new hobbies and interests. Hopefully these reasons are enough to upskill yourself in most contexts but we can’t recommend it enough if you ever have the time free.

What skills would be good to learn? For those of you who have been keeping up with our blogs - which we highly recommend - then you may already know what we might suggest next. We wrote a blog recently on “hard skills” versus “soft skills”. Let’s summarise the difference between the two very quickly. A “hard skill” is something that is usually specific to a certain role or sector such as a forklift licence, an impressive qualification maybe but it won’t increase your chances getting a job where you don’t drive a forklift. Whereas a “soft skill” is applicable to any role and are usually qualities of your own person and in some cases cannot be taught, this could be a natural talent for being creative and arty. Both hard skills and soft skills can be included in some courses though and you should definitely consider these when you’re looking at your options for upskilling.

Now it’s all well and good to take a course for a new skill but we also need to consider that the most important factor in a CV’s success is its relevance to the job you are applying for. If you were to take a course for pottery for example and you could make a lovely mug that doesn’t even leak then that may be quite impressive but unless you were applying for a job as a potter then its relevance to your new job might be lacking. You could still put this skill down on your CV as a hobby or an interest and then your time and money spent on this course would not be wasted if the only reason you took this course was upskilling yourself for your career and to be impressive. Otherwise if you took the course because you wanted to make some mugs and plates, then make all the mugs and plates you desire. The point is, if you are going for a job that involves public speaking and presentations, then you would want to prove that you have the skills required. If you took a course in public speaking or something similar then you would definitely want to put that in your CV for this new job. It sounds incredibly obvious but showing that you have made the effort to learn public speaking as it’s a vital part of the job role shows that you have initiative, you’ve researched the job and prepared, and it shows that you are willing to identify your weaknesses and turn them into strengths.

So when it comes to upskilling yourself for your career’s sake, what skills may be best for you? Let’s discuss hard skills for a moment. There will 100% be courses for hard skills all over the place as they are qualifications that many people need to undertake for certain job roles anyway. A forklift licence for instance, many companies may have an internal programme for training and helping their employees get their licence but if you know that the job you want to go for requires you to drive a forklift, then consider getting trained and upskilling yourself in advance. A forklift licence is of course a fairly exaggerated example, so let’s be a bit more realistic. It could be that you need a driving licence for a delivery company, or a certain level of competence in a computer programme for a digital company. The list can honestly go on and getting any hard skill in advance will give you a very significant advantage over your peers when being considered for the position. This goes so far that some companies are limiting their applicant pool by only accepting applications from those who have already obtained certain hard skills. By upskilling yourself in the sector before having worked in it, you have proven your ability to perform a very important part of the job. You will also open doors to new opportunities and well-paying jobs with much smaller and more niche applicant pools if they are only accepting people with the qualifications you have gained. If you are very sure of yourself that you want to take a certain job, then upskilling yourself with a hard skill is the way to go. There is one downside however. If you are currently unsure of where you want your career to go, or when you are looking through the hard skill courses and none of them are really catching your eye or giving you inspiration, then you wouldn’t necessarily want to spend time learning a new skill that won’t be relevant to your next role. Like we said earlier, there isn’t much use in spending time or money to learn how to operate a forklift if you know full well you have no interest in working in a warehouse. It’s not right to recommend what hard skills we think you should try and upskill yourself in as it would push you down a certain path and career, so what we will recommend is that if you know what career you want to go into then do some research into the qualifications needed in those areas and see if you can get a headstart on them! Keep yourself up to par through practice and then show off your new qualifications.

If you wanted to keep your options open and still spend time learning a new skill then you should definitely consider a course for a soft skill. These courses are also widely available so you don’t need to worry about having to find one over a hard skill course. The best thing about a soft skill course is that not only will you improve your CV and career skills but also it will improve your personal life as well. If you found that you were really rubbish at organising or thought that you were always turning up late to things you were invited to unintentionally (because it’s good to be fashionably late sometimes) then upskilling yourself in these areas through a course can change that around. The types of soft skills that you can take as a course will vary from the provider but the soft skills but some of the most important skills that we recommend are the following:

1. Communication
   1. It’s very important for your career that you know how to speak politely, concisely, and professionally. This could be over the phone, over email, in person, or even in front of a crowd. How you engage with your colleagues and clientele will show how well you represent yourself and the company. If you feel that you don’t really get the professional lingo or that everyone around you is incredibly formal, then maybe you could upskill yourself in this area. However, a lot of smaller companies may take a more informal approach so it really depends on your surroundings at your planned job.
2. Teamwork and Leadership
   1. We’re putting these together as a lot of courses may teach you them together as well but you can get courses that focus on either one as well. Even if you aren’t applying for a leadership position it’s good to learn leadership skills as it shows you have the qualifications to be promoted to manager or to be able to run a team. That means you are opening the window for advancement. Additionally, leadership skills also show that you can make decisions yourself without constant supervision and the ability to resolve problems when they arise. Teamwork skills are quite similar to communication skills in that they are useful in both your personal and career life. Nearly every job role requires some essence of teamwork too.
3. Creativity and Problem solving
   1. We’ve paired these up for slightly different reasons. While there are certainly courses for creativity to improve your artistic aptitude (which is starting to veer into the hard skill category) you can take a soft skill course to upskill yourself in this area so you can take part in brainstorming sessions, communicate your ideas across more effectively to designers, artists, etc., or problem solve in creative ways. The ability to problem solve is so important as it means you can be trusted with some independence at work which will definitely lead to advancement. If your boss doesn’t have to supervise you then you will be a much more valued member of the team as their time will be spent elsewhere.
4. Time management/Organisation
   1. We mentioned this one earlier but this of course has universal benefits. In your career life, if you turn up late to work or to meetings then that will have much more obvious implications than turning up late to meet up with your friends. So that is one big reason to upskill yourself in time management. When it comes to organisation, that doesn’t just boil down to file management or something like that – though that is a major upside to having better organisation. Good organisation leads to greater efficiency in everything you do. You can do things quicker because you can dissect something down into its smaller parts. It’s a vital skill that helps in every avenue of work.

There are many more soft skills that we would recommend but the best advice we can give you is to think about what you feel is letting you down in some way (if there even is anything!) and then to self-improve. However, there is one important thing to mention about soft skill courses. As we have brought up and what you may have noticed about the skills we have recommended is that they aren’t necessarily qualifications but traits. Learning how to be creative doesn’t take one afternoon lesson and then, boom, you’re suddenly creative. Some of these courses go upwards of 3 months so that can be quite a significant time sink. Additionally, you can learn a significant amount but actually applying this information to your career is a different matter. Maybe you have learned how to effectively manage your time but you find yourself going back into old habits under pressure whereas someone who naturally has these traits or more self-discipline won’t struggle as much. The point is, a soft skill course doesn’t suddenly grant you these skills like some hard skill courses might after the learning period. The success of upskilling a soft skill will vary from person to person.

So we’ve talked about what to upskill, and why you should upskill, but how can you do it? We’ve mentioned many times this episode about taking courses. This is probably the most direct approach you could take and there are even a substantial amount of free courses that you can take. You can simply google “Free Online Courses” and there will be plenty of sites and options that you can look through. If you’re okay with paying a bit of money as well, then you may want to specify what kind of course, such as “Public Speaking Online Course”. If you don’t know which sites to trust or not sure where to look first then we recommend LinkedIn Learning, ALISON, Udemy, and Coursera to name a few! We’ve talked a lot about courses though so let’s discuss some alternative options.

If there’s one good thing that has come out of the last few years is the growth of all virtual connections. Be that working from home, in-person courses becoming online courses, or seminars and events going online! Webinars and virtual events have been a huge success and will continue for the foreseeable future meaning that an event that would have normally been held in Edinburgh now becomes widely accessible! Not only are these virtual events great for networking opportunities but there will usually be an event where they discuss changes in certain sectors and industries. For example, if you wanted a job or had a job within Social Media then there will likely be a virtual event where experts and veterans of the sector come to discuss their findings. They might say tell you what the new up to date techniques are for drawing in attention. Once you get back to your workplace you can apply those techniques yourself and lo and behold you’ve upskilled yourself without even realising it! There are so many benefits to these virtual events by just being surrounded by similar people in your field to talk to and discuss your sector. Most of these events don’t mind if you don’t have a job in the relevant field either as they are usually attended by many people of various fields.

Another way of upskilling is through volunteering and internships. This may apply more to those who haven’t currently had a job or much work experience but being able to work around and shadow employees who have been working in a job you’re looking for means you will very quickly pick up all the skills that they have. Plus volunteer work looks very good on a CV as it shows that you are driven by more than money. Volunteer work is great if you have some time on your hands as it can really open your eyes to what you enjoy doing as well. Having some work experience at an early stage can make a huge difference. Every time you get a new job and some valuable work experience, it becomes even easier to get the next job (providing you left your previous job for good reason). Some ways of finding charity or volunteer work near you is through online sites such as Do-it, CharityJob, Volunteering Matters or Reach Volunteering!

Finally, one of the absolute best ways to upskill yourself is by listening to this podcast! Podcasts, blogs, etc. that many provide including ourselves are a great and easy way to learn new skills through a quick and easy source! Our blogs and podcasts are easily accessible and can engage you on the go as well!