
Call on skills, develop new ones, to change lanes

WHEN my husband was told he was being retrenched thanks to the economic effects of Covid-19, it was a call we were expecting but it was still a shock.

Gosh, I thought to myself. What do we do now? My husband had just been retrenched, albeit temporarily under the Covid-19 Temporary Employer-Employee Relief Scheme, but just like our lockdown extension, it could easily get extended.

We sat down that night and prepped ourselves for a difficult conversation on our plan of action. With many people experiencing the same situation, this is some of the thinking that is influencing us:

Over the past few years, we have seen a language develop in businesses. A new narrative. A seed was planted as the first surge of the Fourth Industrial Revolution trends began to set in. It was a discussion about reskilling ourselves to prepare for the future.

Many futurists, who have been talking about this for the past five years, did not predict Covid-19. Everyone was focused on either the machines coming for our jobs or the



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impact global warming would have on business.

But regardless of whether it's machines taking over or a global pandemic which has ravaged our economies and left many without work, the message remains relevant.

Business consultant and author Peter Drucker puts it beautifully: "The only skill that will be important in the 21st century is the skill of learning new skills. Everything else will become obsolete over time."

In other words, reskilling.

For a long time, we have thought

in terms of degrees, certificates, MBAs, assessments and so on. All of which are important, but we have forgotten the idea of skills, or rather, knowledge applied. And the wonderful thing about reprogramming yourself to think in terms of skill sets is that more opportunity exists for you.

Case in point. Many years ago, my husband worked in the entertainment industry as a DJ and master of ceremonies (MC). Those are technical skills, but when we drilled down, we realised what that really gave him was an ability to connect with others, to entertain, and the confidence to speak to strangers, among many others. These came in handy when he decided to shift direction in life.

He ended up working as a "ground handler" for a tourism company – a taxi driver who drives tourists from the airport to the Kruger National Park and back. But to do that, he called on the skills he had as an MC, and also had to reskill himself. He had to learn how to drive a minibus, perform basic first-aid and improve his South African

general knowledge. But it did provide him with a way to leapfrog from one industry to another without much effort.

Financial well-being is not only about the financial – it is also about building resilience. This is the process we are following to set out a plan to weather the storm we are facing:

Step 1. Skilling: What skills do you currently have? It doesn't matter what they are; spend some time thinking and listing them. What can you do?

Step 2. Upskilling: Take the list of things you can do and spend some time researching which of those could have a longer shelf life after the crisis. Of these skills, which of them could you possibly spend time honing and refining? Can you take it from completing routine technical tasks requiring basic skills with general supervision or guidance to mastering the skill from broad to complex and specialised?

Step 3. Reskilling: Think about what industries would you like to work in which hold the test of time. Where do you see yourself and

what do you see yourself doing? Now, what do you need to do to get yourself there from a skill and knowledge perspective? What is one small step you can take today to move you closer to achieving that goal?

Step 4. Breathe. You are not alone in this – a lot of people are in the same situation. There is no need to feel ashamed – the pandemic is beyond anyone's control. Reach out, search for knowledge, ask for help, take small steps, and before you know it, things will be different.

A parting thought from Brené Brown, one of the most inspiring and relevant researchers right now on the importance of courage and vulnerability: "You have what it takes to survive the cringey, awkward moments.

"Knowing we have the strength to survive those moments and come out on the other side with new information, new ideas, new habits, new skills... that is how we get braver with our lives and with our hearts."

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