

How to buy career insurance

It's that time of the year when students scramble for college admissions. If you are a parent, whose child is going through the pangs of admission, as my wife and I are, it is hard to not allow the stress to get to you. And that's why you're likely to tune into war stories of other parents. And this year, my sense was that the biggest trepidations were reserved for engineering students.

Like this batchmate from school whose son wanted to study computer science. But with the information technology (IT) sector seemingly in doldrums, he wondered what to do. His engineering friends in his WhatsApp group weighed in with advice: Pursue any of the core engineering streams till the third year. And depending on the job market, decide on the area of specialisation. If machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things (IoT) or robotics are still the rage — or some entirely new speciality, pick one or two of those for special focus in the last year. And then hope and pray that the college placement service would do the rest.

Going through college admissions with an eye on the job market is a bit like Russian roulette. And every passing year, the situation gets worse. This year, with immigration laws being severely tightened in every market, including in the US, Australia, parts of Western Europe, UK, the prospects of studying and settling abroad have become infinitely tougher. Most international students now have very little option but to come back to their home base.

So will interesting, new jobs be easy to find in India? Your guess is as good as mine. Jobless growth is a phenomenon that we've all come to

accept. And to queer the pitch, it is getting harder and harder to predict which jobs will stay relevant. So I dialled a bunch of friends in IT and in

learning who know a thing or two about the future of skills, jobs and education sector. Based on those candid conversations, here are a few pointers for parents of young people. (I've attempted cut out the fancy jargon and keep it simple.)



STRATEGIC INTENT

INDRAJIT GUPTA

Stagnancy won't be tolerated anymore

First, the spectre of job losses in the IT sector. Yes, the IT industry is rebooting itself. However, the extent of job losses haven't been anything

alarming. Mid-career people who've lost jobs in the large IT companies were those who refused to reskill themselves. They were comfortable doing what they had done for the last decade or so. And refused to learn new skills. Stagnancy may have been tolerated earlier, but with margins and growth slowing down, no IT company can hold on to such people. You can't afford to be a "glorified mail box", as someone told me, banking on just project management skills. You need real engineering and coding skills that are relevant. If you live in denial and refuse to move along, it will be the beginning of the end for your career.

Now, that can't be such a bad thing. Not just in IT, but in any industry.

Don't wait for things to happen, make them happen

Clients around the world are crying out for help. It could be a new competitor eating their lunch. Or a new technology that's suddenly upending old ways of working. From retail, banking, health care

to hospitality and renewable energy, change is everywhere. Most times, the change is so overwhelming that clients don't know what they need. And you've got to engage deeply to understand their business. And solve their problems. Sounds simple? Not quite. At least one Indian IT CEO that I know has cried himself hoarse about the need for his teams to be more proactive about problem solving. Don't wait for clients to tell you. Step in and figure out what needs to be done. And just do it. This is where rigor mortis sets in. If all you've done is to follow instructions all your life, it is unlikely that you'd be able to think for yourself. After all, you can't take charge of your client's destiny, if you don't have a perspective of where your own career is headed.

Having a problem solving mindset won't just be useful, it will be essential.

Tech may be expanding its tentacles, but human ingenuity isn't going away

While AI and automation will cut out mundane tasks, there will be always be need for human intelligence to add value and push the envelope. This came out loud and clear. And if tech changes are likely to become more and more ephemeral, how do you hope to stay relevant? That's why learnability is key.

And guess what? Age has very little to do with it. I know at least a handful of leaders in their fifties and sixties who are just as intellectually curious as they were when they were in their twenties. They read voraciously, love to seek out and soak in new learnings experiences and have no qualms about learning from young people.

I'm willing to bet that a learning mindset is your best insurance for the future.

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