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Opinion: You must be a life-long learner to compete



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It's time to go back to school. Long-term success now requires it.

Rapid technology advances, complex global networks and far-reaching ethical implications of our behaviors require a mindset of continuous technical and business education, evolving leadership skills (particularly in the areas of diversity and inclusion) and a deepening connection with our innate wisdom.

To stay ahead of new technology, harness changing business dynamics and design innovative offerings, we must be life-long learners. Even if you are not personally coding, building hardware or deploying machine learning or artificial intelligence, you must understand their technical foundations to compete in a world increasingly driven by algorithms and data-driven insights. It goes beyond technology — organizational operating models also must evolve, presenting fascinating leadership and management challenges.

There are countless resources available for learning in these domains, including self-paced online coding courses, executive education at leading business schools (including online), innovation-centric blogs, meetups and industry groups and books for every level of technical sophistication. Carve out time for continuing education as a priority and watch your approach to innovation shift.

Extensive research continues to show us that diverse teams improve the bottom line. The Wall Street Journal, in its first ranking of corporate sectors and S&P 500 companies based on diversity and inclusion, found that “diverse and inclusive cultures are providing companies with a competitive edge over their peers.”

Whether you are a teammate or a leader, consciously and proactively getting the best out of your diverse teams is crucial for competitive advantage. It also makes for a richer and more rewarding work environment.

But this doesn't necessarily come naturally. Humans have subconscious mental machinery designed to make judgments and engage in tribal behavior — but by learning about our innate tendencies, we can make better choices. At the same time, historical cultural and organizational systems must be re-evaluated and changed at a fundamental level. Invest in learning the science of these behaviors. Recognize them in yourself and in others. Learn about unconscious bias. Then invest in structural changes at your organization.

In our highest-performing flow-state moments, we are acting from a place beyond thought, from a deeper capacity. We forget time, get out of our own way and execute at our highest potential with limitless creativity. But we live in a world that often tells us otherwise, admonishing us to work harder and longer hours, disparaging intuition or distracting us with endless competition for our limited attention.

Devoting time to mindfulness and realizing a connection with a deeper wisdom unlocks creativity, connects us to our fellow human beings and helps us navigate our changing world with joy and equanimity. In the course of your day, whether it's meditating, talking with an executive coach dedicated to your growth and realization, spending time in nature or simply creating a few moments of quiet, take time to find connection to something deeper, something that is shared and common with everyone you come into contact with.

Your personal continuous learning is one of the most important things in which to invest your time, energy and mindset. As side perks, consider the benefits of the improved engagement, creativity and enthusiasm you will bring to your workplace every day.