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Horizons

Life Skills- Finding the Right Recipe for Success



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Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

Role models are inspirational and are important part of one's support system. With globalization in place, soft skills like communication, diplomacy and negotiation abilities all occupy critical place in personal development. While management and engineering schools have dedicated curriculum dealing with such skills in upper classes, experience, practical learning, and education are needed to gain handle on life skills.

Next-generation workforce should have the ability to adapt to different channels of management. Particularly in start-ups and growing organization nimbleness and creating family atmosphere is necessary stated Bengaluru-based Ramanujam Raghuraman, who retired from IT sector after 24-years. As the saying goes, by breaking bread, we break icy relationship. Agreeing to this concept, Raghuraman quipped that it is good to know cooking as well. These days, MNCs have open kitchen concept as well so that people and mix and discuss while cooking, creating more relaxed atmospheres.

Importance of Life Skills

Interactions with society, active participation in society such as volunteer services, engaging in civic activities as appropriate are some of the best possible ways to acquire these skills and improve leadership qualities. Societal skills are valued in developed economies such as the United States which is evident in the holistic evaluation of application to universities. School grades are a component in evaluating candidates' application for college admissions.

Extracurricular activities, social skills, and leadership abilities are all considered. A recent ruling from the United States' Supreme Court has made the quota/identity consideration illegal in college admissions. Such a ruling makes great emphasis on "self-essays" by students, which articulate the interest, achievements, and extra academic accomplishments of a particular student. Additionally, such a requirement displays student's communication and convincing skills. In the post COVID-19 era, leading universities have made quantitative tests like SAT and GRE not mandatory which again shines light on the integrated approach.



Since the 1980s, while developing economies focused much on imparting technical skills through the four-year college programs, developed economies still place good emphasis on liberal education imparting overall skills. Public education system which relies on taxpayers' money starting from middle school, impart education, where soft skills are also valued. Public schools have music, sports, and arts as part of curriculum, which are taken seriously. At least from the ninth grade many students aspiring for STEM and medical qualifications engage in volunteering, laboratory research, etc. While such efforts should not just be a tick mark in a checklist, it is pleasing to report that such efforts are accepted as part of necessity and get etched in the minds of youngsters. Looking at the biography of leaders and serious contenders for public offices, they have been actively engaged in civic and social activities since school days.

Ramanujan Raghuraman

People Skills

Developed economies emphasize the importance of overall personality for assuming leadership roles in educational, financial, and professional institutions. Globally, management institutions place weightage to work experience, communication, and demonstrable leadership abilities. Medical schools in the United States and Canada, where the MD (Doctor of Medicine) is a program after qualifying college level pre-med curriculum requirements. Entrance to medical schools being highly competitive in the North America, in addition to exemplary academic records insist on volunteering, research and laboratory experience, shadowing experience in medical set-ups to name a few.

Students and parents are encouraged to be initiative-taking in developing these strategic abilities prior to obtaining professional qualifications so that a qualified professional would have acquired necessary skills like diplomacy, dealing with tough situations and communicating such as relaying an advanced stage of cancer to patients, counseling, etc.

People skills are needed to solve complex problems in the society. Stating that each society has its identity based on culture, language, religious etc. As is the case in India, common thread such as patriotism is the uniting factor. Whenever there seems to have cracks in society, leaders with effective outreach and convincing skills are needed, stated Raghuraman. Travel and communication using all available online platforms should be utilized says Raghuraman, based on his personal experience of interacting with his extended family and friends circle spread across the world from Indonesia to Canada. Global understanding and open mindset come easily to us these days due to such interactions adds Raghuraman.

Raising an interesting point, Badri Narayanan Gopalakrishnan, Senior Fellow with NITI Ayog and courtesy faculty at Oregon State University views that information-based knowledge skills can take back seat due to the readily available nature of information these days.

Strategic & Critical Thinking

Strategic and critical thinking capabilities are needed alongside good knowledge on global cultures. Agreeing with my point Badri Gopalakrishnan adds, "Basics in our civilization are becoming more important from a skill point of view in the future. For example, our ancestors used to follow fundamental principles such as universal humanism, respect for diversity, inclusivity, and empathy as principles in day to day lives. Nowadays, people have diverged so much from these principles that some of them have become skills to develop!"

In this information age, critical understanding is needed to differentiate news from fake news states Badri Gopalakrishnan.

As an observation, Badri points out, "Zero sum thinking has been increasingly dominating the imagination of youngsters. Essentially, they think one's loss is another's gain - so we must be aggressive to compete with others. However, I do not think that can take us too far. We must focus on our own potential and achieve the best therein."

Learning from the Society and Colleagues

Citing the loss of his parents when he was young, Raghuraman advises that relying on close friends and society helps. Agreeing that life is a journey and learning should be part of it, he advises that parents should also be constant learners as the needs of understanding and skillsets have changed. Parents should also be learners if they want youngsters to learn and improve, adds Raghuraman.

Challenges provide opportunities agrees Badri Gopalakrishnan. By providing a situation from his life, he states, "When I started doing my PhD in economics, I had no formal training in economics before, apart from a lot of interest and some initial training that I was just beginning to take up. My first degree was BTech in textile technology. So, it was a major challenge wherein I had to pursue innovative research on a subject that I was just beginning to learn. I decided to leverage my expertise and knowledge that I had gained until then in textile industry to develop research ideas on economic issues in the industry. I was able to effectively face this formidable challenge by blending my existing expertise with the new knowledge that I was gaining."



One may retire from active employment, but that is not end of journey. There are so many opportunities to engage with society and lend helping hand to others. I have many interests such as learning texts and travelling, such interests attract us to people who share the same platform—these are opportunities for us to interact and offer services to help others. Seniors like me must engage with youngsters and such meetings must be encouraged, which will be important forums for learning life skills, according to Ramanujam Raghuraman.

Badri Gopalakrishnan

Learn to respect others and the views of others. From his own experience with the Government of India, Badri cites, "When I joined the Government of India, there were many of my academic and other professional friends who warned me of many challenges that I would face - such as lack of reception for someone with so much academic and industry experience abroad. But I faced the situation with respect for others and it worked."

Multiple Skillsets for Life

Ongoing war in Eastern Europe, diplomatic tensions, sluggish economy in some parts of the world necessitate the need for an overall personality development.

As a father of a son in the middle school, I am convinced that to succeed in this complicated and complex world, subject matter expertise complemented by life skills will be a boom.

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