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## 7 Critical Skills for the Jobs of the Future

By **Raya Bidshahri** - Jul 04, 2017

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We live in a world of accelerating change. New industries are constantly being born and old ones are becoming obsolete. A **report by the World Economic Forum** reveals that almost 65 percent of the jobs elementary school students will be doing in the future do not even exist yet. Both the workforce and our knowledge base are rapidly evolving.

Combined with the effects of technological automation on the workforce, this leaves us with a crucial question: What are the skills future generations will need?

Education expert Tony Wagner has spent a lifetime trying to answer this very question. Through investigating the education sector, interviewing industry leaders and studying the global workforce at large, **Wagner has identified seven survival skills of the future**. These are skills and mindsets young people absolutely need in order to meet their full potential.

### 1. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

We spend so much time teaching students how to answer questions that we often neglect to teach them how to ask them. Asking questions—and asking good ones—is a foundation of critical thinking. Before you can solve a problem, you must be able to critically analyze and

question what is causing it. This is why critical thinking and problem solving are coupled together.

Wagner notes the workforce today is organized very differently than it was a few years ago. What we are seeing are diverse teams working on specific problems, as opposed to specific specialties. Your manager doesn't have all the answers and solutions—you have to work to find them.

Above all, this skill set builds the very foundation of innovation. We have to have the ability to question the status quo and criticize it before we can innovate and prescribe an alternative.

## 2. Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence

One of the major trends today is the rise of the contingent workforce. **In the next five years**, non-permanent and remote workers are expected to make up 40 percent of the average company's total workforce. We are even seeing a greater percentage of full-time employees working on the cloud. Multinational corporations are having their teams of employees collaborate at different offices across the planet.

Technology has allowed work and collaboration to transcend geographical boundaries, and that's truly exciting. However, collaboration across digital networks and with individuals from radically different backgrounds is something our youth needs to be prepared for. According to a **New Horizons report** on education, we should see an increasing focus on global online collaboration, where "digital tools are used to support interactions around curricular objectives and promote intercultural understanding."

Within these contexts, leadership among a team is no longer about commanding with top-down authority, but rather about leading by influence. Ultimately, as Wagner points out, "It's about how citizens make change today in their local communities—by trying to influence diverse groups and then creating alliances of groups who work together toward a common goal."

## 3. Agility and Adaptability

We live in a VUCA (Volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world. Hence, It's important to be able to adapt and re-define one's strategy.

In their book, "**Critical Thinking: How to Prepare Students for a Rapidly Changing World**," Richard Paul & Dillion Beach note how traditionally our education and work mindset has been designed for routine and fixed procedure. "We learned how to do something once, and then we did it over and over. Learning meant becoming habituated," they write. "But what is it to learn to continually re-learn? To be comfortable with perpetual re-learning?"

In the post-industrial era, the impact of technology has meant we have to be agile and adaptive to unpredictable consequences of disruption. We may have to learn skills and mindsets on

demand and set aside ones that are no longer required.

## 4. Initiative and Entrepreneurship

Traditionally, initiative has been something students show in spite of or in addition to their schoolwork. For most students, developing a sense of initiative and entrepreneurial skills has often been part of their extracurricular activities. With an emphasis on short-term tests and knowledge, most curricula have not been designed to inspire doers and innovators.

Are we teaching our youth to lead? Are we encouraging them to take initiative? Are we empowering them to solve global challenges? Throughout his research, Wagner has found that even in corporate settings, business leaders are struggling to find employees who consistently “seek out new opportunities, ideas and strategies for improvement.”

## 5. Effective Oral and Written Communication

A study by [the Partnership for 21st Century Skills](#) showed that about 89 percent of employer respondents report high school graduate entrants as “deficient” in communication.

Clear communication isn't just a matter of proper use of language and grammar. In many ways, communicating clearly is an extension of thinking clearly. Can you present your argument persuasively? Can you inspire others with passion? Can you concisely capture the highlights of what you are trying to say? Can you promote yourself or a product?

Billionaire entrepreneur Richard Branson has famously said “Communication is the most important skill any leader can possess.” Like many, he has noted it is a skill that can be learned and consequently used to open many opportunities.

## 6. Assessing and Analyzing Information

We now live in the information age. Every day we create 2.5 quintillion bytes of data. As [this infographic](#) shows, this would fill 10 million Blu-ray disks.

While our access to information has dramatically increased, so has our access to misinformation. While navigating the digital world, very few students have been taught how to assess the source and evaluate the content of the information they access. Moreover, this information is continuously evolving as we update our knowledge base faster than ever before.

Furthermore, in the age of fake news, an active and informed citizen will have to be able to assess information from many different sources through a critical lens.

## 7. Curiosity and Imagination

Curiosity is a powerful driver of new knowledge and innovation. It is by channeling a child-like

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We consistently spoon-feed students with information instead of empowering them to ask questions and seek answers. Inquisitiveness and thinking outside the box need to be treated with the same level of importance the school system gives to physics or math.

## Transforming the Future of Education

There is a stark contrast between these seven survival skills of the future and the focus of education today. Instead of teaching students to answer questions, we should teach them to ask them. Instead of preparing them for college, we should prepare them for life.

Beyond creating better employees, we must aim to create better leaders and innovators. Doing so will not only radically transform the future of education and the workforce, it will also transform the world we live in.

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