

SUMMARY

FUTURE FIT

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Summary of “Future Fit” by Andrea Clarke

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Learn how to get it in competitive shape.

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Introduction

My dad is a talented and intelligent engineer; he can troubleshoot complex pieces of machinery in his sleep. But asking him to like my latest Instagram is like asking him to work his engineering magic on machinery from outer space. However, that doesn't mean he's stupid; far from it! Instead, it means that I'm asking him to navigate technology that is new and puzzling to him. And after all, can you really blame him for his confusion? The inner workings of Instagram are radically different from the engineering technology he had years to learn about and practice with. And if you, like me, are a millennial with parents who are not accustomed to social media and technology, then you know that this experience is not limited to my dad. It is, in fact, the all-too-common story of many older professionals who are gifted in their fields but struggle with the "newfangled technology" that is second nature to kids of today.

For the most part, we're happy to accept this. We patiently explain Instagram to our parents or help our grandmas set up facebook. For the most part, we're happy to help them without complaint, as long as we're allowed a good chuckle at their questions like, "Where's the 'dot com' button?" and "What's a post?" But have you ever stopped to consider the fact that, one day, your generation might be in the same boat? In fact, it's more likely than you think! To confirm this theory, we have only to compare ourselves to our younger siblings, who grew up with more technology at their fingertips than we could have imagined at their age. While 90s kids were delighted by the arrival of their first flip phone, our little brothers' generation could work an iPad while they were still in diapers. And because technology is only going to continue evolving, it stands to reason that we will one day be left behind as well, as clueless and laughable as our parents.

So, how do we stop that from happening? How can we stay current and competitive in an ever-evolving job market? Over the course of this summary, we'll take stock of some top tips that will help us do just that.

What's Your Brand?

We typically think of brands as being exclusive to companies or celebrities. But the advent of social media means that everyone is faced with the challenge of cultivating a “personal brand”-- an easily conveyable vibe that characterizes you, your values, and your sense of style. And although that might sound overwhelming, the truth is that this pressure has been present through time immemorial; we're all faced with the challenge of selling ourselves in both the personal and professional spheres and defining what makes us unique. The only difference is that social media has made that necessity more immediate and more public. As a result, your brand can also be a valuable asset in your career and it can help you get ahead of your competition. So, how do you build your personal brand? And what does the “right” brand look like?

The author observes that when it comes to your personal brand, employers are asking many of the same questions that you ask as a customer. For example, when you're deciding whether or not to shop with a certain company, you have a variety of questions like, “Is this brand reliable? Do they produce items of good quality? What are their values? What makes them different?” The answers to these questions help you formulate your opinion of a brand and determine whether you want to support them. So, it stands to reason that when people are trying to decide whether to hire you, be your friend, or your network with you, they would want answers to these same questions as well. Knowing this can therefore help you create a profile that answers these questions.

So, how can you convey your brand? What does that look like? If you want to think about marketing yourself through an interview or a resume, you can start by formulating the answers to the questions we just discussed and developing a clear sense of self. So, for example, if you know that you're reliable, trustworthy, enthusiastic, and confident, then your brand is going to be tailored to communicating those qualities. That means your resume

won't be a vague hodgepodge of assorted college credits and work experience. Instead, you'll choose highly specific examples that showcase the core elements of your brand. For example, you'll list an award you received that highlights your leadership skills. You'll show off your volunteer experience so employers can see that you're dedicated, hard-working, and altruistic. Examples of volunteer work will also help you subtly communicate the values and causes that are important to you.

Your resume should also be carefully curated to showcase the unique and valuable experience that you bring to the table. Rather than simply conveying the fact that you've worked somewhere in some capacity, choose specific examples that highlight your involvement in a niche area. For example, if you're passionate about superior customer service, don't leave your resume at something vague like, "Customer Service Rep at Hobby Lobby for 2 years." Instead, describe your experience with action words that reflect your passion for customer service and back them up with other examples from volunteer work, college classes, or additional work experience that sends a clear and cohesive message to employers. As you can see from these examples, "building your personal brand" sounds pretty intimidating, but when you really dive in to the specifics, it's not that hard at all!

Adapt to Survive

In this chapter, we're going to refer back to the example we used earlier in the introduction, about our tech-challenged parents. Because the rapid onset of new technology could easily land us in the same boat, it's important to expand on this example and learn how we can avoid this same fate. Building our personal brand is a great stepping stone on the path to becoming relevant, but we can't stop there. So, what's our next step? The author observes that our next step should be a mindset of constant evolution; we can think of it as "adapting to survive," just as our early Neanderthal ancestors did. So, let's take a closer look at this mentality in practice.

If tech-challenged Baby Boomers can be considered one side of the coin, then the reverse is those people who are obsessed with new technology. You probably know a few of them, in fact; these are the people who camp outside all night or wait in line for hours to buy the latest iPhone or newest innovation in technology. These are the people who are obsessed with all things shiny, new, and modern. There's no question that this is an expensive-- and somewhat silly-- hobby, so if that's not a lifestyle you want to emulate, don't worry! You don't have to. But even if you don't instantly rush out to consume the newest tech for yourself, you should at least be aware of it. So, for example, if your workplace unveils a new type of software or an innovative way of doing things, resist the temptation to be a Luddite. Clinging to the known and familiar is comfortable and all of us would prefer to stay ensconced in our routine. But refusing to adapt is the first step to becoming obsolete. So, jump on the bandwagon of trying new things! At the very least, this habit will make you more informed and more employable and that's always a good thing!

This attitude can also help you with the next step: sensing the winds of change. One quality that sets successful people apart is their ability to anticipate new trends before they catch on. This is the definitive characteristic of most successful tech companies; it's what helps them

adapt to stay one step ahead of their competition. The same should be true for you. So, keep your ear to the ground and be aware of new developments in your industry. And if you sense your company is lagging behind, you can even take initiative and draw your boss' attention to your intel! This is another great way to get ahead and show that you're committed to evolving.

But of course, before you can do any of this, you have to let go of what's holding you back. And if you, like your parents and grandparents, find yourself feeling a little apprehensive of change, that's okay! You're not alone in that feeling. But it's not okay to dwell there. Adapting can be scary, especially if it means unlearning everything you already know and training yourself to embrace a whole new mindset. But as scary as it seems, change is good! As human beings, our legacy is one of proud evolution and progression. Compared to other animals, we have an unparalleled ability to absorb new information and incorporate it into our lives. This resilience and adaptability means that we are capable of constant growth and improvement and that's something to be proud of. So, as you cultivate your ability to change, don't just think of it as becoming a better employee-- think of this as an opportunity to become a better citizen of the world.

The Leadership of the Future

Do you ever worry that human beings will one day be obsolete? Do you ever fear that you're going to be replaced by machines? Lots of people can relate to these fears because they tap into the deep-seated fear of change we discussed in the previous chapter. And because these fears are grounded in a nugget of truth, however small, this gives us the impression that they are valid and therefore deserving of our energy and attention. However, the author wants to remind you that nothing productive comes of worrying about the future of our jobs. Instead, those fears are a call to redirect our thinking and concentrate our energy on something that can generate positive change. Cultivating our creativity is one example of a constructive step we can take because this will help us develop the skills necessary to become essential leaders in the future. The author posits that this is important because our relationship with technology and social media will likely look very different in the future. And, like all other facets of adaptability, we need to be prepared for that.

So, what does that future look like? And why is creativity such an essential skill? The author acknowledges that one reason is because it's highly likely that machines may take over some jobs that have been formerly held by humans. However, that's more likely to occur in positions that can be easily automated like data entry, scanning, and-- occasionally-- problem solving. After all, if a machine can cheaply and effectively record data, it's understandable that employers might gravitate toward utilizing that machine. But creativity is one skill that is uniquely human. No matter what else we can train a machine to do, our ability to come up with ideas, to create something new, and to see the world in a unique way is rare and special.

So, if you want to cultivate your adaptability and demonstrate your relevance in the workplace, pursuing your creative potential is a great place to start! The author observes that a process known as "forced adaptation" is great for stimulating your creative juices because it requires you to do

new and unfamiliar things. It doesn't have to be anything especially dangerous or scary-- it just might involve doing something you've never done before! This is especially helpful because the human mind craves routine and routine is the enemy of creativity. So, if you want to get your creative juices flowing, try something outside your comfort zone. Attempt to paint, for example, or try learning a new language. If you've always considered yourself to be uncoordinated, try learning to work with your hands. No matter what you try, the important thing is to stimulate your creativity and open yourself up to embracing new experiences.

Studies show that creativity can also improve your leadership and communication skills! And if you think about the core tenets of creativity-- an eagerness to learn, to grow, and to bring something new and beautiful into the world-- you can easily see why that would be true. After all, if you're open to new experiences and new skills, you're also more likely to be open to cultivating collaboration and hearing someone else's point of view. The author asserts that this type of leadership will become crucial in the future because our culture is already aiming to eliminate the stodgy, elitist form of leadership that has characterized managerial positions for years. So, if you can learn to lead by listening and growing with others instead of assuming that everyone needs to follow your example, you're already on a great path to developing the leadership skills of the future!

Final Summary

When we look ahead to the future, we can be sure of only one thing: change is the only constant. We may not know what the future will hold, what our jobs will look like, or even if our position will still be relevant, but we do know that the world is constantly changing. Because of this, we also know that we will need to adapt if we want to survive. So, if you want to stay relevant and competitive in our ever-evolving global marketplace, the author suggests the following strategies.

Building your personal brand is one great way to get ahead. Building your brand will help you identify your definitive best qualities and showcase them to future employees and connections. Next, you should attempt to evolve with new trends in technology and listen for the winds of change. This will help you stay on top of new trends as they arise and train you out of complacency. And last but not least, remember to cultivate your creativity and focus on developing the leadership skills of the future.



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