

Stay ahead of the obsolescence curve by expanding your workplace capabilities.

Stretch Yourself to Remain Relevant

BY KARIE WILLYERD AND BARBARA MISTICK

In an extensive study conducted by researchers at Oxford University, 47 percent of U.S. jobs were classified as being at high risk for replacement with computerization or automation, and another 19 percent at medium risk. Whether software or hardware, computerization is going to affect jobs dramatically in the next decade—perhaps more than any decade in history.

In the study, high wages and educational attainment showed a strong negative relationship with the likelihood of being computerized. In other words, jobs that currently require having an advanced education resulting in high wages have a big bull's-eye on them.



PHOTO: GETTY

At risk of becoming obsolete

If you're worried about becoming obsolete, you have company. In a 27-country survey we conducted in collaboration with SAP and Oxford Economics, the number one concern of employees around the world was that their job would change and make them obsolete. Only 50 percent said they feel the skills they have now will be sufficient in just three years. More disconcerting, only 34 percent of people said their employers are able to help them acquire new skills to prepare them for tomorrow. Our personal sell-by date is looming ever closer.

From interviews and write-in comments on our survey, we found three resounding themes that portray the context in which we are working and that must be addressed in any solution. We call these the stretch imperatives:

- It's all on you—You care the most about your career and you are the only one who can drive your career development.
- You need options—Not everyone is able or willing to relocate or make a major career shift if the company demands it; you need options from which to choose in considering how to prepare for tomorrow.
- You have dreams—Whether those dreams are in the organization you are in now, somewhere else, or as your own boss, you dream about doing more.

So how do we stay relevant in our work lives? Our answer: Stretch. If we are to be ahead of the obsolescence curve, we must envision the future workplace and prepare for it by stretching our capabilities and outlook in relentless pursuit of our career goals. In practical terms, that means:

- Reach beyond your capabilities of today, to be ready for tomorrow.
- Expand your viewpoints and skills beyond your current state.

REACH BEYOND YOUR CAPABILITIES OF TODAY, TO BE READY FOR TOMORROW.

- Be relentlessly resourceful in pursuing your career dreams.

We discovered five practices that successful people use to personally stretch themselves and, in so doing, stay ahead of the obsolescence curve:

- Learn on the fly in any situation and be a professional informal learner.
- Be open in your thinking to a world beyond where you are now.
- Build a diverse network so that you can connect to the people who can help you make your future happen.
- Be greedy about experiences that will prepare you for tomorrow.
- Bounce forward to stay motivated through the ups and downs of a career.

Take control of your career

To get started, here are three of our 29 strategies that support the practices so you can push out your sell-by-date.

Pick a development project. We can approach work with one of three stances: Just get it done, do it well, or really learn from the project.

If your motto is to just get it done, you likely will not learn much from the project. By doing it well, at least you learn a little because you do some benchmarking of what “good” looks like.

But if you decide to really learn while doing a project, you might go talk to experts, do some research, take a class, read a book, or undertake other spontaneous learning. We can't have everything be a development project, so pick one. You might have to move another project to the “just get it done” category to allot room for a development project.

Strive for five to thrive. The expert learners we talked to rely heavily on other people to keep them up to date. The best network stretches you.

While you may have hundreds of people in your network, who are the five people who can help you be a better person, especially when it comes to your work? Every time you are with them, you feel you have upped your game and are thinking a little differently. Because we can't maintain close connections to everyone in our network, focus on the five you could groom to help you thrive. Make sure you prioritize your calendar to spend time with them.

Get in over your head. Routinely. When was the last time you felt like you were in a little bit over your head at work? That feeling is a good thing, because it means you are stretching beyond your comfort zone and learning new things. Aim to feel in over your head at least every 90 days to ensure you are continuously pushing yourself to the next level.

To prepare for tomorrow's workplace and put yourself in control of the career of your dreams, you must personally stretch. Stretch to become your best self, the person who you know you can be.

■ **Karie Willyerd** is a workplace futurist for SuccessFactors, an SAP company, and former chief learning officer of Sun Microsystems; karie.willyerd@sap.com, @angler.

■ **Barbara Mistick** is president of Wilson College and former president of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. She is co-author, with Willyerd, of the upcoming book *Stretch: How to Future-Proof Yourself for Tomorrow's Workplace*; bmistick@gmail.com, @barbarakmistick.



talent development

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!



YES, I would like to subscribe to TD!

Subscriber Information

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Job Title: _____ Company Name: _____

Address 1: _____

Address 2: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____ Country: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Subscription Type

Individual (U.S.) - \$150

Individual (Outside the U.S.) - \$216

Institutional (U.S.) - \$300

Institutional (Outside the U.S.) - \$366

Get even more when you become a member of ATD! All ATD memberships include a monthly subscription to *TD* magazine, plus access to webcasts, publications, research, and discounts on conferences.

Professional Membership (One Year) - \$229

Professional Plus Membership (One Year) - \$349

Payment Type

VISA

MasterCard

American Express

Discover

Check in USD Payable to *TD* magazine

Payment Details

Name on Card: _____ Card Number: _____

Exp. Date: _____ Security Code: _____ Signature: _____

Check Number: _____

Return Form to:

ATD Subscriptions | PO Box 1567 | Merrifield, VA 22116-1567

FAX: 703.299.8723

Prices valid through December 31, 2015. *TD* magazine is published by the Association for Talent Development, formerly ASTD.

071426.31610

Order online at www.td.org/tdsub

Copyright ATD 2015

