

# ENSURING YOUR EMPLOYABILITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

by David J. Bowman

It seems the world is changing faster every day. Almost overnight, business has become global. Technology is outdated in a few short weeks, or months. Customer tastes change at lightening speed. Increasingly, jobs are being outsourced. The pace can be dizzying.

Employees, of course, must stay current with all of these changes, or employers will find others – who are current – to take their place. But, the “how-to” of staying current is confusing, because it too changes quickly. So, what should you be doing to maintain your continued value? What are the guidelines to ensure your employability today? Let’s look at several of these.

**Ability to work in teams.** Very few of us work alone today. Most work is accomplished by two or more – often in groups, or teams. In fact, one concept of teaming is the self-managed team, in which there is no boss, or supervisor. There’s only a team leader, who is actually a peer of the rest of the members. Important to the idea of team productivity is participative management. No longer does the team leader say things like, “do it my way, or it’s the highway for you!” Now, it’s *group-think* and decisions are made democratically. So, learn to work within a team to build your value to an employer.

**Computer and hi-tech proficiency.** Regardless of your industry, computers and advancing technology will continue to have an ever increasing dramatic impact. The rapid development of hardware and software is mind boggling. Consider the fact that today we can have video conferencing to a world-wide audience, and it’s from a single computer with a camera and microphone. Products and even political campaigns are launched via the internet. Missiles can be launched from great distances and hit targets within inches of the intended mark. Remember how quickly we went from snail mail and the telephone, to faxes, and then to e-mail? In five years, perhaps we’ll be communicating *in-person* with voice and video?

Biotechnology is advancing so quickly, some medical experts predict we may wipe out many major human diseases in just a few short years.

How current are you with computer and other hi-tech advances in your industry? If you aren’t at cutting-edge, you’d better get back to school quickly.

**Customer focus.** Oh, how important this one is. But, it seems to be practiced so seldom. Why is it that many organizations put their least trained, rudest employees at the front lines of their businesses – to greet the customer. Consider the phone companies and banks (to name only two). When was the last time you talked with a human being on the phone? It seems these organizations exist simply because of their enormous size – certainly not because of their customer focus. In reality, a business continues only because of customers, and when customers vote “no” with their pocket books, well...

So, a great way to make yourself valuable to employers is to have a focus on customers, and know how to create their loyalty.

**Knowledge of business trends.** Is there an industry today that isn’t in the midst of change? I can’t think of one. Change, of course, means obsolescence for those who don’t remain current. What are the new methods of producing and delivering products and services in your business, and who is using them? What are the changing tastes of the market? What are the newest techniques for improving productivity, and who uses them? These, of course, are only a few of the many questions you should be asking yourself about *knowing* your business. If you don’t know the answers, you’d better find them.

**Communication ability.** No, I don't mean communication technology. I'm referring to your ability to communicate with others in both a *verbal* and *written* form. Can you present written proposals in a crisp, concise way? Are you able to verbally communicate effectively with customers and internal colleagues?

If your verbal skills need improvement, I suggest you join organizations like Toastmasters, which can help improve your public speaking ability. If your writing ability isn't top notch, you might consider attending an adult education writing class at a local high school, or university. There are many types of writing improvement classes, and any one of them could make a big difference in your value to an employer.

**Lifelong learning.** Just because you've graduated from formal schooling, doesn't mean you can stop learning. Certainly not in the changing world of today! You must keep yourself at cutting-edge in knowledge about your business, as well as about the world in general. How aware are you about the global economics of your industry and the world? When did you last attend a seminar and/or class on a topic of importance to your career and job? How often do you read industry periodicals, as well as a general purpose newspaper?

Unaware people don't have much strategic value to their employers. Don't let a more knowledgeable person edge you out of a promotion, or even your job.

**Cultural sensitivity.** North America is a region of racial and ethnic mix. It has many cultures and heritages. And, this multi-culturalism will continue, in our social lives and in the workplace. In fact, our laws ensure that it will continue. For you to remain valuable to your employer, you must respect and be able to work with those of other ethnicities and from other cultures. Indeed, it's often the abilities and ideas from different backgrounds that best and most effectively solve problems, or create new products, services and methods of doing things. Respect and embrace those of different descent. It will make you a valued citizen of the twenty first century!

*David Bowman is chairman and founder of TTG Consultants/Lincolnshire, located in Los Angeles.*