

How did you start your first job? With ten years of experience?



Saturday afternoon, I spoke with the daughter of one of my clients. Bright, energetic, articulate, accomplished. Her English is twice as good as mine. The kind of young professional I would have been delighted to recruit. For almost any starter job.

She applies for around five jobs a day on LinkedIn. Almost no responses. No interviews.

"Not enough experience."

Increasingly, my clients ask me how their children can enter the job market. Even getting an internship seems to require the experience of a seasoned professional.

We demand experience from young people while progressively removing the opportunities through which they acquire it.

In yesterday's article, I argued that organisations should help people develop an Exportable Skillset. But how can they, if we remove the opportunities to acquire one?

AI is increasingly taking over tasks traditionally given to junior professionals. Research, analysis, drafting presentations. Faster, sometimes better. But what happens to the learning?

Remote working has reduced spontaneous observation and learning opportunities.

In workshops, laboratories, offices and boardrooms. Sitting alongside experienced colleagues. Listening to difficult conversations. Shaking hands, finding the right seat, speaking up when your inner voice tells you to stay quiet.

At Shell, I answered colleagues' telephones when they were away from their desks. An unexpected lesson in dealing with people and taking responsibility. And learning to understand Scottish.

We learned by watching, doing, making mistakes and receiving instant feedback.



Today, your manager may be sitting in their Covid shorts-and-shirt outfit on Teams, AI prepares the analysis and colleagues are scattered globally.

Efficient? Perhaps.

But where do you learn the craft?

I am not arguing against AI or remote working. Nor for preserving repetitive junior tasks.

We need to redesign how young professionals gain experience.

Let them solve problems with pen and paper before consulting AI. Give them case studies and listen to their answers. Take them into meetings. Give them responsibility, exposure and real feedback.

Teach them to network in person. My **ASCOT®** model: Acknowledge, Shake hands (or greet appropriately), Correctly introduce yourself and repeat their name, Offer something relevant, Transition to the next step or person. Five basic steps. Easy? Try it on the professional dancefloor.

AI can accelerate learning, but also encourage accepting answers without understanding them.

Organisations and their clients need people who can question those answers, exercise judgement and take responsibility.

The wooden observation tower in my village, from which I photographed an eclipse for my earlier article *Three Eclipses*, offers a rather fitting illustration. A beautiful structure, a wonderful view from the top. Look at the staircase in the picture. No climbing allowed.

If we block the first steps of the professional ladder, how do we expect young people to reach the top?

We should design another way to climb.

#LeadershipDevelopment #ExportableSkillset #AI #FutureOfWork