

Whose job is it to make students employable?

A simple graduation was all that it took to get employed in the 80's. With growing competition and the rise for skilled talent, that bar was raised to an engineering degree in the 90's. Until recently, it was the MBA that was doing the popularity rounds. But with the dawn of the new millennium, even the reputed MBA (with exceptions of those from the pedigreed institutions) seems to be falling short in providing employment to the fresh graduates.

Why this trend? – one may ask. MNCs opine that up to 75 per cent of the graduates passing out every year are not employable. Whose job is it then to make students employable?

To begin with, let's name the three stakeholders in this scenario – the student, the college administration (including the faculty) and the corporates hiring these students.

There is a constant confusion of sorts or rather a blame-game going on between the three stakeholders, with each one shirking off the responsibility from their shoulders. Students expect the educational institution from which they graduate to serve things to them on a platter. Educational Institutions on the other hand cry foul stating that corporates are not playing their role in this process. And finally, corporates take turn blaming the student and the educational institutions for this dearth of talent.

It is a vicious circle indeed and each of the stakeholders has as much to lose in the process as the other.

Undoubtedly, the primary responsibility of making students employable lies with the students themselves. The primary beneficiary in the entire loop is to a large extent the student itself. The colleges and corporates can play the role and provide the resources but consumption of these resources ultimately depends on the students. Like they say, you can take the horse to the pond but you can't make it drink.

The obvious question from the students' point of view is – “What is meant by being employable?”

The answer to this question is best answered from the corporate point of view. Most employers would expect their new recruits to contribute more than their basic cost to the company, within six months of being employed. They would expect new recruits to be more of a resource than a liability or rather generate more than they consume.

But then, how does one measure contribution?

The onus here lies on the students. Unlike in jobs where financial or sales targets have to be met, contribution is, to a large extent, intangible. In such situations, taking initiative is the first step to contributing. For instance, if new recruits are put through a training session, they must aim to become a resource to the training group itself. This they can do in numerous ways like dividing the work involved and taking ownership of the bit in which they are most knowledgeable. They could also document the training program (if not already documented) to benefit future training groups.

The biggest challenge in making oneself employable is to:

- Understand what a student is good at
- Understand the mechanics of the job market
- Take ownership of one's own skill development over and above what the curriculum demands

Ex: Attending soft skills sessions which students otherwise skip, considering it unproductive

Let's move on to the second stakeholder in the loop – the educational institutions.

The first step in educational institutions playing their part in making students employable is by accepting the fact that placement is as important as enrolment.

Most educational institutions believe that marketing their brand invariably means marketing it to the prospective students. What they need to understand however, is that brand marketing should also be targeted at prospective recruiters.

In this regard, the educational institutions have to employ enthusiastic placement coordinators who can think out of the box and go that extra mile to attract as many campus recruiters as possible. To further the cause, a comprehensive website should be hosted that would provide all necessary information about the college like the infrastructure, the curriculum and the college USP amongst others. To tune in with the times, facilities like the internet, projectors and video conferencing should be put in place. Traditional board and chalk teaching methods could give way to power point presentations to inculcate professionalism amongst the students.

In an example of how educational institutions can play their part in making students employable, the **K.L.Nagaswamy Memorial Polytechnic College** in Madurai, for instance has appointed faculty, dedicated to handle spoken English classes, General & Technical Aptitude classes etc. They have also signed Memorandums of Understanding with various training centers to conduct skill development courses apart from the regular curriculum.

Following suit, all educational institutions should manage their curriculum in a way that provides space for personality development. This should be followed by ensuring that the emphasis is more on 'doing' than 'writing'.

We now move on to the third stakeholder – the corporates.

Leading corporates have begun to realise that they would be 'living' with their students, and to this effect, they have started adopting campuses in their catchment area. They allow faculty from adopted campuses to work with them for short durations to understand how corporates function and what it takes to excel in such environment. They can then impart that knowledge to the students.

Employees from these corporates also visit the campuses to give a personal account of the work environment to aid students to align themselves with the same. Thus, faculty exchange programs between the campus and the corporates are executed from both sides. The beneficiaries as mentioned earlier, are primarily the students. Corporates should also encourage and support educational institutions to incorporate non curricular personality building activities.

One such corporate which is leading by example is TCS which conducts faculty development programs regionally, across the country. TCS also provides a type of sabbatical to academic faculty wherein, the faculty can take time off their academic responsibilities to work with TCS. This sets the platform for closing the gaps and also exchange of ideas between the academia and the industry for the larger benefit of all the stakeholders – the academia, the corporates and finally the students.

In conclusion, the goal of making students employable would be realised when academia and industry go hand in glove and students capitalise on the benefits.

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