

## **Experience is not a number!**

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Plenty of things bother me about typical organisational behaviour, and lately one of the biggest has become a total lack of understanding of the disconnection between experience and value.

Let me explain, experience matters, and a lot of jobs need this, I get that. Beyond that point for me it all gets too easy, with lazy thinking, and results too often in having to invest dozens of hours a year performance managing each mistake resulting from a half day's poor selection.

The problem is simple, the value of experience is not a function of age or of time in a role.

The worth of any unit of time in a role varies significantly from one person to another.

Thus one person with 25 years of 'experience' can have in effect 1 year's experience 25 times, whereas another apparently 'inexperienced' person could genuinely accrue the full 25 years of value within three if they are focused on what consciously can be learned, thus seriously enriching their capability and competence.

Factor in the obsolescence of so much which was current in the early 1990s and clearly there is a 'top loading' element to experience in favour of the recent past.

So, find me energetic, enthusiastic, focused twenty something year olds with five years experience who have serious potential for future growth, and they shape up well against people thirty years older with plenty more years behind them, but less relevant and valuable learning and capability. Another consideration, in my view less significant, is that they are likely to cost less.

The trouble is, I see too many 'experienced' people retiring in the job, often in significant positions, with no desire to expose themselves to any risk of failure or by definition of seeking better ways of working, creating dull and unchallenging workplaces from which they have no intention of shifting for the next, two, three or worryingly more than five years.

Too many highly 'experienced' people's get up and go has got up and gone.

As a later in life person myself, I am not having a dig at the fifty plus folk – the most capable people in any workforce for me are those that have both the years in work *and* critically, an unquenched thirst for new learning and an unsatisfied curiosity that fuels a self-driven appetite to develop and become constantly more effective.

Thus there are problems. I feel organisations are missing out on recruiting the apparently lesser experienced, and seriously capable people that have multiplied the value of maybe six years to make it worth thirty, being passed over in favour of those with twenty seven years in the bag, of which only nine are current and relevant, and who have little will to make positive use of the next ten as a less 'experienced' person.

It's just too easy to look no further than the number of years earned and not their value.

There are for me at least, some lessons here. Firstly I encourage 'younger' people to help potential employers to see that the few years they have worked are worth more than that number. Secondly for those people with both years in and a track record of putting them to real use, make your efforts more clear – those that make career and recruitment decisions tend to see numbers only, not the outcomes or value of these.

At a time of ever diminishing training budgets, and despite decades of sound advice on spending less on structured events that are too often an expensive waste of time and money, all of us with a desire to prove our worth and optimise the worth of each year must show we are truly driving our own learning, and using the real workplace as our primary source of development.

The tighter things get, and the more that is required from less and less people, the greater the value of those that can prove a tangible commitment to their development, and that the number of years employed is but a platform from which to make each year worth many more.

Whatever your age, the way to get maximum learning value from each working year is to plan and genuinely manage your own professional development. The passives will lose out to active and energetic learners who use CPD to enhance their employability, catching the attention of the too few organisations with the good sense to see that experience is not a number!