

(Plan Your Career) Facing change: You have to adapt

Written by Julie Desmond
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What new technical or specialty skill have you learned in the last year? Think about it. Unless you are a new graduate from a college or technical school, this might be your toughest interview question. It seems to stump people at every career level, and it is an instant stopping point in interviews for new jobs and promotions.

Why are employers interested in ongoing education? The obvious reason is because processes and techniques change constantly. Learning a new software program, for instance, does not put you ahead of the competition; it just allows you to keep up. Would you be comfortable having surgery without anesthesia? Of course not. If your doctor has not kept up with the latest innovations in medicine, you will likely move on to another doctor. Employers are doing this, too.

There is an underlying reason for asking questions about skill development. Your responses illustrate your sense of initiative, your motivation to succeed, and your interest in the industry you've chosen. People naturally want to learn more about something that catches their interest. Examples of this are everywhere. Maybe you hear the Twins are going to the World Series. If this interests you, you might talk about it with friends, listen to interviews on the radio, try to get tickets, and dance on the streets when they win. Your motivation is intrinsic. No one cares whether you buy a jersey or not, but it interests you so you do it anyway.

Learning a new technical skill might not have the same level of excitement, but if you are going to win your own personal Career World Series, you have to invest time, and possibly money, into learning all you can about your field. Prove you are an expert in your field by recognizing you don't know it all, yet.

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