

Careers



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Eye on the finish line

Career experts advise students on the path to take

SUMAN SAHA

JOB seekers now have to be more serious in designing a solid career map. Today's volatile employment market has necessitated the need to pursue a career based on personal aspirations and physical and mental capabilities.

But human resource (HR) professionals argue that students in Bangladesh are not serious enough about their career plans.

"Most undergraduate students in Bangladesh remain undecided as to which sector they want to build their career in future, even at the end of the second year," says Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed, a prominent HR professional. "This is because they study on an experimental basis."

Most students choose their subjects based on their parents' instruction, says Ahmed, who has worked for renowned organisations like Pepsi-Cola, British American Tobacco, Unilever, Sanofi-Aventis, Pan Pacific Hotel and Apollo Hospitals Dhaka.

"We see a lot of students choose a particular subject because their parents asked them to do so, but they actually do not enjoy the subject," says Ahmed, who has been in this field for over 20 years.

A career plan should be well thought out with clear achievable goals, set against personal aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, and physical and mental capabilities, says MA Mannan, a professor of management at Dhaka University.

Students should assess their own personal strengths and weaknesses, in terms of language proficiency, physical fitness and mental stability, before pursuing any career, he says.

Mannan, with over 60 research publications, says, "Job Seekers should evaluate their personality (ask yourself: am I an introvert or extrovert?), attitudes toward a job and employers, choice of location (would I feel better in Dhaka or in rural areas?)."

"This self-analysis is very important," says Mannan. "For example, an introvert is more suited to a desk-oriented job, like accounting and finance or research and development. An extrovert would be more suitable for development-oriented work, like marketing or relation-



ship management."

Mannan, a visiting professor at Western Kentucky University, USA, says students have to visualise the job market within the country and outside, in developing a career plan.

In choosing a major, a student should assess the required skills, values, interests, along with academic requirements and potential career choices, says Shaila Parveen, head of HR planning and sourcing, The City Bank.

"It would be unwise to view one's career as a linear progression in a particular organisation, unless one finally chooses to work in the government system," says Mannan.

One has to change the current organisation due to unforeseen circumstances.

"We see a number of people who once worked in academic jobs, but later switched due to lay-off, termination or a change in spouse's workplace," says Mannan.

However, career experts also urge prospective job seekers to develop leadership and good communication skills to survive in the highly competitive market.

In addition to proficiency in English and computer knowledge, students have to nurture

skills like communications, empathy and presentation, to stand out from a crowd, says Ahmed.

Parveen, who also worked at Grameenphone in HR sourcing and employee branding, says job seekers have to nurture job-specific and soft skills because every employer is looking for these skills.

Mannan, who was also a guest lecturer in the faculty of management studies at Delhi University, asks job seekers to visit the web sites of different skills-training institutions and attend specialised programmes to sharpen their skills.

Students should participate in training, read career portals and seek advice from senior peers in related disciplines, he says.

Ahmed urges students to participate in sports, debate and cultural shows because it helps them develop team spirit, competitive skills and build self-confidence. A sports person will have the right attitude to fight back. He taught HRM and business communication at Kentucky College of Business, USA, between 1990 and 1994.

"Students have to build a strong network with related professional bodies from an early stage,"

says Ahmed. "These associations will keep them stay up to date with latest developments in their field."

"Employers always focus on hiring the right fit. It does not necessarily mean the 'best' person, but the 'right' person for the job," says Parveen from The City Bank.

She says prospective job-seekers, therefore, need to be clear about the role and requirement of a job before applying for a position.

Career experts urged students to take their internship programmes seriously because it gives a strong foothold in a career path.

Ahmed, however, urges academicians to impart knowledge to students by exercising real life cases, in addition to practising theories, in building a solid foundation.

It is a common phenomenon that students do not find a match between book-knowledge and reality when they begin work, says Ahmed.

Mannan also urges students to study with their full attention because exam results play a vital role throughout a career in the context of Bangladesh.

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A positive attitude does the trick

Chief of Grow n Excel defines steps to success

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EVERYONE strives to be successful at his or her working life. They want to discover the secret of success. However, a career expert suggests that only a positive attitude can lead to desired success.

"Attitude is the single most determining factor for success," says M Zulfiqar Hussain, chief executive officer of Grow n Excel, a leading human resources and management consultation organisation in Bangladesh. "Because it is the foundation for success."

"The attitude must be positive," says Hussain. "A good attitude helps us be positive and optimistic."

Since its beginning in August 2008, Grow n Excel is engaged in providing consultation, executive searches and training and HR outsourcing services to different sectors, like fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) makers, telecommunications, banks and financial institutions, pharmaceuticals, media, energy, retail and development organisations.

Hussain, who is also the lead consultant of the company, said today's job



M Zulfiqar Hussain

seekers have a short term focus because they switch jobs very frequently, without judging their passion for work.

One should remember that the key to success lies in the determination and willingness to do something, to be something because our passion drives us to become successful, says Hussain.

Hussain, who worked more than 12

years as HR director and head of human resources at Nestle and Citycell, asks job seekers to make career plans according to long term orientation, as it will help them develop the required competencies and required insight for the future.

Career planning is a life long process. Along this continuum, career decisions differ according to personal

and professional criteria at each junction of life.

So, Hussain suggests job-seekers to follow five steps for effective career management.

'Assessing yourself' is the first step, where one should identify one's interest, skills, knowledge and values. For example, while choosing a major, a BBA student should carry out the self-assessment process first.

"Examining the possibilities" is the second step. Candidates should take a broad look at all career options, conduct some research and consult others. They can list their career aspiration based on their interests, like which companies would be suitable, what jobs would be appropriate, what opportunities are available.

"Goal setting" is step three, where job seekers should identify their long and short-term goals. In terms of setting goals, they need to think about first long term goal, like where they want to see themselves 8-10 years from now. In reaching long-term goals, they need to design short-term action plans for 2-3 years. Goals must be flexible enough so that necessary changes can be made.

Identifying the specific require-

ment. Fourthly, job seekers should identify the specific skills, experience and education that they need to achieve their career goals. An individual needs to be specific in identifying these requirements and prioritising them.

"Developing a measurable action plan" is the final stage. They should define the steps and a time frame to meet the requirements of the career goals.

Hussain, who also teaches in some leading business schools in the country, urges job seekers to read the job overview and requirements carefully before applying for any post. He also instructs students not apply for a post if their qualifications and other qualities do not meet with the set standards.

A good academic track is certainly an asset for any student. It is also important to be involved in various extra curriculum activities like debate, social groups, club activities and organising events, says Hussain.

Part time jobs can accelerate a student's career growth. So, they should be sincere in project work to get acquainted with the practical scenario.

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