



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

To be the master of (n)one

MASHIYAT NAYEEM

The term 'jack of all trades' was coined to describe Shakespeare, a playwright who was skilled at managing all aspects of theatre production from direction to set design to costumes. Then how did a phrase linked to one of the greatest writers of all time come to have so many negative connotations?

We tend to see the world through narrow lens, disregarding diversification. Thus, when we see someone having a knack for a particular skill, we tend to force them to go down that path to become better. It may look like specialising on one particular skill is a sure-shot way to having a head start, so, spending time on any other alternative is deemed undesirable.

This demand for hyper specialisation has made it difficult for any integration of the left and right side of our brains. By chasing competency in one field, we are forced into short-sightedness. As a result, we may think we are bad at other things when in reality, we were so focused on one thing that we didn't invest time in developing others.

In the world of sports, however, research shows that while engaging in strict practice causes athletes to reach their peak relatively early, the future looks bleak. Those who sample multiple sports in their early days and delay specialisation go on to become better than the athletes who specialised early. This is because diversification allows a child to develop a variety of motor skills that are transferable between sports, reduces the likelihood of burnout, and helps to become passionate.

The patterns ring true in the case of learning musical instruments as well as a multitude of other creative pursuits.

If you look closely enough, education is no different. In a culture where we are shunned if we have no idea about what we ought to study or do with our lives, we are made to believe that a focused path is likely to bring us success. While those with a career-focused education are likely to get hired quickly because of their expertise and become well paid in the short run i.e. the dream reserved for all Bangladeshi kids, they are also less likely to be adaptable to changing work conditions and the world at large. Flexibility is the biggest advantage to being the jack of all trades, which means we can fill many roles and make observations, specialists often cannot.

What we often fail to recognise is that early specialisation makes poor choices more likely, especially for impressionable teenagers. Here is where well-rounded, holistic education systems get it right. The case for liberal arts education is the belief that a jack of all trades is indeed better than a master of one.

The misguided notion that a 'master of none' is a bad thing has us chasing after specialisation when so many of us do not wish to be pigeonholed. Instead of picking one field and restricting ourselves to certain skillsets, exploring a variety of fields is the key to self-discovery. After all, the entire saying actually says, "a jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one."

Mashiyat Nayeem is mourning the end of online school and the extra hour of sleep. Send her condolences at mashiyat.nayeem@gmail.com

BEING THE THERAPIST OF YOUR FAMILY

ANGELINA NODEE FRANCIS

Do you have to hear your family members rant about their problems while they continue to not acknowledge the existence of mental health or therapy? Do your siblings run to you whenever something comes up, and you have to reassure them that things will eventually get better?

I am here to tell you that you are not alone.

It feels nice to have someone to lean on during the worst of times and trust them enough to be able to tell them everything about our circumstances. I do it too, sometimes.

However, it is essential that we acknowledge the fact that this cannot be a permanent solution, and the healthy way to dealing with these issues would be to speak to a mental health professional.

Sometimes, our family members face a scenario that they may be unable to figure out a way to deal with it, and hence they end up coming to you for help.

As a kid, I never really understood why some of my older family members had sudden outbursts where they would yell at each other or passively aggressively express their anger without making any attempt to sort things out. During these situations, I would find myself sitting quietly in my room, pretending to study or work while entertaining the rants from either or both parties engaged in the argument.

When we bury our emotions for a really long period of time and are unable to communicate our feelings effectively, we end up having emotional outbursts or meltdowns using harsh words, which only lead to hurt feelings and resentments.

My younger sibling would come up to me sometimes, telling me how she was losing

hope in almost everything, and that her life seemed like a mess. I could only tell her that it would get better. To which she would understandably ask, when?

When an elderly relative cried on my shoulder after losing her husband, all I could do was hug her tight.

There is a story behind the tears that are shed for the deceased husband, a story behind unspoken words and anger, a story behind losing hope at an age where one hasn't even started living life properly.

However, what often goes unnoticed is the impact on the assumed family therapist. Remember that you are also a person whose emotions hold equal value, that there is only so much you can do. It is okay to feel overwhelmed when multiple people expect you to objectively listen to their problems and offer reasonable solutions. It is also okay to not always be available to absorb rants from your family members all the time.

Respectfully asking loved ones to give you space may allow you to establish healthy boundaries. Risking your own mental health while seemingly helping others out with their problems may not help anybody in the long run.

Angelina Nodee Francis enjoys cracking self-deprecating jokes and running away from her problems. Send her memes at angelinafrancis004@gmail.com

