

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/the-most-valuable-skills/>

Deb Liu, CEO of Ancestry, observes that students are often taught to focus on mastery, when the skills they most need in the workplace are adaptability, the ability to be introspective, and the willingness to learn and grow.



Transcript

- I think our schools do a disservice to us, 00:00:05,880 which is you're taught this idea of mastery, right? All of you took, like, you know, you took the, you know, SAT or the ACT, there is a perfect score, right? There's a class rank, there's a GPA.. A lot of you got in because you have great, you know, scores and GREs, and things like that.. And suddenly you're like, "Okay, I know what mastery looks like." When you get into the workplace, it's like a playing field like no other, because somebody is always better than you at something.. And the skills that we're taught, which is this, like, the person with the most knowledge is the person who's the best, is not at all how it works.. It's actually the person who learns the fastest, who adapts the most, the person who is, you know, you're never gonna be smarter than, 'cause people are at different points in their lives, people are experts in different things.. And to really being most adaptable, most introspective, and most able to actually force yourself to learn and grow, the people who take feedback the most, those are the people who actually have careers that are outsized over the experts.. You know, when we actually do hiring, there have been many times we had the opportunity to hire an expert.. The person who did exactly the thing on their resume that you absolutely needed to fill this specific role, and you're like, "That person's great," and their runway is probably two to three years.. And then, you hire someone who's up and coming, because they came from a different industry or maybe they're trying new things, but they have a learning mindset, and they're introspective, and they say, "I'm eager to learn." Those candidates tend to outperform in the long term, because they're adapting, and changing, and they're growing.. They're thinking about things not the way it was always done, but the way it could be..

And so that's the one skill I wish we could teach, as opposed to this idea of, "I'm gonna be the expert," because in the workplace, expertise is valuable, but adaptability is way more valuable...