

Considering a career change? How skill-stacking can help...

The Covid-19 lockdowns have caused many to evaluate their current path, including the direction they are taking career-wise. While these new insights might cause you to consider a career change, it is better to prepare adequately before moving on, rather than just quitting and taking your chances in this difficult economic environment, an education expert says.



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“If lockdown showed you you are not on the right path, it is crucial that you investigate your options thoroughly before making a move. Make sure you have a strategy in place and don’t make rash decisions, no matter how certain you are that your current path is not for you,” says Dr Gillian Mooney, Dean: Academic Development and Support at The Independent Institute of Education, South African private higher education provider.

Get stacking

“And remember that you don’t necessarily have to throw the skills and experience you have already acquired to the wayside to pursue an entirely new direction, because you can build upon that which you’ve already achieved, by so-called skill stacking.”

Mooney says the concept of skill stacking – the idea of developing several skills that are often unrelated yet when combined complement each other – is increasingly gaining traction in the world of work, where employers need critical thinkers and problem-solvers who can apply themselves broadly.

The *New York Times* describes skill stacking as the idea that instead of focusing one's efforts on becoming singularly great at one specific skill or task, one strives to become proficient at a few related skills that can be woven together into a wider skill set.

"So instead of quitting and starting the application process for seemingly more interesting positions, work on and build upon your existing skill set to ensure you position yourself strongly and competitively to set yourself up for the job search next year," says Mooney.

"Take the time to investigate your options, and then ensure you acquire new skills so that you are ready to change jobs when things start settling down," she says.

Mooney says that the following few months, when most business slows down over the December holidays, provide the ideal opportunity to discover new and interesting options.

Get connected

"When pursuing new directions, it is important to understand what networks exist that can support you on the way, and guide you in terms of what employers seek. A great way to get some guidance in this respect, is to contact a respected higher education institution and speak to a student advisor about your position. Such a person will be able to help you determine where you are, and then which short learning programmes will complement your existing skills while expanding your field of competence, in line with what is in demand in the workplace," Mooney says.

She adds that in the ever-changing and constantly evolving world of work, these advisors may even be aware of interesting new career paths related to a person's existing path that they had not yet been aware of.

"It is important though to speak to student advisors at higher education institutions which have a strong work-focus and industry connection, to hear what latest trends are in terms of real employer demands and emerging careers," she says.

"If this year has shown you that you need to do more to develop yourself and reach your dreams, you must act on your instinct. It really isn't necessary to stay in a rut for years to come just to play it safe employment-wise. However, there certainly are steps you can start taking right away to ensure you are better positioned, and armed with a unique combination of skills which will set you apart from the competition in future when opportunity arises."