

## Building Marketable Skills for Success

### A Personal Journey

I have been in the IT industry for over 20 years and having trained thousands of IT professionals for almost 10 years. The best advice I ever received was from the Managing Director of the company I was working for, in one of the my meetings with him, said to me:

“ The company doesn’t owe you a living, you owe it to yourself to build marketable skills.”

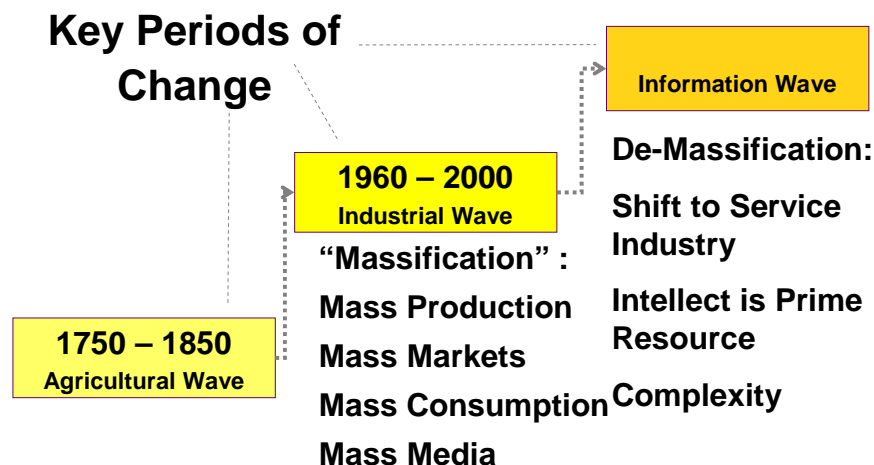
The words rung in my ears and continues to be a constant reminder of what is important to stay relevant in today’s ever changing environment. It propelled me to build the skills that I needed to start my own training and consulting business almost 10 years ago. And to receive recognition in 2001 as one of the winners of the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award (ASME WEYA).

### The Business Environment

The IT industry, more than any industry, has gone through tremendous change over the past 10 years. With the emergence of the information age (ref: Figure 1) intellect, service ethic and complexity is the order of the day.

## Figure 1: The Case for Change

Is it Chaos, Crisis or The Third Wave Economy?



The key demands of the industry that have emerged are:

- Keeping up with technology change
- Acquiring relevant skills
- Attracting and retaining talent
- Managing margin erosion on projects
- Increasing competitiveness
- Increasing customer expectations

## Second Wave vs Third Wave Management

Characteristic	Second Wave	Third Wave
<b>Organization</b>	<b>Hierarchy</b>	<b>Network</b>
<b>Output</b>	<b>Market Share</b>	<b>Market Creation</b>
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Individual</b>
<b>Style</b>	<b>Structured</b>	<b>Flexible</b>
<b>Source of Strength</b>	<b>Stability</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>Structure</b>	<b>Self-Sufficiency</b>	<b>Interdependencies</b>
<b>Culture</b>	<b>Transition</b>	<b>Collectively-Created</b>
<b>Mission</b>	<b>Goals / Strategic Plans</b>	<b>Identity / Values</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Dogmatic</b>	<b>Inspirational</b>
<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Security</b>	<b>Personal Growth</b>
<b>Status</b>	<b>Title / Rank</b>	<b>Making a Difference</b>
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Cash</b>	<b>Information</b>
<b>Advantage</b>	<b>Better Sameness</b>	<b>Meaningful Difference</b>
<b>Outlook</b>	<b>Tactical</b>	<b>Strategic</b>



### Burning Questions

Burning questions emerging for any IT professional are:

- What can I do to stay relevant?
- How do I stay ahead of technology change?
- How can I be successful as a project manager?
- How can I build value for myself within the organization?
- How do I develop myself so I can do well in my job?

### Core Competencies

I would first like to dispel the myth that building technical skills is the panache for an IT professional's development and success in the industry. Technical skills in isolation may not give you the "employability" in the IT industry.

Having worked with numerous organizations and spoken to senior executives in these organizations, I have distilled the core competencies that I believe represent success in the IT industry. The core competencies are transferable to other jobs and industries and coupled with the relevant technical skills will give you the "edge" needed in any position to succeed.

2 database or network specialists being interviewed or considered for a promotion, the likelihood of the person who has

- Good Interpersonal skills
- Communicates well
- Demonstrates adaptability and flexibility

is more likely to receive a positive outcome.

### **Competency # 1 : Working through People**

As businesses configure themselves into matrix or networked organizations, individuals in these organizations, **accountability to multiple stakeholders** have become the order of the day.

In order to achieve success in these environments, the ability to work through people to achieve the desired outcomes is key to success:

Skills like

1. Interpersonal Effectiveness
2. Relationship Building/Networking
3. Influencing
4. Conflict Management

are just some of the skills that will support Working Through People.

### **Competency # 2: Leveraging information and Effectively Communicating**

We live in the information age, where every day we are inundated by a continuous stream of information. In today's environment, where information is the great leveler, easy access to information has changed the face of competition. The key to competitiveness and meeting customer's expectations is being able to leverage information and communicate and present it effectively. How information is used and how well it is communicated makes all the difference between winning and losing.

Skills like

1. Communication or Engagement skills
2. Presentation skills
3. Articulating value proposition based on customer's needs
4. Writing skills
5. Financial skills

are just some of the skills that will support this competency.

### **Competency # 3: Team Skills**

In the IT industry, where most of us work either in teams as team members or as team leaders, the ability to work in teams and be a productive member of a team is key to the organisation's success. As a team leader, people management skills, motivation techniques and performance management skills are important in ensuring that the organization achieves it's desired outcomes.

Attracting and retaining good talent comes from a good working environment where people thrive in effective, well managed teams.

Skills like

1. Team Effectiveness
2. Performance Management
3. Coaching skills
4. Management and Leadership

are just some of the skills that will support this competency.

#### **Competency # 4: Adaptability and Flexibility**

The ability to handle ambiguity and to work towards a successful outcome in spite of it is tremendously key to success in the IT industry. As the saying goes; “ Change is the only constant in business,” and in the IT industry where “ a Web year is 3 months, ” change is magnified many fold.

The willingness to upgrade yourself, ability to work through change, be an agent of change and to help others embrace change, will carry you a long way.

Skills like

1. Working through Change
2. Leading Change

are just some of the skills that will support this competency.

#### **Competency # 5: Macro skills**

All too often we hear comments about IT professionals being too “technical” in their approach; “Missing the forest for the trees” and “ They don’t understand the business.” In today’s competitive environment , business savviness is key to the success of IT professionals, being able to step back from a technical problem and see the overall business implications of the problem and the solution required. Developing business acumen, understanding financials, running your projects as you would a business provides the “ Big Picture” that is essential for success of any IT professional.

#### **Developing Marketable Skills**

- Where do we start? Start by taking stock of your strengths and areas requiring change.
- Take responsibility for your own development. Whether it be:
  - Enrolling in a training program provided by your organization
  - Funding your own personal development
  - Accepting different jobs to build exposure to other parts of the business and develop broad experiences (Move out of your comfort zone)
  - Take a regional assignment. Nothing like learning the business from a remote location.

I believe more than ever these competencies are what it takes to be successful in any industry but more so in the IT industry. I took control of my destiny, why not you! What are you waiting for???