Adaptability key to getting hired

By JADE CHAN

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The webinar touched on how the movement control order has affected the ability of students to compete in the job market, the actions that can be taken to improve their soft skills and how to remedy this situation.

An important trait that any employee should have is a growth mindset, shares TalentCorp head of graduate and emerging talent Nazrul Aziz.

“Having that trait allows you to become more resilient and a problem solver.

“With everyone grappling with how to adapt to the new norm as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic being an agile and adaptable employee is an asset.

“Always get feedback from the right people, whether it is related to soft skills or technical skills, so you can grow,” he said, adding that a growth mindset was a key trait that human resources personnel look
Nazrul was among the featured speakers in a webinar titled “The Lockdown Generation: Playing Our Part To Nurture Future Leaders.”

The other panellists comprised Malaysia Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan, Malaysian Institute for Debate and Public Speaking (MIDP) chief executive officer Emellia Shariff and Teach for Malaysia chief executive officer Chan Soon Seng.

The webinar was moderated by independent broadcast journalist Tehmina Kaoosji.

The free event, streamed live via The Star’s Facebook page, was jointly organised by Star Media Group, Taylor’s College and MIDP.

The webinar touched on how the movement control order has affected the ability of students to compete in the job market, actions that can be taken to improve their soft skills and how to remedy this situation.
In her opening speech, Taylor’s College campus director Josephine Tan said: “While students are now going back to school, they have missed out on an entire year of social and physical activities, such as extracurricular activities, which means they are also missing out on things like critical thinking and problem solving.

“They are also likely to be feeling the impact of a prolonged lockdown, such as lack of confidence, decreased motivation, taking longer to think outside the box and difficulty in communicating.”

Drawing from her personal experience, Tan said soft skills were paramount to the success of any graduate and set one apart from others when applying for jobs.

Shamsuddin acknowledged that it was a difficult time for graduates to gain employment in light of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and tough economy.

“Students who are coming out of universities are unable to properly nurture their soft skills.

“Some students don’t always take it seriously. But done right, apprenticeships can serve as a bridge between university and the workforce,” he said.

Shamsuddin cited Japan as an example, where university students were attached to a workplace environment from their first year itself, thereby allowing them to learn about workplace ethics and culture earlier.

Emellia believes it is important for the education sector to work closely with industry practitioners to integrate soft skills.
“The education system should create a learning environment that simulates a real-world working environment,” she said, adding that MIDP was trying to supplement this with their soft skills programmes.

“When PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) introduced an assessment in 2015 that looked into teamwork and collaboration, the results revealed that girls often do better than boys.

“The results surmised that girls usually pay more attention to relationships and friendships, so they are more likely to empathise (and work effectively as a team to solve problems).”

Emellia shared that MIDP had identified the soft skills a person should have, starting from school to internship level.

“These include communications, problem solving and crisis management, persuasion and negotiation, people management as well as empathy and emotional intelligence.

“If a student is able to complete this ecosystem of soft skills, they will be seen as someone who is a potential leader,” she said.

Nazrul said: “You can only develop soft skills at the workplace when you really experience it. You can learn as much as you can in university, but you really develop it when you start working.

“LinkedIn did a survey in the United States with some 290 hiring managers, who all said that it was hard for them to get talent with good soft skills.

“TalentCorp received similar feedback through our engagements here.”

Chan noted that the gap in soft skills education was somewhat exacerbated by lockdowns.

“Even though many students are digital natives, there is digital inequality across social classes,” he said.

“About 1.5 million students in Malaysia don’t have devices and Internet connectivity, so they will be left behind in many aspects.

“For students that have some proficiency and exposure to technology, what will help them stand out is understanding the role and power of technology, and how they can manipulate it to solve problems in the world,” he added.
Since the Education Ministry cancelled some public examinations last year because of Covid-19 restrictions, Chen felt that would have offered an opportunity for teachers and parents to focus on the more holistic aspects of education.

“Public sentiments are rooted in having exams to prove students are truly learning.

![Image](image_url)

Tan: Soft skills are paramount to the success of any graduate and set one apart from others when applying for jobs.

“What we need to do is to release students of the burden of catching up with the curriculum and encourage play or extracurricular activities such as sports and music,” he said.

Meanwhile, Shamsuddin advised fresh graduates to readjust expectations of starting salaries when joining the workforce.

“Some graduates are asking for salaries as high as RM3,000, which are not within the reach of micro enterprises,” he said.

“There are more than 650,000 small enterprises in Malaysia and they usually have fewer than five employees in a company.

“Graduates shouldn’t be thinking too much of their starting pay. If they prove to be an asset to a company, the employer will want to retain them.”

Shamsuddin urged graduates to grab any opportunity they could for work exposure, or even try working in the gig economy sector.

“Graduates need to be clear on what they can offer to an organisation in terms of their soft skills and technical skills,” said Nazrul.

“As they build their career path, they also need to build on their networking while being aware of market needs.

“I’ve seen cases where graduates were able to accelerate their career growth ahead of those with more work experience, because they were able to balance their strengths and market needs.”

Emellia said resilience and adaptability were key traits a graduate should have to prove that they would be an asset to organisations, while Chan felt that problem-solving skills were essential.

Shamsuddin also shared this tip: “Always remember that you need to future-proof your skills.

“This means that you have to continuously learn and upskill yourself so your skills remain relevant to the job market,” he said.