Digital Futures: Opportunities in Technology

I was very excited to be able to host the Digital Futures: Opportunities in Technology event at the Deloitte Digital studio in London on 5th March. This is the third in a series of industry and careers events run by the OC Society to help in their mission to support Old Cliftonians on every step of their journey. We had a fantastic panel who were able to take us through the varied journeys they've had through the technology industry followed by a lively Q&A and discussion ranging why being drawn on by children can help you get ahead to the role of artificial intelligence in recruitment.

The panel consisted of:
Katie Wray, Operations Director at CACI UK
Rochelle Thompson, Strategic Management Consultant at Deloitte
Thomas Ffiske, Editor at the Immersive Wire and Global Thought Leadership Strategist at Accenture Song
Julia Kleinsteuber-Walker, Vice President of Talent and People at the social media platform BeReal
Callum Paine, Senior Solution Specialist at Microsoft

Being a tech event we ran the transcript of our discussion through ChatGPT and asked it to pick out the ten top points based on what was covered. This, with some light human editing, is what it suggested:

1. Growth Mindset and Pushing Boundaries
The importance of demonstrating a growth mindset and being comfortable in uncomfortable situations was discussed. It was emphasized that being upfront about lacking certain capabilities but showing the willingness to learn can be a valuable approach in career pursuits. While experience in the industry is beneficial, being open to learning from clients and admitting when one doesn't know something is crucial.

2. Job Descriptions and Application Trends
Job descriptions were discussed as a tool to filter applicants, with insights into the tendency for women to apply only if they meet 100% of prerequisites, whereas men might apply with only 40%. The conversation also touched on the importance of encouraging girls at a young age to see the value in technical challenges, dispelling stereotypes, and showcasing the variety of roles available within the tech industry. The use of AI to filter job descriptions for diversity and inclusion was mentioned and Google was highlighted as a company avoiding specifying the number of years of experience required.

3. Recruitment and CV Tips for Fresh Graduates
Julia provided valuable insights for fresh graduates navigating the job application process. She suggested keeping resumes concise (ideally under two pages), focusing on key achievements and projects rather than generic job descriptions, and investing time in crafting personalized cover letters. Personalizing cover letters, while time-intensive, can showcase personality and make a candidate stand out.

The significance of networking on LinkedIn was underscored, encouraging

candidates to engage with recruiters, share insights, and even personalize connection requests. This proactive approach can help candidates establish a connection and potentially stand out during the application process.

4. Soft Skills in Technology
The value of soft (or human) skills, often considered challenging to find, was discussed. The dynamic nature of many tech roles, requiring adaptability and problem-solving, was highlighted, and the importance of gaining experience that pushes individuals out of their comfort zones was emphasized.

Focusing on both "faking it till you make it" and "coming as you are." Balance is crucial in presenting oneself authentically while also showcasing confidence.

5. Passion and Creativity in Technology
Personal passion and creativity were recognized as driving forces in the tech industry, with a recommendation to focus on the problems that genuinely inspire and excite individuals. The need to balance passion with practical considerations, such as hidden user needs, was emphasized.

6. Keeping Up with Technology
Different panellists suggested various methods for staying updated on technology trends, such as podcasts, newsletters, and social media channels, with a focus on something that you enjoy so it can sustainably become part of your routine. Don't get FOMO and let the algorithm (sort of) serendipitously guide you to the right stuff.

7. Falling in Love with the Problem, not with the Solution
Especially in the face of rapid technological change, rather than being fixated on a specific solution, focus on falling in love with the problem at hand. Jobs are a means to an end, and understanding the core issues is crucial for finding effective solutions.

8. Concerns and Challenges
An open discussion on personal concerns and challenges in the industry was touched upon. The unpredictable nature of the tech industry, with factors like layoffs and market fluctuations, was identified as a source of anxiety. The advice given was to focus on controlling what is within one's control and developing resilience to navigate unforeseen challenges.

9. AI's Impact on Jobs:
The panellists discussed the dual perspective on AI in the workplace. On one hand, there's concern about job displacement due to automation, as seen in the example of Klarna replacing customer support roles with ChatGPT. On the other hand, AI was recognized for its potential to enhance efficiency and provide relevant data to users (I would say that ChatGPT tried to sneak this second point in here... Ed).

The challenges of implementing AI were highlighted, noting that many companies face difficulties in aligning their technical and cultural aspects to fully leverage AI solutions. The discussion emphasized the importance of organizational culture and strategy in navigating the impact of AI on business operations.

10. A Positive Vision

Society needs to collectively figure out what the end goal is and what "good" looks like. With potential changes in job structures and value creation, having a positive vision for the future is essential to avoid defaulting into a dystopian scenario.

A massive thank you to the panellists and all those who attended, asking probing and thoughtful questions, making for a fascinating discussion. We look forward to seeing you at the next event!

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