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Why Being A Jack Of All Trades Is Essential For Success



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Entrepreneurs

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When you hear the phrase *jack of all trades*, what judgment does your mind make? It likely conjures up negative connotations. A wheeler-dealer who will sell anything to anyone. Someone who knows a little about a lot and uses it to get their way. A lack of specialist skills and knowledge in favour of giving any old thing a try.

Jack of all trades has become somewhat of an insult, but it didn't begin as one. The phrase was originally used to describe a playwright who was always hanging around the theatres. He would help with the stage, the set and the costumes. He would remember lines and try directing. This so-called jack of all trades was in fact William Shakespeare. The full phrase is "a jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one." It was a compliment.

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Far from letting it deter their path, some entrepreneurs swear that being a jack of all trades brings benefits.

Self-discovery

Picking an area and learning it inside-out is one way to begin a specialist career but trying a lot of things can lead to self-discovery. To working out who you are and where your skills lie. Therapist and business owner Sunayana Clark says that when she started out, she was a jack of all trades. The benefits were, “you understand your strengths and weaknesses very quickly. You learn about time management and boundaries.”

Paul Clarke from Connect Performance has explored working in sales, human performance and sports performance throughout his entrepreneurial journey. Although he says they are “seemingly unconnected”, the combined skillset has “allowed me to develop a scientific solution for improving the wellbeing and performance of salespeople.” Knowledge across many areas can combine to create well-rounded experts.

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International speaker and mentor Kitty Yeung Downer studied business studies at university, “as I didn’t have an idea what I wanted.” She found that exploring and experiencing different paths gave her the confidence to leave “[her] six-figure income to make a leap of faith moving to a new city with no visa, job or home awaiting.”

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Keeping your eyes and ears open to opportunities, coupled with learning and growing in multiple areas, means self-awareness and confidence in your path.

Allowing flexibility

Holding a solid grasp of many concepts or decent proficiency in multiple skills can allow for flexibility, in a life and career. When a breakdown forced self-employed dressmaker Holly Winter out of a PR career of nearly two decades, her “sewing hobby accidentally turned into a bridal dressmaking business.” Winter had sewed since the age of five “but it never occurred to me to sew for a living. Friends asked me to make a few things, then friends of friends and it snowballed. Having PR experience definitely helped [my business].”

Marketing and events specialist Ben Allen thinks “monotony is torture!” He prefers to think of his work as a “portfolio career” and enjoys “being able to dance between marketing/pr and event production work, especially in the summer.” Allen says, “with ADHD it helps to work on different projects and keep stimulated with different tasks.”

The flexibility can benefit your clients as much as yourself. According to marketing consultant Andie Coupland, who likes the term "generalist" and "spent a ten-year in-house career climbing the ranks before setting up on my own last year", "being able to pick and choose different projects or clients works really well for me." Coupland says it gives her "exposure to lots of different areas of marketing. My natural curiosity led me to find out how other departments functioned, how marketing could help them and how they could help me." This means she is "now able to adapt my approach to all sorts of client needs." Less pigeon holing, more being able to adapt to any requirements, can be a winning strategy.

Great in business

Companies want to hire useful people who can find analogies and draw trends, with a curiosity for solutions outside a narrow sphere.

Cliff Gibson, founder at New Key Homes, admits he has "No education", but has "worked in garages, finance, purchasing, warehouse management, IT development, data architecture, GDPR, built [his] own house, and now run[s] a growing property development company."

Gibson's "self-taught jack of all trades approach to life has put me in a good position to be able to understand every role required in my businesses." PR consultant Catherine Bolado agrees. "You have to have an eye on what is happening in other areas to provide the best advice for clients. As a former journo, charity comms and now PR... I can advise on anything from fundraising to digital strategy."

Alex Yates is a web development consultant who has noticed tech is going through a movement "away from highly specialised technical roles and teams toward more general individuals and teams who are better at collaboration." Specialising too narrowly causes systematic problems and means departments don't understand each other and it's now considered old-fashioned by the best tech organisations." Yates said that, "the market is shifting toward a higher percentage of broader generalists, who can thrive in smaller 'startup' style teams."

Broader knowledge leads to greater understanding and being better able to advise clients across multiple areas. It's not adequate to specialise and turn a blind eye to other influences. As covered in David Epstein's book, *Range*, progression and breakthroughs happen at the interfaces between specialisms.



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Required for roles

In some fields, being too narrow can be costly. This is especially true in digital marketing, which changes all the time. Digital marketer Heather Topf doesn't think you can be accomplished in this area if you're not a jack of all trades. "Constant professional development is so important to keep up! One minute you're deep delving in data, the next learning how to use After Effects." Topf loves the mix.

Katherine of Kattack PR finds that working in comms she "tend[s] to do social media, marketing, video, audio, image editing, copywriting, web design, analytics, events" and more, but specialises in PR. "No day is the same! As I'm [just three years in to] my career I'm slowly specialising in related industries as there are far more generalists out there competing

for work than specialists.” Her strategy is simple; learn everything first and specialise after.

Blogger Taty said that being a jack of all trades developed her transferable skill set, including writing, web design, SEO and languages, and helped her “stand out in full-time and part-time positions and made it easier to secure jobs because I already had the exact skills they wanted. It made employing me easier because they didn’t have to spend much time training me.”

Curiosity as a strength

Bringing curiosity to any work makes you better at doing it. According to proud non-nicher and all-round useful person Francesca Baker, “I set up my own business because I love variety. I’m one of those people always out exploring more, learning new things, discovering how the world works. That innate curiosity is something I bring to my work.” Her work includes writing, copywriting, journalism and PR.

Hortense Julienne, whose list of titles includes food writer, photographer, snack brand owner, advocate for rare diseases, speaker on visible and invisible disabilities, NGO trustee, community volunteer manager, and ex-events manager, says “I make myself dizzy, but all this knowledge comes in handy. You're never bored, there is something bubbling up. You can contribute to many people and sectors. You are an eternal learner. I get joy from meeting people who know more than me as I soak in their knowledge. She describes it as being an “unboxable chameleon.” Too interesting to categorise, too cool to care.

Being a master of one thing might mean you are an artist or an academic. Being a master of more means your work has a chance to reach people. You don’t wait to be discovered; the power is in your hands. Holding good working knowledge of a lot of areas is desirable and those who hire you might feel like they have hit the jackpot.

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