

Opening remark by Dr. Arega Yirdaw, MIDROC Technology Group; Chief Executive Officer, President of Unity University on "How to motivate and ensure the Young Generation has the relevant skills to excel in the workforce", at National Career Expo-HR Conference, August 11, 2018, Addis Ababa, Millennium Hall

Ladies and Gentlemen, Participates, as a leader of the MIDROC Technology Group Companies, I would like to address my comments to students who are joining the work force. I see a lot of academicians here from the Ministry of Education. I believe you need to have some discussion with the Ministry of Education to make sure that relevance become a very important topic. So, I will refer to my notes so that for the interest of time I can address a lot of points. Topic that was given to us was. "How to motivate and ensure the young Generation has the relevant skills to excel in the workforce".

I focus on the two words **relevance and skill**. Relevance is simply we should not going to school if we are not going get hire. Relevance is the relationship between two points; one is the kind of education that you get, and the other one is the kind of employment we are going get it. Those will have talk to each other or those will have to be addressed, it people are going to have relevant skill in their work. So relevant skill therefore must be pertinent, must be suitable, Must be applicable, must be appropriate and must be saleable in the market. Skill is not something which you can acquire it in very short period of time or in the classroom environment. It's a combination of a lot of things. If you remember, if you know about HERQA the Minister of Education has got an agency which is called HERQA. In that abbreviation Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency. Those two words relevance and quality are very, very important. Students going to school without any skill will have a long, a long time to become professionals. So, when you get school to get educations.

What is education? Education is the process of facilitating learning or acquiring knowledge. Then, what is knowledge? Knowledge provides us the necessary fact, information, skills and so on, and so on. Then what is Skill? Skill is acquired through education and knowledge a combination of it. Just a person, by virtue of a person going to class room having education does not mean he has got skill, because through a process. So what skill? Skill then is needed it's a talent, it's something which is acquired, it's something which is saleable, it's something which should be also adaptable to different situations.

In light of the above, a candidate with the relevant skill must have appropriate and applicable ability to do something well. That is if she or he must have the ability to carry out tasks with determined result within given amount of time and energy or both. Then that is the Person we say has got the skill. **Now, how do we acquire skill?**

In my opinion there are three steps that will be needed the person to acquire skill.

I call the first one initial label skill. Initial label skill is something which you acquire while in you are in school. But in school there is a lot of things that we learn. But developing a skill is a little bit different than just acquiring education. If the student is in school he should do things other than learning based on curriculum we should be engaged with extracurricular activities. If he does that there is acquiring in skill while is learning in school.

So that can be achieved by having apprenticeship, that can be acquired by having part time job, that can be acquired by attending summer employment, that can be achieved by having national services if you remember during our time we used to have one year dedicated for national service before we get a degree that gives as a skill. Additional skill before graduation. That initial level skill is needed by students before they doing graduate. A fresh graduate without any extracurricular activity, just attending classes, taking exams, getting **A** scores is not a skill by itself, it requires more.

The second label of skill I call it transitional label skill. That transitional level skill is when the person gets hire just like what where are doing in this forum now. A young a fresh graduate comes in here, we are gone hire him, he gets hire he is not expected to produce specially the first one year. So, what does he need, he needs a transitional he needs to acquire transitional skill before he becomes a professional and that can be done by having on the job training, by having short courses, by having familiarization classes and so on and so on.

I give you an example from my experience, when I graduated from the University as an Engineer, the place where I went to was Ethiopian air lines. Over there, when I was in college there was not a single topic about aircraft. We know nothing about air craft. As an engineer, I know a little bit about pumps, air conditioning and so on and so on, but not an air craft.

So what does Ethiopian air lines do, they have one year training program for a young Engineers to make sure they get converted into the aviation industry. That is the kind of skill, transitional skill a person needs. We should not expect graduate with no experience to come in and produce the next day. Hire people like our self in the companies should patient enough to give these students the transition from education to the job market. So that transitional period is very important.

The third one is once he becomes a professional then there should be continues skill upgrading. Because education continues. So there is short courses that we should have there is special courses sometimes some companies also give higher education and so on. If you do that, then we are helping, motivating our new students to become good professionals.

Now, How do we support that, as companies, as government officials, as company leaders, or educators, how do we have?

1. The first one we do is, we should recognize, that students, fresh, hold degrees are not expected to produce a first time. So we should deal with them as trainees for a certain period of time. We should have the patience to do that.
2. We should continue hiring people, fresh people, from universities we should not always gang up with the word five years experience, seven years experience two years experience. Where do they get they experience they don't start somewhere? So we should do able to start them somewhere.

The other most important thing for graduates is language, if you are going on exercise of training them to develop skill how do we communicate with them? We are now having 50 universities what over number of universities we have, where students and teachers are not communicated at all. That's a situation where the companies will not very communication with them. So, Language in the soft skill is very, very important, that not been given in schools. So, there must be emphasis on language.

3. The third one will be when we place students from high school to universities their interest comes first, not their grade. They should not attend schools or going to a program if it is not in their heart too. If I want to an Engineer, I want be on engineer I should not forced to be something else. That should come as a very important item the trucks we have now is a student gives three or four options, he doesn't get option number one, he gets option number two. As a start he is not interested and becoming for instance a politician or an accountant, he wants to be an engineer. That is something which we should consider in the future.

Then there is another one which was related a little bit mention the gap. **How do we narrow the gap between the academic world and the workforce?** That will have to be done. This kind of forum is a good example, but there must be an orientation.

1. When we hire somebody companies should be generous enough to have orientation, to have customization, to have familiarization, before we expect students to become productive.
2. The other one we need to do is universities and programs will have to be carefully managed to make sure where producing students with relevant education. So that they get hired. If you look at, I will give you an example, there was no mining engineering class in Ethiopia. Me, leading a Goldmine, we thought we have gone a new gold mine in Metekle, as a result we need to have fresh graduate educated mining engineering. So what Unity University is start the first time a country in Mining Engineering course. We gave 25 students scholarships and will make them attend the class for five years and they graduated.

There are a lot of mining companies who can absorb all the graduate leaving from Unity University. The moment we start that course now we have got x number of university given the same course but there is no hiring institution for these engineers.

So, relevance means it has to be relevant to the needs of the nation not simply having courses because university X has got these courses, University B has to have these courses that is not relevance. That is reason why a lot of students are not getting encouraged.

For instance, why we having a lot of IT student, why we having a lot of MIS students, when our largest resource in the country is land. Why not agronomist? a lot of agronomist, a lot of people involved in agriculture. So, skill is something which takes a lot of time to develop and relevance is something which is important for people to get a job.

Thank you