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WHICH IS BETTER IN THE WORKPLACE: LOTS OF DEGREES OR YEARS OF PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE?

EXPERIENCE

VUSI RASEROKA,
Investment Banker:
Development Bank of
Southern Africa, with
16 years of financial
services experience in
investment banking,
corporate finance and
project finance



Having lots of degrees relates to what one is taught by others, where their knowledge or experiences are transferred without actually having been undergone by the learner. Experience, on the other hand, is gained through getting involved and participating in the activity. When you compare the two ways of learning, it's clear that learning through experience is better for the workplace, as the person who's learning actually experiences and participates in the learning process. Having lots of degrees, while being a way of learning, isn't necessarily the most effective knowledge in the workplace, as there would be a lack of "closeness" between what has been learnt and the application.

"Working through problems in the workplace and gaining real-life, hands-on experience gives you a bank of knowledge to draw on."

Every workplace is unique, and there are different approaches and processes that can be applied in different situations. It's important that you have the right frame of mind and temperament to deal with and resolve work-related situations.

Working through problems and situations in the workplace and gaining hands-on experience gives you a bank of knowledge (akin to personal case studies) to draw on when developing an approach to the resolution of problems. Experience enables you to deal with issues in a manner that's relevant, efficient and practical, as opposed to a highly academic or theoretical approach that you'd likely adopt if you had no experience. Experience allows you to cut through the noise and zero in on the core.

In banking, as in most industries, each project or client has different needs. The benefit that an experienced banker provides to the client is credibility, which means that the approach and the solutions you provide will be tailor-made to the client's particular circumstances. In this way, you're able to arrive faster at a solution that fully meets the client's needs.

DEGREES

PROFESSOR WIM GEVERS, Associate
Director: Academic:
University of Stellen-
bosch Business School
and Professor of Opera-
tions Research, with an
MBA and other degrees



Many academic qualifications are geared to prepare people for a professional life. The reality is that professions such as medicine, engineering or accounting can't be entered into without the relevant qualifications. In addition, any good academic qualification develops critical thinking skills that are tough to develop elsewhere and will last a lifetime.

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An academic qualification is much more than just the details of the degree you write behind your name. During your studies, you're exposed to a wide variety of opinions. Some fellow students will also become lifelong friends and, more importantly, form part of your professional network.

I also believe that post-graduate business qualifications, such as an MBA, are invaluable for the right candidate. I've witnessed first-hand the successes that a high proportion of MBA graduates have attained.

An accredited MBA attempts to condense the experience you can gain in the workplace over as much as 10 years into the two or three years that you're busy with the degree. In addition, you're exposed to a wide variety of typical business situations and challenges in multiple industries, where your decision-making skills are honed.

Above all, a strong post-graduate business qualification, like an MBA, is an opportunity for huge personal growth. You learn, among multitudes of strategy modules, workshops and courses, to identify your "competitive advantages" - those competencies that make you stand out from the crowd. Your leadership potential is also developed to bring out the authentic leader in you. **DK**