

Is it compulsory to have 'experience' to become a manager?

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I believe that we have a lot to learn from each other. I mentor many young people and some of them mentor me. I enjoy spending time with them and finding the opportunity to discuss corporate life. There are some "hotspots" so to say, issues which the young lament about the current culture of work. One is the unproportionate value bestowed upon 'experience'. The other is the role of 'age' in their positioning in the workplace.

I am talking about people who are under the age of 30. The expression on their faces change when these two issues come up in a conversation. 'Is experience really that important?' they ask. I am asking the same question myself: Is experience really that important?

At the beginning of my career, 'experience' was the first and most dominant criteria for moving up the ladder in the organization I have been working in. No matter how well you performed, you would not be promoted unless you had the required years of experience. I must admit that, as an ambitious 22 year old, I did not find this rule substantive at all.

Maybe I was young and impulsive, but I thought to myself, "I read a lot, I am smart, I seek after knowledge (even more so than many others). When it comes to academic background, it was not bad, either. Nevertheless, my path was blocked. I had no other option than to simply wait. The only lacking prerequisite to become a manager was age. And I did not want to 'simply wait'."

I left that organization and switched to another one in which 'performance' had priority and 'experience' took the backseat. I became a manager at the age of 29. I was young and had relatively little experience. During the time when finance sector was growing rapidly, companies had no other choice but to give us young employees a chance as a matter of fact.

There were times I had completed my tasks successfully, there were times I had made mistakes... There were times I said to myself 'If I had the chance, I would not make that decision, I would not act that way..'



First of all, let's look at the definition of 'experience': *1. Knowledge and skill that is gained through time spent doing a job or activity. 2. The knowledge that you get from life and from being in a lot of different situations. (Mac Millan Dictionary)*

Now let's look at the definition of 'expert': *Someone who has a particular skill or who knows a lot about a particular subject.*

At this point I can't move on without mentioning the '10,000 hours' theory in psychology. 10,000 hours for perfection.

The theory which Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson constructed highlights the importance of work on success. 10,000 hours is a pretty long time. The 'expert' title is not something you can have as a result of things you do for entertainment or in your spare time.

10,000 hours theory was approached in Malcolm Gladwell's book 'Outliers' in great detail. Gladwell makes a research about successful people and finds out

the 10,000 hours rule applies to all of them. All these successful individuals worked and practiced at least 10,000 hours to get to where they were, which is roughly 10 years. For example, before Bill Gates launched Microsoft, he programmed exactly 10,000 hours in a high school near his home. He was even sneaking into the computer room at night and programming until the dawn because he wasn't allowed to visit there during the day. In a similar case, Apple's founder Steve Jobs programmed for 10,000 hours. The Beatles practiced for 10,000 hours before they became famous.

'The idea that excellence at performing a complex task requires a critical minimum level of practice surfaces again and again in studies of expertise. In fact, researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours.' (Gladwell, Outliers)

It is probable for some to be critical about Ericsson's theory, for he rejects the idea of innate talent. However, one thing is for certain, success is not a coincidence. Working in fast pace and working hard are the most important elements that bring success. As leadership and management requires knowledge of 'humans', how does 10,000 hours rule work here?

As you may know in some occupations, how long you have worked is very important. 'Psychotherapy' is a beautiful example of this. As you grow older, you accumulate more knowledge and gain more sophisticated ways of seeing the world. What you know and understand about worklife can be used to reach a more productive state.

When it comes to choosing a doctor, a lot of people prefer someone who has worked in a busy hospital, someone who saw a lot of different cases. Some others prefer someone 'young', who is up to date with the latest scientific progresses. For some, someone who doesn't hold the title 'professor' has no chance whatsoever.

When I have to make such decisions, influenced by my HR point of view, rather than fixating on a single criteria, I aim to identify as many different perspectives as possible to reach my decisions.

I think the same applies to corporate life. Experience is extremely important but it is definitely not enough to be the sole criteria. Especially if your job is about people, I can safely say that experience is highly critical.

By the way, let us not ignore the 10,000 hours rule; 'expertise' is as much as important. People and relationships are complicated and, unfortunately, they are not as easy to understand and interpret as technical issues. Putting intensive effort and spending time, and even surpassing the 10,000 hours threshold, is a must.

Our inference ability is not limited by the quantity of our experience but rather the quality of it. That's why, when it comes to assessing experience, if we tally up the years we are gravely mistaken. The essence of 'experience' is not its duration but what we have experienced throughout those years, what we have learned, and what we have accumulated. Let us not forget, as our repertoire broadens, our flexibility increases.

Just like Søren Kierkegaard said, 'It is quite true what philosophy says that life must be understood backwards. But that makes one forget the other saying: that it must be lived forwards.'