

## **Audio Lesson #7 – Keep Investing in Yourself**

*It's not a hill, it's a mountain  
As you start out the climb...*

**Hello. My name is Jeff Tyburski. Welcome to my 7th in a series of audio lessons. I teach financial literacy with a focus on helping you save money. Unfortunately, you can't even begin to save if you can't get and hold a good job; especially one that enables you to grow your income.**

This session is the last of three sessions addressing such career uncertainty. To *this* point we outlined *the drivers* of the problem and we *began* a discussion on how to *adapt and survive* in such an environment. The first part of our solution, covered in the previous session, is to adopt *a mindset* that welcomes and *even* embraces change. Here, we will finish our discussion by suggesting a personal plan to *keep investing in yourself*, thus *proactively* staying employable and improving your earning power. Many of the steps we must take are in the areas of what we call *soft skills* and learning on the job and in life. The mantra to “Keep investing in yourself” *definitely* means *outside of and beyond* school.

Do you recall from session 3 when I said I did NOT consider my passions when I was in HS choosing to become an engineer and selecting an engineering school? I said in session 3 that, at least initially, I was *very* unhappy working as an engineer. I learned in the first 5 minutes as an engineer at General Electric that I didn't enjoy being an engineer, or at least that type of number crunching, design-oriented engineering. But I worked 33 years before setting out on my own to teach financial literacy. *What's the rest of the story?* The last session listed my employers and jobs but didn't expand on what drove the changes. *How* did I adapt? How did I proactively stay employable? If you look at my resume, I've been an engineer, and an analyst and portfolio manager. I have an MBA and CFA – all this reads as rather analytical, math and results-driven attributes. But in the end, what *kept me employed* and evolving were *softer skills*.

My first change was that I *proactively* became another *type* of engineer; a field engineer. I began to work in old economy mills, power plants and physical plants that seemed alive and dynamic. I enjoyed being away from a desk. I realized I *did* have a skill for helping operators run those plants more efficiently. I then acknowledged and developed a budding hobby of investing. I went to night school and then switched careers to become a professional investor. But as an analyst I leveraged prior skills *by covering* or studying commodity investing and the

industries I *had* worked in as an engineer. Being an investor is hard. You can, and I did, have some rough stretches. During those times I saw the need to adapt and add value in unique ways. I saw that I had a skill of describing our proprietary investment strategies, boiling them down to plain English. So, I occasionally helped as a *liaison* with sales. I further leveraged this ability to summarize and communicate by *creating* an internal school and mentoring program for interns and new analysts. I recognized my weaknesses and leveraged and developed my strengths and, as they say in the NCAA basketball tournament...I survived and moved on.

I also drew heavily from other life experiences. I am president of a non-profit working with aspiring entrepreneurs in Africa. This 15-year effort has taught me how to collaborate with people with *different* skill sets and styles. This proved valuable to me. I gained these insights *specifically* from experiences *outside* work because engineering departments and investment firms tend to hire *whole* groups of people who are *very similar*. My faith-based non-profit group and working with a different culture over 7,000 miles away, opened my eyes and broadened my skills working with people and towards a mutual goal. The project has also been very *rewarding*. We have created over 10,000 new jobs and 2,000 new businesses. The locals own and implement the process now making it truly sustainable as they currently expand to communities in other African countries.

Most important to me has been my family. I've enjoyed being a parent and have been overwhelmed by how much I have learned *from* my kids. I made career decisions with my family in mind. My priority was to eat dinner with my kids and to coach little league and attend events. That didn't fit the culture where I worked, where people stayed late into the evening. I simply did *my thing*, compensating for going home earlier than others by going into work earlier than almost everyone.

**So, a career path *truly is* a path. Often winding. Often difficult. Importantly though, You can *control* your path *more* than you think!** You can build your skills and highlight your soft skills. **Trust me, it doesn't all come down to the degree you obtained, where you went to school, and what is on your resume.**

I told my story not because I think it is some great story worth telling but it does highlight some of what we want to cover here. For instance...

## ***Expect to Change Jobs or Even Careers***

A mindset that embraces change begins by adopting a realistic perspective that fits this changing world we live in. Specifically, *expect* to change jobs or even careers; don't be shocked or surprised or threatened when you face the need for change.

### **Actions to support this mindset include:**

- **Be proactive** and not caught off guard and reactive.
- **View your career as a building portfolio.** Commit to your current job while you constantly build skills with your eyes on the horizon.
- **Be fluid.** That is, be *open and willing* to move laterally within a company or receptive to relocate.

## ***Also, Expect to Have to be Your Own Advocate***

Don't let yourself fall through the cracks. Realize that in a fast-paced, results-driven, technology-driven world, you will have to be your own agent, advocating for yourself, promoting your accomplishments and qualifications.

### **Actions to support this mindset include:**

- **Be your own brand manager.** Think of it as developing your own personal brand and having to act as your own brand ambassador. Your brand is more than the technical stuff on your resume. Your brand includes your skills, your values, and what motivates you.
- **Know what you are passionate about (so that you can pursue it) but also so you can tell others.** *Craft, and learn to articulate, your message.*
- **Know what I call your *generic skill set*.** For example, you may be an accountant, but you may have a unique ability to organize and run a complicated project. What I call generic skills represent your skills at your core, skills you'd display no matter where you worked.

- **Soft skills** are increasingly important to get and hold a job *and to advance*. Soft skills include:
  - Your ability to communicate effectively in written and verbal form.
  - Your ability to truly listen.
  - Your ability to connect the dots and solve problems.
  - Your ability to influence others, to negotiate, to manage.
  - and, underlying this whole session, your ability to adapt to change is critical.

I once had a manager and mentor who often said that your intelligence quotient or raw IQ is obviously important, but your emotional quotient (EQ) helps you advance. EQ includes soft skills and is thus a lot about communication skills, decision making ability, and leadership.

## **Importantly, Understand Your Degree is Not the Be All End All**

Another important realization is the mindset that *your degree* is not the be all and end all that defines your skill set or capabilities. Don't pigeonhole yourself to what is printed on the diploma. It's true, you have innate skills, that generic skill set I just spoke about, but **you also need a *lifelong focus on learning and a desire and commitment to develop your skills. Constantly demonstrate to people around you, colleagues, managers, and customers, your intellectual curiosity.***

### **Actions to support this mindset include:**

- **Be sure to learn on the job and in life.** I emphatically encourage you to learn *outside* of school. You can do this in two ways, develop a true expertise or stay broad, keeping your options open. There is no one right answer. Life is a balancing act. You may have to do a bit of both or at least be aware of both paths.
- **Becoming an expert, is to understand Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hours rule<sup>7</sup>.** This *rule* defines how many hours in a particular skill you need to become a *true expert*. Obtaining a job is not the end but rather the beginning of the race. You will need to keep pace with the changes in your industry by identifying and tracking industry sources and trends; not just for opportunities

but for threats. Attend conferences. Follow webinars, podcasts, and social media of industry leaders. Spot trends in technology and growth opportunities that point you in the areas you must develop skills.

- **Regarding keeping your options open; continuously develop skills in line with your interests and also *push the limits of your comfort zone and skill set.***
  - As you work to proactively develop your skills, you should occasionally, consciously, step outside your comfort zone as well. This might be as simple as volunteering for a new project at work which offers a chance to challenge yourself in new ways and to stand out if you succeed. You may also explicitly seek out and ask for a mentor.

I hope this checklist, of ways to proactively stay employable, resonates with you and helps you get and keep good jobs, and increasing your income in the process. Doing so will put you in a position to save money...our true goal here. And now we are ready to discuss that *in detail.*