The Job Skills That Will Be Essential in 20 Years (Aren't What You Think)

You can see where things are going. Software is making things easier, faster, and more comfortable. That's no original insight.

You might think 20 years from now the skills that make "faster + easier + more comfortable" possible (e.g. software engineering) will be the most valued workplace skills.

I disagree.

Unfortunately, (and in my darker days) I think "faster + easier + more comfortable" is on track to make many people psychologically weaker. Amazon drone delivery will allow many people to never leave their homes. Tinder and the like will allow many people to gloss over hard parts of relationships. Facebook and other platforms let us build our own bubbles, insulated from critique. Automation, interfaces, and intermediation all reduce human risk and effort and discomfort.

But when our technology makes anything beyond instant gratification feel painful, people will begin to lose the skills that make innovation possible. And I'm not talking about software engineering.

It will be the things which technology can't really teach you that will be in short supply. It will be all the things which are essential for business but which are psychologically uncomfortable.They will be the interpersonal and "soft" human skills that everything in our world is training us to lose. And because those things power innovation and make the world work, they will be highly valuable to have on your side.

If you want to create the future, don't get sucked in to the instant gratification of the "future" in its current "faster + easier + more comfortable" iteration. If you want to be in a good position in the job market in 20 years, start now to expose yourself to situations (at work and at home) where you have to develop skills like courage, honesty, ownership, and emotional resilience. Learn how to negotiate. Learn how to ask for help, or to ask for things. Learn how to sell. Learn how to say no. Learn patience and long-term thinking. Learn how to defuse hostile work relationships. Learn how to inspire others.

If you are worried about not being a software engineer, relax a bit. If you let the real world be your teacher, almost any job will prepare you for these skills of the future.*

*Which are also skills of the present

Intellectual credit: Cal Newport has already made a similar argument that the ability to

focus and do "deep work" is a competitive advantage. Credit to Gary Vaynerchuk for thoughts on the future of convenience and to Isaac Morehouse for his thoughts on the importance of entrepreneurism/flexibility and general skills as future-proofers.