

CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT

episode notes



EP 26 - Advice In The Age of Algorithms

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AI Statement

All elements of this episode are products of the author, Chris Kreuter, and created without the use of AI tools.

Today's question:

I'm a junior in college and gearing up for my first major summer internship. I'm worried about the rising influence of AI apps like ChatGPT. What advice would you give to someone entering the workforce in this new environment?

I'll start with the main summary of everything I'm about to say: **Focus on your human-ness.**

We live in complex, turbulent times. We have wealth, tools, and opportunities beyond our ancestors' wildest dreams. But we're no less human than they were.

So many of us are lost in screens. Hobbled by attention spans measurable in milliseconds. Letting the dopamine parade continue with another swipe.

Make no mistake: We're in the midst of seismic shifts in many industries. Algorithms and generative AI programs grow in sophistication and usage at an insane pace. I worry about friends working as copywriters, sports columnists, paralegals, insurance salespeople, just to name a few of the many fields face economic realities, even existential crises, as software replaces humans responsible for rote, quantifiable, and predictable tasks.

But today's episode isn't meant to be a treatise on how these tools are shifting society. It's about what our asker can do now to better prepare themselves for this uncertainty. Which brings me back to the summary at the start: **Focus on what makes your humanity valuable, and it'll enable you to thrive despite whatever comes your way.**

There's many directions to explore, but today's episode will cover three themes that I feel are most poignant for someone anticipating the transition from formal education to the realities of 'adulting':

1. **Curiosity**
2. **Network**
3. **Evolution**

1. Curiosity

- Don't confuse algorithms and AI apps as sentient beings with thoughts and emotions.
 - They're programmed learning modules
 - Despite they're powerful abilities, they're a function of guidelines and inputs
 - They don't strive for any particular objectives other than those they're programmed to strive for

- Each of us is also a product of the influences and momentum of our past actions - but we retain the free will to aspire to things or to change
- Embrace the elements of your nature that are uniquely human
 - The physical world will always have greater resolution than digital ones
 - Human connection face-to-face will always carry more weight than digital interactions
 - There are deeper layers of complexity that don't fit the 0-or-1, us-or-them, red-vs-blue nature of much digital interactions
- But it's also imperative, in this day & age, to maintain curiosity about how these tools are developed
 - Keep up with technical developments
 - Don't just use them - understand who has made them and for what intent
 - Understand their methodology, how it produces results
 - Pay special attention to the biases & limitations of their outputs before you use them
- It's vital to note that curiosity is a lifelong journey.
 - Our asker may be in the start of adulthood, but this advice is equally important as those nearing retirement.
 - It's vital that we don't surrender our human-ness to systems and programs we don't understand.
 - **And it won't be easy: Which is what will make it one of the greatest differentiators for our asker's success**
- Particular fields will always have their gatekeepers, certifications, licenses, etc... But they're just the cost of entry.
 - Think of them as the rules of the game: You need to know your guideposts, but the fun comes from developing a winning strategy within those rules.
 - The broader & deeper your experiences outside of your field, the greater diversity of strategies you can bring to bear within it.
- Learning shouldn't end with your degree.

- Be curious about the world
- Work on identifying trends
- Find ideas and inspiration from other fields - can you apply any to your current one?
- Develop stronger mental models to help you clearly see how the world actually works
- Seek out a diversity of opinions

2. Network

- Regardless of the tools you use: The majority of us rely on our communities to survive and thrive.
- Making your way through the world, and your career, your success is improved if you maintain strong networks.
- Be a friend first: Develop thoughtful, strong connections through shared interests, human empathy, and aiding them in times of need.
 - ***Dig the well before you're thirsty!***
- Treating people in a beneficial manner, over a long enough time-scale, will provide you not just immense joy and satisfaction in life - it can also serve as a safety net in times of need.
 - It'll be hard for our asker to relate to this now: But if you lost your job - who are the first five people you would call? How much help would they be able or willing to provide?
 - If you're curious about a topic, or how to handle a situation - who in your network can you reach out to for expert advice or interesting opinions?
 - The size & diversity of your network (*or the podcasts you're listening to / the shows that you watch / the books that you read*) are uniquely human assets that will pay you dividends throughout life, the proverbial well to help you weather personal droughts.

3. Evolution

- Embrace shifts in life
 - Few of us will have entire careers devoted to what we focused on in our formal schooling
 - Using myself as an example: Nearly 20 years ago I went to school focused on underwater system engineering, and I've spent most of the years since loving my career supporting the construction and operation of public transit trains and buses.
 - Your interests and situations will change - and those changes are often unpredictable & out of your control:
 - Having to move
 - Having children
 - Changes in health
 - Environmental changes
 - Corporate downsizing
 - An idea or product (or podcast 🗣️) you create 'going viral'
- With so much uncertainty, it's imperative that you maintain a mindset that's open to evolving.
 - This is why I led this episode with the importance of curiosity & lifelong learning
 - One of my personal guiding principles is to have thoughtful opinions, but hold them loosely
 - Avoid being headstrong and insisting the world is a particular way: It's impossible for any one of us to grasp the entire scope of existence.
 - Live more in the questions, not your certainty of particular answers.
- And yeah: Sometimes this means embracing uncomfortable, or even painful realizations & situations.
 - Evolve always, through failures and successes.
 - Get comfortable leveraging your network to help you navigate the difficult times that are certain to come

- Dealing with hard things now will setup Future You with better circumstances & opportunities
- Supporting others going through painful times can also help you evolve to better weather your own situations in the future, as long as you're open to constant evolution.
- Going back to the game analogy I used earlier:
 - The more games you've played, and the more times you've played them, the better able you'll be to adapt to new situations, new rules.
 - There's a distinct advantage to bringing a diversity of experience to the table: You'll see patterns that other players won't.
- There's another aspect to this game analogy: Where a player can also be deeply enmeshed in the rules and strategies of a one singular game.
 - Someone with deep domain knowledge and a long-term experience in the field will still have an advantage over those new to the game with novel strategies.
 - But they must live with the danger of elements of those rules changing or becoming obsolete. They'll have fewer footholds from which to adapt.
 - And this is where the dangers of algorithms and generative AI must be understood.
 - Can you identify aspects of your prospective career that have a likelihood of shifting drastically in the coming years?

Episode 26 Quote:

From [Rob Reid's recent article on Ars Technica](#):

Of course, people have been warning about AI risk since before even Stanley Kubrick's 1968 classic 2001: A Space Odyssey. But the danger we should worry about today isn't super AI. It's bad people super-empowered by generative AI.