



After the Fact | [The Future of Learning – A Career of Learning](#)

Originally aired November 8, 2019

Total runtime: 00:16:32

TRANSCRIPT

[Music plays- "Pomp and Circumstance"]

Ray Suarez, guest host: It's graduation day. Congratulations! You now have a bachelor's degree, probably some debt, and you're ready to hit the job market. Or maybe you've just finished high school and are going straight to work to help pay the family's bills.

Either way, you're armed with a diploma. Are you finished learning? Hardly. The fast-moving marketplace is adding new jobs—many we've never heard of before. And many familiar jobs are going away just as quickly.

Michelle Weise, chief innovation officer, Strada Education Network: The rate of computing power doubles every 18 months or two years. And we've seen that occur over time, and we've seen technology get adopted faster and faster, as the technology also gets cheaper and cheaper. And so, what we are seeing is that there's just more turbulence in the labor market, and it's changing the nature of work.

It's changing where we work, how we do our work, what we do for work. And so, what this is basically leading to is more switching and more navigating transitions in our lives. And it's already been happening, where we've seen early Baby Boomers experience about 12 transitions by the time—12 job transitions by the time they retire. And so that number's only going to go up.

Ray Suarez: That was Michelle Weise. She is chief innovation officer at Strada Education Network, where she studies the future of learning and work and how to connect adult learners to good jobs throughout their working lives. We spoke with her to understand what the rapidly changing marketplace will mean to all of us who work, whether we're brand new to it or—ahem—veterans with several decades under our belts.

I'm Ray Suarez, and you're listening to "After the Fact," a podcast from The Pew Charitable Trusts. This is the third episode in a four-part series that explores the future of learning. I'm your guest host.



Today, we're focusing on the learning we do—and the learning we need to do once we've left school. And how learning is becoming a very real part of our entire adult working lives. Let's set the stage with our data point for this episode: 65. According to Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce, 65 percent of all jobs in the American economy will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.

That means most of us will have to learn some additional skills in order to get, or keep, a job, because of how fast technology is changing the modern workplace. This won't come as a shock to most of us. Here's Michelle Weise again.

Michelle Weise: We are all going to have to somehow harness the power of education over and over again throughout our working lives. It's not just going to be kind of a one-and-done experience on the front end of your work life. We have to start thinking about how we invest truly in a lifelong learning system, instead of just sort of nodding our heads along with the idea and the concept of lifelong learning.

Ray Suarez: The transition that you're talking about has been underway for decades. Hundreds of thousands of workers have found themselves confronted with—without exaggeration, we could call it an existential crisis. We haven't answered those questions very well in the past, have we?

Michelle Weise: In the past, you could get away with not earning some postsecondary credential and sustain a middle-class lifestyle. You could buy a home. You could have a family. You could experience some sort of stability. And we've seen that model devolve over time, where with growing inequality in the system, you just can't.

Ray Suarez: Chances are, you're going to have to figure out how to get some additional skills in order to go to work, keep your job, change your job, or advance your career. But how do you learn what you need to learn? How do you become a worker of the future?

[Kitchen sounds - sizzling/chopping/pans clattering]

Emily Phillips, chef and instructor: So shrimp have this dark vein that runs along the backside of them. We're just going to slice them shallowly along their backs and pull that vein out. And then all of the—

Student: So, you're just going to pull the shell off of them?



Emily Phillips: Yes. You're going to pull the shells off, and then you're going to—I don't think that these shrimp have the head on, but I can't remember for sure.

Student: So we use a paring knife?

Emily Phillips: To take the shells off, you're just going to use your fingers.

Ray Suarez: We're here in the cooking classroom of JobTrain in Menlo Park, California. JobTrain is a nonprofit organization that helps people who are low income, out of work, or on prison furlough find—and get on—a career path.

JobTrain offers vocational training and academic guidance for students who need a GED or want to go to college, for example. They also help with essential life skills, such as managing finances, or their anger, all for free. The students have 11 weeks to master skills—skills that are badly needed.

Barrie Hathaway, CEO, JobTrain: Sixty-seven percent of jobs in California do not technically require a college degree. In fact, 43 percent of all jobs in California are middle-wage, middle-skill jobs. So, people who don't have college degrees have been trained to believe that they only have access to low-skill, low-wage kinds of jobs, and that couldn't be further from the truth.

Ray Suarez: That's Barrie Hathaway. He's the CEO of JobTrain, which teaches willing adults skills in four areas: the construction trades, the health care and technology fields, and as we're learning today, the culinary arts. Once students finish their program, work is often waiting.

Barrie Hathaway: We know that employers in the Bay Area are not able to grow as quickly as they'd like, are not able to contribute to the economy in a way that they actually could, because they can't get the skilled workers they need. And we are helping with that.

[Transition music plays]

Emily Phillips, to student: Remember, we talked about this, right? What's the best way to get a peel off? Cut in half, then the skin's going to peel off a lot easier. Make sure that you're working smarter and not harder. Don't make things harder for yourself than they need to be.



Ray Suarez: Chef Emily Phillips is the instructor in the cooking class. She's been a chef for 20 years and has worked in both casual cafes and boutique restaurants. Now, she's teaching adults, who've had no previous experience, how to cook.

Ray Suarez, to Emily: What do they have to master in order to be ready to walk into a restaurant and have a boss say, "Go to work. Do this."

Emily Phillips: The main things are learning your basic knife skills so that you know how to use a knife, you know which knife you're supposed to use. And then also cooperative working because you're—a lot of the people that come here, especially people who are on work furlough from the county jail, they sometimes have those kinds of like—this kind of like really independent spirit, let's say, where they want to do everything themselves. They don't want to have to rely on somebody else.

[Transition music plays]

Barrie Hathaway: They're learning how to cook, but they're learning it at a very important, fundamental level. They're learning, very importantly, customer service, how to be a great employee on a job, what employers are looking for, how to be that person that whether they're dealing with the staff of the organization or customers of the organization, they treat everybody with respect and kindness and are very diligent, hard, knowledgeable workers.

Ray Suarez: These skills, known as human—or soft—skills are key for all of us workers to master as the marketplace moves toward more automation and rote jobs are phased out. In many professions, you can't teach a robot to navigate the ins and outs of other people's personalities. Cooking is one of them.

Emily Phillips: This is not the kind of job where you can't rely on somebody else. You have to be able to rely on your teammates, even if you don't like them, even if you feel like they're not a person that you would hang out with after work. You still have to come into work every day and be able to work with them.

Ray Suarez: You have to be able to not only bone the fish, but work with somebody else to get it ready to eat.

Emily Phillips: Yeah. Exactly, yes. Because I'd say it's a dangerous job. There's fire, there's sharp knives, there's raw meat everywhere. It's also chaotic and it's very stressful. And so, learning how to manage your emotions, learning how to manage your feelings and compartmentalize is a very big part of learning how to be a chef.



Ray Suarez: Once the students graduate from the 11-week program, they get a job. Again, JobTrain's Barrie Hathaway.

Barrie Hathaway: They're getting what's called a ServSafe certification that makes sure that the employer knows they understand the rules of the road when it comes to worker safety and the kitchen environment. In the culinary arts field, JobTrain is working with some of the best employers in the region because demand is so great for this kind of worker, that we're able to focus our energy on some of the bigger employers who offer better benefits and better wages and are more inclined to grow their talent. Once they have them working for them, they're more inclined to grow them within the company.

Ray Suarez: More than 190,000 individuals have taken JobTrain's program in the past 50 years. Eighty-five percent of those who take the program finish. Eighty percent of those who finish will get a job in their field.

[Transition music plays]

Ray Suarez: If acquiring soft skills is one of the keys to having a job in the future, so is the desire to learn, even for those folks who have been able to rely on one career or a job they know how to do well. Again, Michelle Weise.

Michelle Weise: I think one of the challenges is just to have this mindset shift that you do have to return to learning. I don't think that was part of the narrative that they grew up with—that they would have to upskill and retrain. If someone has been working from age 18 onward, and now suddenly sees the need to transition, how does that person understand all the different kinds of hidden skills that he or she may have from all of that work experience? And how can that person think about adjacent domains where they might be able to transfer some of their experience into something new?

Ray Suarez: Liz Beigle-Bryant can answer that question. Five years ago, when she was 57, she found herself in a bind. She is the main breadwinner for her family and was laid off from her administrative assistant job at a big tech company. But she had an idea.

Liz Beigle-Bryant: I was an administrative assistant. And while I was there, I had realized that there was this new software platform used for collaboration, and a lot of people would hire me if I knew how to use it. So, after I was laid off, I realized I needed to go learn this software. I needed to learn other pieces of software to go around with it, so I decided to learn HTML, which is one of the basic web coding programs.



Ray Suarez: Liz taught herself how to use the new software. And then, more software. Then, she taught herself how to code. She's also learned how to talk to people who were looking to hire someone with her new skills. And she did all of this from the comfort of home.

Liz Beigle-Bryant: I went online, I did the research, and then I learned the language to speak to be a programmer. I learned—and I got on to Code Academy, which was an online learning free website, and I learned the language, and I learned what people expected. And then that, coupled with my research, got me the right way to speak to people.

Ray Suarez: Was it tough to make up your mind to go get this subsequent training? Was it a daunting prospect?

Liz Beigle-Bryant: Not really because it's something I've always done. I'm a lifelong learner, and when I was a kid, I used to be bullied, and so my favorite place to be was the library because it was quiet and books became my friends. So, it's a natural thing for me to go learn something new. Also, I came from a family without much money, and the only way that I could learn to do something was any way I could access it free. And that started with the library, but as online learning became a thing, and I could find more things on the internet, I found that I could access more free things and learn new things.

Ray Suarez: Michelle Weise had shared that the learner is a critical part of the puzzle. And Liz's ingenuity shows just that.

Ray Suarez, to Liz: Did you have to regard yourself, take stock, assess what it was you already knew, what it was you had to offer, even look at yourself in a different way, because being in the workforce taught you things?

Liz Beigle-Bryant: Each résumé that I wrote, I had to say, for this job, what are the different skills that I have? And then for this next job description, what can I bring to the table and what is this company going to want to see from me? And so I had to constantly re-evaluate myself just going through the process of trying to get the next job, and so I tried on each of these jobs that I looked at, and it was like I was trying on different costumes, but it was really—I was trying on my different skill sets and seeing how can I fit into each of these jobs?

Ray Suarez: And fit in she did. One month after she learned coding, Liz got a job at Sound Transit, the public transit agency that operates the rail and bus system in the Seattle region.



Liz Beigle-Bryant: From there, the trajectory of my life totally changed. Five years later, I have my dream job at Sound Transit doing that collaboration software as the expert within my department. I have a career path I never knew I could have because they—seeing the skills that I had—recognized that I could have a career path, and now they've opened up some additional worlds for me to think, I can go back. I can go get my engineering degree, and so I'm actually really excited to have that backup from my employer.

Ray Suarez: So what's next? Could you see repeating the trick again? Climbing that mountain again and continuing to learn new skills that you haven't already taken on board?

Liz Beigle-Bryant: Well, yes. I actually do have some dreams. I would like to retrain myself to be an engineer so that I can continue to move up within Sound Transit. It seems kind of crazy to want to do that at 60, but that would be fun, and that's one of the original lives I actually really wanted to do that I told myself I couldn't. But now, because I told myself I can and changed my life a number of times, I know I can go and do this, so now I will.

[Transition music plays]

Ray Suarez: Be sure to join us as we continue our four-part series and look at the effects of a life spent learning. And let us know what you thought of this episode. Tweet us [@pewtrusts](https://twitter.com/pewtrusts) or send us an email at podcasts@pewtrusts.org. And thank you for listening.

Female voice: "After the Fact" is produced by The Pew Charitable Trusts.