

The future of work won't be about college degrees, it will be about job skills

- According to the survey *Freelancing in America 2018*, released Wednesday, 93 percent of college-educated freelancers say their skill training is more useful in the work they are doing now than their college training.
- Sixty-five percent of children entering primary school will end up in jobs that don't yet exist, reveals the World Economic Forum.
- The result is a proliferation of new, nontraditional education options.

Stephane Kasriel, Upwork CEO

Published 8:36 AM ET Wed, 31 Oct 2018 Updated 12:29 PM ET Wed, 31 Oct 2018 CNBC.com



Tony Talbot | AP

Students walk across campus at the University of Vermont in Burlington.

Twenty million students started college this fall, and this much is certain: The vast **majority** of them will be taking on debt — a lot of debt.

What's less certain is whether their degrees will pay off.

According to the survey *Freelancing in America 2018*, released Wednesday, freelancers put more value on skills training: 93 percent of freelancers with a four-year college degree say skills training was useful versus only 79 percent who say their college education was useful to the work they do now. In addition, 70 percent of full-

time freelancers participated in skills training in the past six months compared to only 49 percent of full-time non-freelancers.

The fifth annual survey, conducted by research firm Edelman Intelligence and co-commissioned by [Upwork](#) and Freelancers Union, polled 6,001 U.S. workers.

This new data points to something much larger. Rapid technological change, combined with rising education costs, have made our traditional higher-education system an increasingly anachronistic and risky path. The cost of a college education is so high now that we have reached a tipping point at which the debt incurred often isn't outweighed by future earnings potential.

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For example, a 2016 World Economic Forum [report](#) found that "in many industries and countries, the most in-demand occupations or specialties did not exist 10 or even five years ago, and the pace of change is set to accelerate."

And recent data from Upwork confirms that acceleration. Its latest [Upwork Quarterly Skills Index](#), released in July, found that "70 percent of the fastest-growing skills are new to the index."

Expect the change to keep coming. The [WEF](#) cites one estimate finding that 65 percent of children entering primary school will end up in jobs that don't yet exist.



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These trends aren't just academic to me. It's influenced the [advice I give my children](#). While my father had one job throughout his life, I've had several. And I tell my children not only can they expect to have many jobs throughout their working lives but multiple jobs at the same time.

It is therefore imperative that we encourage more options to thrive without our current overreliance on college degrees as proof of ability. We need new routes to success and hope.

New, nontraditional education options

The future of work won't be about degrees. More and more, it'll be about skills. And no one school, whether it be Harvard, General Assembly or Udacity, can ever insulate us from the unpredictability of technological progression and disruption.

As a leader of a technology company and former head of engineering, I've hired many programmers during my career. And what matters to me is not whether someone has a computer science degree but how well they can think and how well they can code. In

fact, among the top 20 fastest-growing skills on Upwork's latest Skills Index, none require a degree.

Freelancers, the fastest-growing segment of the workforce, realize more than most that education doesn't stop. It's a lifelong process, and they are [nearly twice](#) as likely to reskill.

More and more, companies are catching on. Last year [PwC](#) began a pilot program allowing high school graduates to begin working as accountants and risk-management consultants. And this August, jobs website Glassdoor [listed](#) "15 more companies that no longer require a degree," including tech giants such as Apple, IBM and Google. "Increasingly," Glassdoor reported, "there are many companies offering well-paying jobs to those with nontraditional education or a high-school diploma."

Google, for example, used to ask applicants for their college GPAs and transcripts; however, as Laszlo Bock — its head of hiring — has explained, those metrics [aren't valuable](#) predictors of an employee's performance. As a result, Bock told [The New York Times](#) a few years ago that the portion of non-college-educated employees at Google has grown over time.

And second, new nontraditional education options are proliferating. Often laser-focused on the most in-demand skills, would-be college students can now enroll in campus-based, project-focused institutions, like the Holberton School (where I'm a trustee) or online programs such as e-learning sites like Coursera or Udemy.

To be sure, I'm not saying college is a waste of time and money for everyone. But if there's one takeaway, it's this: The future of work won't be about degrees. More and more, it'll be about skills. And no one school, whether it be Harvard, General Assembly or Udacity, can ever insulate us from the unpredictability of technological progression and disruption.

But one thing can: The fastest-growing segment of the workforce — freelancers — have realized more than most that education doesn't stop. It's a lifelong process. Diploma or not, it's a mindset worth embracing.

— *By Stephane Kasriel, CEO of Upwork*