

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



927 The Why and How of Becoming T-shaped

Today, we help I-shapes and generalists make the transformation to T-shape, if they're looking to expand their horizons. I'm Jerry Roberts, and I'll explain all of it, next on The Extra Point.

To recap from yesterday, I-shapes in the workplace are pretty much one-dimensional. They do one thing extremely well, are known for that, and not much else. T-shapes are also expert at one thing, but have other skills that are also of value to customers, and therefore are valuable for an employer. We'll call them expert-plus. Finally, generalists are relatively competent at many things, but wouldn't be considered an expert in any of them.

In the uncertain economy that is before us, having an extra marketable skill could be the difference for many people. We'll talk about that today.

First, some I-shaped companies and individuals are very well-positioned to ride out whatever bumps and potholes the Guam economy will present in the next few years. Their market niche, their specialized talents, their political pull — whatever it is, they'll do well. It's virtually guaranteed.

Generalists may have to be more aggressive in letting people know what services they offer, but if they hustle, many should be fine.

For the rest of us, it could be more challenging. There will be I-shapes who are good at one thing only, but they'll find it difficult to make it on that one thing.

We'll also see generalists who have a tough time. Even though they're good at many things, that might not be enough.

So, what is the answer for both? Evolving from where they now are, into a T-shape — great at one thing, and competent in others.

The answer is to slightly modify a famous phrase, and become "A jack of all trades, and master of one." For the I-shape, who already is an expert in one field, they would expand and develop skills in a few other areas, perhaps associated with their specific expertise, and perhaps not.

For the generalist, who is already able to do many things well, they will have to do is select one and over time, become an expert performer.

I know of a good appliance repairman named Marvin, who was doing pretty well in his business. He could fix almost anything. Then, during a heatwave in Houston, his AC died and he sweated for almost a week because all repairmen were busy. Finally, he got some help and did the repair himself.

When he found out how much it would have cost him, and that Houston AC repair staff were always busy, he decided to learn that business at a local trade school.

Within a year, Marvin was competent, had equalled his appliance repair income, and did so in his spare time. He'd still fix washers, dryers, and refrigerators if you asked, but he mostly focused on his aircon business. Marvin gained certifications, and was seen as an expert. He went from generalist to expert-plus in just a few years.

Another story of transformation. Paula was a chief financial officer at a billion-dollar company, and was paid extremely well. However, the job was beyond stressful. Then, Paula's sister had trouble with her small business, and needed help with finances, marketing, and help to build an online presence. Paula was tired, but jumped in, and within a month the company was on solid ground. She knew little about marketing and Internet business, but she went to online groups and got answers. (Con't.)

It didn't end there. Paula's sister was part of a civic group with many female business owners, and most of them had similar problems. Several begged Paula to help them. The work was very different from her normal routine and required some different skills, but she grew into the role.

Paula found that she was energized by working with these entrepreneurs, not burned out like in her day job. Wait, it gets better. Paula then noticed that this energy rolled over into the day job, and she was better able to tolerate the pressures.

If you're an I-shape and great at one thing, like Paula, can you identify some other skills that could complement what you now do? If you're a generalist, like Marvin, can you imagine one skill you could build up to expert-plus status?

Here's a quick list of what to do.

1. Whether it's to add expert status, or develop complementary skills for your existing expert status, determine what will help you get to where you want to be...and if there is a market for it once you learn.
2. If the skill is complementary, how much do you need to learn, to add to your revenue?
3. Find out how you can learn those skills. That might be a community college, trade school, or perhaps online courses.
4. Develop the plan to gain the learning.
5. Work the plan. Apply what you learn.

Changing times require that we be willing to change. Should you be thinking about that?

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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