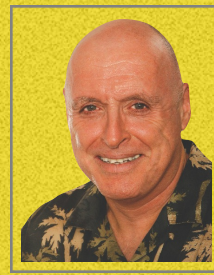


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1792 The Future of Higher Learning – Part 2

Yesterday, we spoke about the challenges surrounding higher education, both here in Guam and elsewhere. Besides the increasing costs to students that are associated with earning degrees, employers are worried over new hires not being ready to make a significant contribution. Some leaders say information is coming so fast now, that college is obsolete. I'm Jerry Roberts, today let's explore how industries might replace traditional college or university programs if there was a move away from the conventional two- and four-year degree programs; as well as how might students feel about that. It's coming next on The Extra Point.

So, let's set the table as we left it yesterday. A growing segment of employers are not happy with the product being turned out by colleges and universities — and they think they can do a better job to get workers ready to deliver results. No doubt AI, artificial intelligence, would play a prominent role.

Higher learning institutions have been with us in America for over 200 years. The thought of them disappearing from the landscape seems strange, but we certainly live in strange times.

If America's tech sector decides to drop a few billion dollars into an educational system for their employees, they are ready to do it. The leaders in Silicon Valley believe they can educate workers better, faster, and cheaper.

A key factor is the strong belief that their training programs would be state-of-the-art and far ahead of anything a college could provide.

If tech leaders devise such a system, there's no reason that any other industry couldn't do the same.

What might be the difference between the program offered by the industry provider and a college? Right off the bat, I'd say that the core requirements of a school would likely be gone. History, science, English, where would those

fit in? More than likely, an industry program would strip out the first two years of a four-year curriculum — the courses that aren't generally part of the student's major.

Or, maybe industry and colleges could put together a hybrid program. The colleges provide the general courses, while industry delivers the technical side. Colleges make less but are still in the game, and the student ends up with a degree signed off by the school and the industry.

In my opinion, it's the colleges that will have to roll up their sleeves, get very creative, and in effect will have to reinvent themselves. If they do not, I believe they will face a marketplace where the deck is stacked against them.

Students will have faster, likely cheaper options for their education. Industry providers could offer tuition assistance as many do now for college expenses — or just pay it themselves, figuring it will bring them a quality candidate sooner and will be worth it.

By now, you might have questions. Questions like:

1. If a student opts for an industry program that doesn't have traditional core classes, won't they be losing out on a "well rounded" education?

Yes, the learning would look different. That question deserves another one. If given a choice, would most students stay with the four-year college curriculum, or would they select a one- or two-year industry plan that would result in being hired faster and pulling in a paycheck that would probably be bigger. Why bigger? Because the employer would have a worker who is trained and ready to make a larger impact faster.

2. What is the value of a college degree in today's market?
(Con't.)

I could easily do an Extra Point on this topic alone. Degrees certainly have value. They show that the holder made a commitment and completed the work necessary.

However, there are a lot of people walking around with college degrees who haven't got a job, or haven't been able to find work in their chosen field. College degrees don't guarantee jobs. Industry program completion certificates likely would.

After talking with CEOs and HR managers over the past several years, I can tell you that what they want is better candidates applying for their open positions. They want people who are ready on day one to contribute.

I'm sure the tech titans in Silicon Valley and elsewhere have always wanted the same thing. I don't think they have any real desire to be in the education business. However, they will do that if they have to.

Perhaps there can be greater partnerships between industries and colleges, where both get what they want and the students benefit.

Locally, both UOG and GCC have those kinds of relationships, and should develop more. If I was in a leadership position at either school, I believe it would be foolish for me to think that the changing landscape around education that's happening in the mainland will never touch us.

For those leaders I would offer this dose of reality: Every kid you graduate and who is hired by a local employer is a walking billboard for the quality of your product. Are you totally comfortable in owning that?

Tomorrow, we go another step deeper into the future of higher learning.

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

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