

Getting career coaching online via song and dance

While social media advice is plentiful, job seekers should look at practical considerations like job security and job tasks



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Financial analyst Terence Cheng was considering his next steps two years into his first job in an accounting firm.

So, he did what any millennial would do – look online.

He found a wealth of advice and anecdotes on platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram and forums like Reddit and HardwareZone, as well as webinars by industry and professional associations.

“There’s a wide range of perspectives and advice available online. I could tap the wisdom of the crowd and supplement it with experts’ advice to see what was most applicable to my situation and decide on my next steps accordingly,” said Mr Cheng, 30.

One tip he picked up was to place more emphasis on “choosing” a good boss to work for, especially in the first few years of work which form the foundation of his career.

It helped him decide to take up a job offer which, he said, led him to where he is today.

Career coaching is taking on a new form in the age of social media, driven by hunger for on-the-go information and entertainment.

And as new formats such as TikTok videos and podcasts gain popularity, content creators ranging from professional career coaches to well-meaning individuals have been jumping on the bandwagon to offer free advice.

Some dance and lip-sync to catchy music while displaying captions on how to ask for a promotion, while others get successful entrepreneurs to share pearls of wisdom with the young crowd.

“We see the uses of social media evolve from being something almost purely for social and entertainment purposes to serious vehicles for the communication of all types of information,” said Associate Professor Trevor Yu of Nanyang Business School who is co-director for Nanyang Technological University’s Centre for Research and Development in Learning.

Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) senior lecturer for

marketing Vanessa Liu said the bite-size videos shared on entertainment app TikTok meet the short attention span and preferences of millennials for visual and video content.

The app has made video editing so user-friendly that novices can also get on board.

New media, like podcasts, are likely to become more popular among millennials, added Dr Liu.

“The advertisements in podcasts are minimised and the podcasts could be available on demand. These features meet the growing needs of millennials for useful knowledge, credible information or entertaining topics instantly available.”

TikTok was downloaded some 3.2 million times between 2018 to Dec 14 this year, according to estimates by analytics firm Sensor Tower of first-time unique installs from Singapore’s App Store and Google Play.

A Spotify survey in May of 500 Singapore respondents aged 18 to 37 found that 22 per cent of them listen to podcasts at least once a week.

TikTok’s user and content operations manager for Singapore, Ms Doreen Tan, said the platform saw a 63 per cent jump in the creation of educational videos among users here between July and September this year.

The firm has been encouraging more individuals and organisations to create content that promotes learning new skills, habits or information, she added.

Experts say these new formats make career advice more accessible, digestible and memorable for millennials.

Dr Brandon Koh, an industrial-organisational psychologist and lecturer at SUSS, said young people may learn more effectively from a person they can relate to, such as another millennial seeking their first job or relating advice they have learnt and used successfully.

“Career advice also prompts individuals about the variety of factors to consider, which could illuminate blind spots or provide balanced perspectives,” he said.

Still, Prof Yu recommends taking user-generated career advice with a pinch of salt.

“Risks to consumers can range from simply believing in inapplicable or unproven advice to even more serious consequences like being manipulated to hold beliefs which are downright wrong and harmful to the management of one’s career. The bottom line is, try to make sure the information is coming from a source with an established professional record,” said Prof Yu.

Dr Koh said people giving advice are on average more likely to recommend idealistic choices to others, perhaps focusing on idealistic characteristics of jobs like an employer’s branding or symbolic status of particular jobs.

But the people making the decision who have to experience and execute their own choices may need to take a more pragmatic approach and look at practical considerations such as job security, the actual job tasks and potential stressors.

PERSONALISED COACHING STILL IN DEMAND

Besides consuming online content, young people seem to be more eager for one-to-one career coaching too, with a 40 per cent increase in the number of job seekers aged 35 and below seeking help between January and October, compared

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Common issues young people seek help for include clarity on career direction and personal values as well as job search techniques, according to career coaches.

with the same period last year.

This is based on the number of them who registered for employment assistance at Workforce Singapore’s (WSG) Careers Connect and the National Trades Union Congress’ Employment and Employability Institute (e2i) centres.

A WSG spokesman said the increase is likely to be due to more job seekers, including younger ones, being affected by the coronavirus pandemic this year, as well as greater effort by WSG and e2i to engage with and help more job seekers.

Common issues young people

to take on lower starting pay or being fixated on having a job that is directly relevant to their field of studies, he said.

Despite the convenience of accessing career advice online, personalised coaching may still be more effective for some people.

This was the experience of Mr Farhan Juraimi, 29, who sought career coaching at e2i in March after searching unsuccessfully for a job in events, the field he had been working in until his contract was not renewed.

His coach advised him to continue learning technical skills during the circuit breaker and post his certificates and achievements on LinkedIn, so he took courses in data science as he has a background in information technology.

This paved the way for him to find his current job as a systems engineer in a multinational company. A former polytechnic friend he reconnected with on LinkedIn saw his data science certificates and recommended him for a job opening.

Mr Farhan, who graduated from university last year, said he used to think career coaching was a waste of time but has since changed his mind.

“Some may think it’s for older people, but sometimes, getting personalised advice can be better than something generic,” he said.

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