

Otto Ruys: What I Didn't Learn in University

After completing my school I was looking forward to studying Business Administration at one of the best colleges in the Netherlands.

All ready to be prepared for my future life and learn a lot.

I had grown up with many conversation about business life and big multinationals. I was really convinced I would go that direction and, to be honest, had not even had any thoughts beyond that.



During my first year in college I soon discovered that the college lessons were not really teaching me much. They were not challenging me to think. It was mostly about, as I call it, 'copying information' or 'reproducing information'.

The books that were used where mostly very old and the professors from a typewriter era. For example I followed a IT management class where we used a book was used that was so old it literally mentioned DOS. But this was 1999. Windows 98 had already been launched. This was so demotivating that it was hard for me to even try to do my best at the exams. I did not see the purpose.

Another example were the marketing classes. It was a five-year old book which did not even mention newly born technologies like the internet.) The exam at the end of this class was multiple choice. When we received our results, I overheard a student brag that he had scored a 9 (A-). He was now convinced he was a great marketer.

I don't even blame him for thinking like that. It was the way and the tools we used that gave him that conviction. I was just afraid what would happen when he would try to find a marketing job and really have to prove himself. The only thing he had learned was to reproduce a text from a book in an exam without even thinking about what it entailed. Most of the info in the book was outdated in my opinion.

This was when it struck me that what we got taught was to copy and reproduce, not to think and to create.

This was the moment I decided to develop those skills on my own and started my first small company. I can honestly say that running that company taught me more than I could have learned during any studies.

I did actually finish my studies and got my degree. It could come in handy if I ever needed to apply for a job at a multinational. But after getting my degree I started my second company in the Taxi industry. We launched the first taxi app worldwide. As we were small and did not have much money, we decided to hire interns and college students to work for us.

We had students from universities from Hungary, France, and Spain. But especially a guy from Somalia (Bashir) made a huge impression on me. He told us how he grew up in a small farmers' village in a mud house. He was rescued from crocodiles when he was four years old. He had fled his home country as a political refugee.

This young Somali was now 23 years old, living in Amsterdam, and had a wife and two children. The way he approached problems was very different from the other interns. For him it was always about survival.

He did not rely on someone else's knowledge or support to find out how to fix a problem. Did not ask me many questions. Always, he first tried to think and fix something himself, and only if that did not work, would he ask for help. I would guess that this has much to do with his culture, coming from a place where school education is not normal and people don't rely on it.

Yet it took him far as far as Amsterdam. And it made me think that using your brains and thinking creatively about problems is probably the best way forward. We need to be able to solve things without always relying on other people's knowledge. Through this search for solutions, we remain creative.

This was a very valuable insight for my work. In entrepreneurship, nobody has the answer. There is 'no last time we did it like this'. You have to explore and make many choices.

Concluding, I am not trying to say education is not a good thing, I think it is, but we need to redesign Europe's education system in such a way that the output (the students) become thinkers, innovators and problem solvers and not 'copying and reproducing machines'.
