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# Coursera's Bet On The Upskilling Of American Workers



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*Coursera CEO Jeff Maggioncalda discusses upskilling of American workers in 2018.*

*(Part of an ongoing series on initiatives to upskill American workers in line with changing technology and globalization.)*

The ominous “future of work” continues to dominate headlines this year. We are told to prepare for the technological change that is rendering many current skills and job duties obsolete. To help us prepare, an industry of workforce degrees, certifications, badges and other training is rapidly expanding.

How to sort through this training? Individually what upskilling or retraining should we be engaged in, or encourage our families, neighbors or friends to engage in? Collectively, what upskilling makes sense across society?

Our public education institutions--universities, community colleges, adult education schools—are developing workforce certificates, and “stackable” workforce certificates, to add to their degree programs. Over the past year, they have been joined in upskilling products by the online training giants, the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), including Udacity, Udemy, and most of all Coursera.

These online companies are putting their money beyond their ideas. They are investing funds in training, betting that employers and individuals will find this upskilling valuable and pay for it.

What are they placing their bets on? Recently we sat down with Jeff Maggioncalda, the CEO of Coursera. Maggioncalda served for 18 years as CEO of Financial Engines, before taking the helm of Coursera in June 2017.

In his reflections on upskilling, Maggioncalda discusses the choice of certifications, how the workforce certification market is evolving, and how companies are assuming a greater role in designing as well as operating training (vis-à-vis traditional education institutions), utilizing online platforms.

## **1. How is Coursera expanding from its origins in hosting online education classes to more focused workforce training and retraining?**

The future of learning and future of work are converging. Coursera is already one of the biggest learning platforms in the world with 30 million learners. However, with companies across the world facing a massive skills gap challenge, they are turning to Coursera to help them manage and transform their talent through an environment of accelerated change and rapidly evolving skills caused by digital and data revolution.

Employers across industries are investing in technology-centric credentials, including [data science](#), [machine learning](#), and [cryptocurrency](#). That said, 'hard skills' are not the only types of expertise in demand. Many companies are looking for "softer" skills like leadership and adaptability, explaining the popularity of courses like Learning How to Learn.

In the last year alone, 18 companies have joined Coursera as course creators including Google, IBM, Cisco, BCG, and PwC. From IBM's [Blockchain Foundation for Developers](#) to Google's [IT Support Professional Certificate](#) to Deeplearning.ai's [Deep Learning](#), leading companies around the world are turning to online education to help address rising skills shortages.

## **2. How can a worker know what certification is right for herself? How can she choose among workforce certifications?**

People have different learning needs throughout their careers, so we offer a range of credentials that they can choose from: courses, for those who want to learn a specific skill or want an introduction to a subject; professional certificates or Specializations - offered by employers and universities - for those who want to build a higher level

of mastery; and accredited master's degrees for people who are looking for the highest level of career transformation.

**3. Coursera is developing workforce training partnerships with individual employers. How are these partnerships structured? How are results measured?**

Helping enterprises rethink their workforce training with Coursera for Business was a natural extension of our mission. Since it launched in 2016, over 900 companies, including a number of Fortune 500 have started using Coursera for workplace training.

Coursera works closely with employers to curate learning programs that meet their specific and rapidly evolving needs. As a part of that, we provide easy-to-use tracking tools that help employers see the progress their employees are making in real-time.

**4. Coursera just launched Google IT certification, which has garnered attention. What makes this different from the many other IT certs available?**

The Google IT Support Professional Certificate is the first of its kind; the certificate, taught by industry experts at Google, is designed to take beginner learners to entry-level job readiness in 8-12 months. Enrollees don't need prior tech experience or even a college degree to succeed in it. Compared to other certifications, the Google IT Support Professional Certificate offers a much broader foundation of knowledge and a ton of hands-on learning including 65+ novel technical assessments similar to problems you would face on the job. With IT skills in increasingly high demand, learners who finish this certificate can use Coursera's platform to apply for open IT jobs at some of the largest businesses in the US, including Bank of America, Walmart, and, of course, Google.

**5. Looking out more broadly, what will the credentials and certifications market look like three to five years from now?**

Today, a four year bachelor's degree is table stakes for those hoping to have a long and successful career. What we know as master's degrees today are typically expensive, rigid, and time consuming - not always ideal for people who can't stop their careers to get another degree. I believe we'll see degrees that are increasingly complemented by sub-degree credentials that can be earned while continuing to work. In some cases, a professional certificate offered either by a university or a respected company will also be seen as a path to a well-paying career.

## **6. How will the upskilling and retraining demands impact universities and their offerings, including roles for workforce certifications and partnerships with private firms.**

For many people, a traditional four-year on-campus degree program doesn't make sense. For others, their decades-old degree is no longer enough. They need jobs and they need training to get those jobs but time and cost are major obstacles to getting there. Universities are taking this into account and experimenting with different types of offerings that help students prepare for the demands of the workforce throughout their lives. I believe we'll see more universities join forces with employers, accrediting corporate-sponsored credentials and even baking these credentials into their own degree programs.

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The online skills training field is already highly competitive (just like the [online job placement field](#)) and becoming more so every day. This is only to be welcomed in expanding choice generally, and particularly in increasing the ability of employers to develop training content and utilize an online platform, as Maggioncalda describes. It is employer-developed training that in many cases will be more real-time and focused than training products of traditional educational institutions.