

„Switch-Happens“

Switch-Column by Monica Deters

How millions of people experience the switch into a new era.



When Your Job Fades...

It hurts when the world suddenly no longer needs what you're good at.



Don't Forget Your Worth

This summer, I was given a wonderful little gift on my daily walks with my dogs: a huge field of sunflowers. What a sight! At first, I didn't even know what was growing there. All I could see were countless green plants. Then one day, I noticed the first buds and thought: My goodness, these are all going to be sunflowers.

From then on, I watched them every day. I saw them grow. I waited for the first flower to open. And eventually, there they were. Thousands of sunflowers, a sea of yellow right in the middle of our fields. It was beautiful. I still walk past that field today. But now, it looks completely different. The yellow has disappeared. The heads are hanging low. The plants are dark, dry, almost black. Nobody would stop to take a picture of them now. Their time as a bright, radiant field of sunflowers is definitely over.

When You're Suddenly No Longer Needed

And as I stood there looking at them, I suddenly thought of all the people who feel as though something very similar is happening to them right now. Only at work. You did your job. Maybe you even loved it. You knew what you were doing. You knew the routines. Your colleagues knew they could come to you. You solved problems, organised things, looked after customers, checked figures, wrote texts, coordinated appointments. You built a good reputation. You were needed. And being needed feels good. Until one day, someone says there's another way. Faster. More digital. Automated. With fewer people. Perhaps with artificial intelligence and robots.

And suddenly, the question is no longer simply what you're going to do next professionally. There's another question. A much quieter one.

What's wrong with me now?

Maybe you never say it out loud. Maybe you would even strongly object if someone else said it. But it's there. *Is what I know how to do suddenly worth nothing? Why don't they need me here anymore? Where am I supposed to go now?* And perhaps the most painful question of all: *If I'm no longer needed there, where am I needed at all?*

The Job Has Faded. You Haven't.

That is exactly what I thought about as I stood in front of that sunflower field. Because, of course, those plants haven't suddenly become worthless. Only their time in bloom in this field has come to an end. And perhaps this is precisely the mistake we are making with ourselves. We confuse the end of a task with the end of our own worth. A profession can fade. A particular role can fade. A business model can fade. A skill that was desperately needed yesterday may be performed by a machine tomorrow. That hurts. Yes. It hurts a lot. And we shouldn't pretend that this feeling can simply be brushed aside with a cheerful, "Well, then you'll just have to learn something new." Because a workplace isn't simply a place where we earn money.

It can also be a place where we feel competent. Secure. Connected. Respected. A place where we know who we are. And when that place disappears, sometimes we first have to find out where we belong now.

What I Hadn't Seen Before

The remarkable thing is this: right now, those sunflowers are full of treasures. Their dried heads are packed with seeds. They can be pressed into wonderful sunflower oil. They can become food. Or they can give rise to new plants. From the outside, the great show is over. But their value is still there. In fact, now more than ever. Perhaps this is exactly what we need to learn in the new world of work. Not everyone whose previous role disappears has to completely reinvent themselves. Perhaps the

first thing they need to understand is something much more important: What you have contributed all these years does not disappear with your job. Your experience doesn't disappear. Your sense of responsibility doesn't. Your understanding of people doesn't. Your reliability doesn't. Your humour doesn't. And certainly not your ability to bring calm into a situation when everything is on fire. Perhaps only the place where all of that is needed will change.

We Are Going to Need One Another

I believe this is one of the great human challenges of this switch. We talk a great deal about everything artificial intelligence will be able to do in the future. We talk surprisingly little about what it does to a human being to suddenly hear: We don't need you for this anymore. Perhaps that is why we are going to need people who can accompany others through precisely this moment. Not with empty motivational slogans. But with a clear understanding of what remains – and where it might lead next. That is also why, at the MillionDreams Academy, we are now training the Switch Mentors of the future. People who support other people through a time in which familiar places are disappearing while new ones have yet to emerge.

Yesterday, I walked past my sunflower field again. And strangely enough, I found it beautiful again. Different from the way it was in summer. But now I knew what I hadn't seen before. I knew what was still hidden inside those dark, bowed heads. And just how valuable they are – especially now.

Perhaps we should learn to look at ourselves in exactly the same way when a professional chapter comes to an end. **Your job can fade. But you can't. So please: Don't forget your worth. You may be more valuable than ever.**

The Switch Column by Monica Deters
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