

Mentoring in the world of exponential change

Tony Czarnecki, Regent's mentor and Managing Partner of Sustensis

I have been mentoring for over a decade, initially at UCL and for the last several years at Regent's University London. The reason why I started my mentoring 'career' was that it was simply an extension of my management consultancy practice. Mentoring for me is similar in some respect to consulting. However, there is a key difference. In consulting, the object is usually a business and the objective is to provide advice on a continuous business success. In mentoring, the subject is a young person like you, reading this article, and the objective is sharing the mentor's experience in discussing various options that you may wish to consider in your professional career. That is of course important. After all, your professional career may determine your capability to fulfil your key life goals. But for most people their job is a means to an end, and not an end goal.

So, how do you combine your first job, and the ones after that with your career development over the rest of your life? About 30 years ago that was the question asked by some HR specialists. A

new business doctrine was coined: 'work-life balance' and one of the first adopters was a telecommunications company, BT. My own consultancy was at the forefront of proposing concrete implementation solutions integrated with the government's Investors in People programme. Over the last decade I have adapted it to mentoring needs although it can of course be applied in any other domain. The approach that I propose is a kind of a continuous process for integrating your professional career into your whole life by applying a holistic wellbeing pathway. Those interested may wish to visit this website: liveyourlife.org.uk

What I hope to pass on to my mentees is that skill of effective and symbiotic way of combining their career progression with their changing life goals as they progress through life. That is my view of what mentoring in most general terms should be about. I have asked two of my mentees to share their experience with the Regent's mentoring programme. One of them, Stephen Coveleski, an American, graduated in 2016 and he has

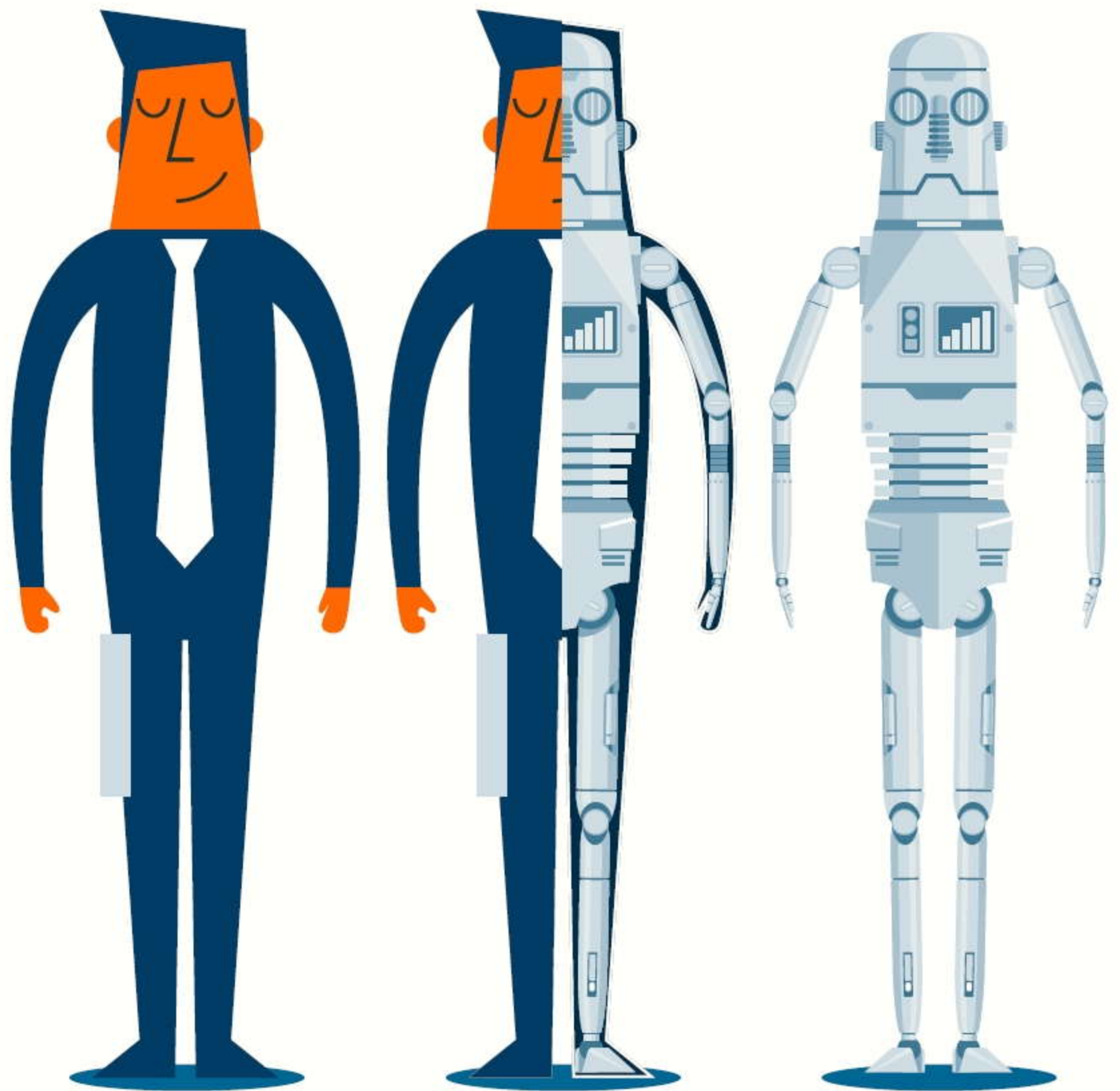
encapsulated the value of the programme as follows:

'The Mentoring Programme at Regent's was extremely paramount to my success during and after my master's degree. I was an MSc student in Finance in 2015-2016 when I was matched with Tony as my mentor. He was able to educate me on many life lessons that allowed me to experience out-of-classroom activities such as frequent business meetings with a wide variety of top-level executives and political influencers.'



My current mentee, Cecilie Landsverk, a Norwegian, joined the mentoring programme in spring this year and for her the value of the programme includes additional aspects that may be helpful for her in the future:

'I was one of the lucky students that was allocated a mentor when I started on the MA Management programme at Regent's University London. It was a new experience for me, and it brought out a lot of nerves with the idea that this all-knowing person was to point out all my flaws and give me lists of things to do, to fix it. Luckily, it has been nothing like I had expected; far from it, in fact. Meeting Tony has been an incredible experience. He has provided me with perspectives that created calmness, motivation and confidence. I am truly thankful that he takes the time to meet with me and shows such an honest interest in my thoughts that his responses, stories and reflections help me to prepare for the future, both in the short and long run. I highly recommend others to participate in the mentoring program, so that they may be better prepared for the incredibly dynamic change in almost any profession in the coming decades.'



That last sentence in Cecilie's summary leads me directly to the subject that I may have not raised even a few years ago in an article on mentoring. But times are changing, and they are changing as fast as never before, reaching almost an exponential rate of change in many domains, not only in technology. The impact of those changes, caused mainly by the application of progressively smarter Artificial Intelligence (AI), will be profound on your career. In my recently published book, *Who Could Save Humanity from Superintelligence?* I give quite a few examples regarding the future of work. Let me give you some numbers to put it in a certain perspective.

In about 2030, according to most forecasts, employment will shrink by at least 30-40% of the current level in most countries of the northern hemisphere. We will

enter the age of technological unemployment. At least 100 job types will be gone in a little more than a decade. Some professions will be absolutely decimated. You may immediately think about the unskilled workers. Yes, they will be affected significantly, but not to the same degree as neurosurgeons, radiologists and lawyers. Each of these professions will be down to just about 10% of the current employment level.

I do not quote those numbers to alarm or demotivate you. On the contrary, I believe you should be aware of it to prepare yourself as best as you can and adapt to the new situation, where it is almost inconceivable that you will work in the same profession your whole life. Once you accept that this is the 'new normal', you can think about the best ways to navigate between the rapidly changing employment

patterns. So, what can you, a young graduate, do to prepare best for such a volatile future? Here is a

snapshot of what you may wish to consider and the new generic skills you may have to learn:

1. The World Economic Forum estimates that 65% of children entering primary school today will work in jobs that don't exist yet. So, there will be new jobs in new occupations. However, please remember that the ratio of new jobs to the existing jobs created in every decade since the war has been falling. Therefore, the number of new jobs will not replace the number of jobs lost, since some occupations, such as lorry drivers may almost disappear.
2. Prepare for the age when a large percentage of the jobs will be freelance or part-time.
3. Imagine yourself working closely with your AI robot as a permanent member of your team.
4. You will have to prepare yourself for continuous learning and upskilling to remain in your job or acquire entirely new skills. What will matter most in your career progression and keeping yourself in employment is the development of the following 'soft' skills:
 - Being good at taking initiative
 - Being innovative, creative and entrepreneurial
 - Having leadership abilities
 - Having systems-thinking ability
 - Having the ability to see both the wholeness and the detail
 - Being good at problem-solving
 - Being technology savvy
 - Being adaptable to fundamental shifts in society, requiring new communication, social and even ethical skills in the age when robots may have 'human' rights

This is where additional value of mentoring lies today. It enables you to test your ideas about the way you could adapt to future challenges, such as the AI-triggered rapidly changing employment landscape. For example, in the very near future you may have to look at your employability potential through the lenses of a non-human, AI-driven HR agent. Its knowledge about your soft skills and development potential as well as assessment of your adaptability will be unparalleled when compared with today's recruitment agent. It may, or it may not work in your advantage. This will depend, among others, on whether you have developed a brand new 'soft' skill to pass an interview with a non-human recruitment agent. ■

Tony Czarnecki is an economist and spent most of his life working worldwide as a management consultant for large global companies. Over 20 years ago he co-founded Sustensis, a management consultancy focused on business sustainability. Tony has lectured on business sustainability at postgraduate courses at the University of London and universities in central Europe. He is also a conference speaker and author of many articles.



Sustensis's Business Sustainability answers the question: 'How can companies survive forever?' Over the last 10 years Tony has gradually adapted that metaphor to a global context: 'How can humanity survive forever?' His wide range of interests – in politics, technology, futurism, science and culture – gave him the necessary insight into complex subjects, discussed

in his recently published book: *Who Could Save Humanity from Superintelligence? – European Union, NATO or... China.*

Tony has also been mentoring postgraduate students – initially at UCL, within its Advance programme, and for the last several years, at Regent's University London.