

Finding Your Role in the Workplace

Human resources expert Martin Gabriel discusses the workplace of the future and what technology can – and can't – do

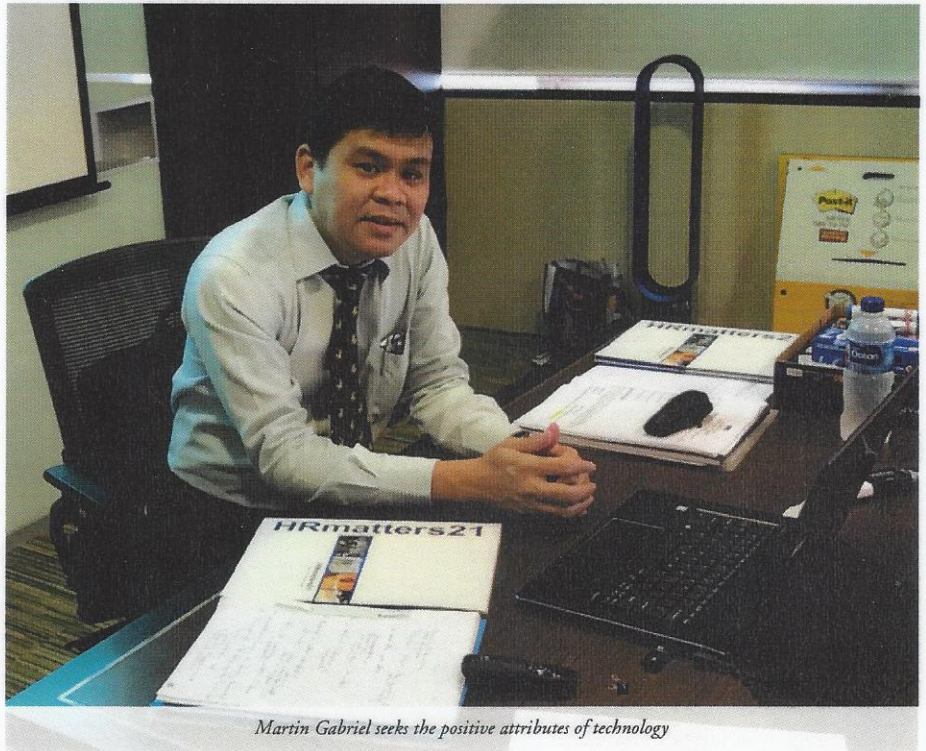
As chairman and senior HR consultant of HRmatters21 forum, and with more than 20 years of experience in the HR sector, Martin Gabriel has given much thought to how employees need to develop to keep pace with the fast-changing nature of the workplace.

Technology, he acknowledges, has brought about huge improvements in speed, efficiency and accuracy. "Machines have the ability to sort millions of data in seconds and also improve productivity. Humans have no chance of competing against machines based on frequency and high-volume tasks." However, he contends that there are certain jobs that machines will never be able to do, such as nursing, as machines are unable to feel and empathise. "We humans can be creative, innovative, handle novel situations and have the ability to connect disparate threads and solve new problems. Machines at this point in time can't do this."

He emphasises that people should be aware and ask themselves to what extent their jobs are repetitive or transactional. He says that if 80 per cent of their job is transactional work, it can be easily taken over by machines in the future. "The portion of a job that involves novel situations like strategising, creativity, innovating or being a care giver, will still belong to us."

Martin started the HRmatters21 forum in 2001 to provide a platform for HR practitioners to share information about best practices. Then, many HR members needed to be cajoled to speak out, he says. In contrast, today, many online users are having discussions on diverse platforms. He also says that in HR there are often sensitive issues that are seldom spoken about, such as retrenchment or termination, and the forum allows users to discuss these and tap on the experiences of the other more seasoned HR professionals anonymously.

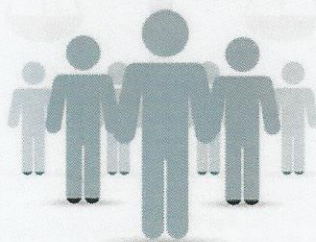
He encourages people to continue learning new skills, and at a faster pace. "Learning has to be ongoing," he says. He also points out that work no longer necessarily involves personal encounters and cites his own experience, when an entire work process was completed without having to meet face to face, which would not have happened in pre-



Martin Gabriel seeks the positive attributes of technology

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Martin Gabriel

Martin's achievements include a book on employment law

internet days. He says: "Technology presented us with an opportunity to do a business transaction regardless of the fact that we were from different parts of the world. These are new opportunities that we must seize or create for ourselves."

Martin has also written a book that examines key clauses of the Employment Act and its related legislation. It breaks down and interprets legal jargon for laymen to allow them to gain a better understanding about employment law in Singapore. The book is available from the EA, priced \$28, \$10 of which is donated to the EA.

Martin concludes that there are many workers who fear that technology will take over their jobs but he encourages them to have an open mind and use the technology for their own gain. "Embrace technology and make it work for you rather than against you," he advises.