

# More Than Just A Ticket

**By Wayne Visser**

Picture the scene ...

You've graduated (EUREKA!). After three years of nose to the grindstone, shoulder to the wheel, strain on the brain and burning the midnight oil, you've finally done it!

And now you hold in your hand a little piece of paper - your one way ticket to the top! Here you are at your first job interview. The guy across the desk from you seems nice enough (boring suit though). And he's taking a look at your "one way ticket" which you so proudly presented him with at the start of the interview. He looks up, and with a pleasant smile on his face he says ...

So you got your degree eh? Mm ... some good courses too. Congratulations, welcome to the graduate world."

See, you knew he'd be impressed. You can almost feel that first salary cheque in your hand. Then ...

"Tell me, what else did you do?"

What? What did he say? What else did I do? I studied of course. What does he mean?

"I mean, were you involved in anything other than your studies - clubs, societies, committees? Were you ever in any position where you took responsibility, or worked with a team, or organised an activity?"

Gosh! I'd never expected these sorts of questions. I mean, surely the degree, the one way ticket, surely that's enough? He continues ...

"You see, all your degree really tells me is that you've got a good mind, a theoretical grounding, and possibly that you can work under pressure. It tells me nothing of how well you relate to people, what your leadership potential is, or your organisational ability. And these are the things I need to know if I'm to employ you. Thank you for your time. Goodbye."

A nice story? Far fetched you think? THINK AGAIN!

Allow me to share with you some ideas on the value of getting extramurally involved at varsity. I'll use as an example my own experience over the past two years with a campus

organisation called AIESEC, of which I am now the President. Involvement in other organisations, clubs and societies such as NUSAS-SRC, RAG, BSS (Black Students Society), and faculty councils (to mention but a few) I would imagine to be of similar great value.

So firstly, what is AIESEC? AIESEC is an international Association of Students interested in Economics and Management. It is represented in 70 countries on 650 campuses around the world, and committed the development of aware, internationally minded, adequately skilled future business leaders. This it achieves through the various programmes, projects and meetings which it organises and runs.

These include an international Traineeship Exchange Programme, as well as the various seminars, workshops, study tours and contact talks which AIESEC organises in an attempt to bridge the gap between theoretical university and the practical workplace.

I joined AIESEC in my first year at varsity, but I didn't get actively involved then (which I now regret). It was only at the beginning of my second year that I took the plunge and went up to the AIESEC office to find out what it was all about and how I could get involved. You see, it's really up to you, the student, to take that first step. So I ended up joining the Projects sub-committee of AIESEC.

Suddenly, I had a new set of friends. I started by helping to organise various community and business leaders to come to speak on campus. After some weeks I had volunteered to organise a whole seminar. I was beginning to learn the skills of planning and organisation. And now that I was doing more, I found myself having to learn to manage my time better. Also, I began to gain confidence in dealing with professional people. These were not theoretical concepts I was learning, but practical, hands on, how-to-do skills.

By the time elections for AIESEC executive positions came in August 1989, I had decided to take another plunge and stand for Projects Director. I was elected, and so a new journey began. I began to learn how to work on a team (the executive), but also how to lead and motivate a team (my sub-committee). And I had to learn to take on responsibility.

Then I attended my first national AIESEC meeting. Here I met and worked with South African students of different races, cultures and political persuasions from 20 campuses around the country. And so I began to get the bigger picture of AIESEC and to become more aware of the real issues which faced South Africa.

Soon, I found myself getting interested in an international project which AIESEC was running. It concerned the current global environmental crises and how we as youth and the future business leaders should be responding.

My subsequent involvement took me to a national conference in Jo'burg, then to an African conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, and finally, I had the privilege of being selected

as a South African delegate to the culminating World conference in Tokyo, Japan in August 1990.

It was also in August 1990 that I was elected as President of AIESEC here at UCT. And so another steep learning curve has begun!

In summary then, what has extramural involvement at varsity done for me? I guess one could say it has prepared me for “the Big World out there” in a way which my theoretical university course couldn’t possibly do. I’m talking about contacts, confidence in myself, planning and organisational abilities, time management skills, greater awareness of South African and global developments, better understanding of different cultures, and practice in leadership and in working on a team.

And it’s these things which will give me the edge, not only in breaking into the job market but in making quick progress once I’m in. So really it’s up to you - do you want the edge or don’t you?

The level and extent to which you get involved extramurally is up to you. You need to be sensible and balance it with your studies. But my advice to you is the same as was given to me in my early days in AIESEC: GO FOR IT! You won't regret it.

Wayne Visser, President of AIESEC

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