

Reality check: the new

For employees in Bermuda, it's been good for a long time. But all good things must come to an end.

By Alex Wright



Gone are the days when a Bermudian could quit a job on a Friday and expect to walk straight into a new one the following week.

That has changed, with the impact of the recession resulting in thousands of people losing their jobs, homeowners defaulting on their mortgages and families struggling to make ends meet.

Preliminary data from the 2010 Employment Survey has indicated that the total number of jobs in Bermuda decreased by 1,425 from 39,520 in 2009 to 38,095 in 2010, marking a 3.6 percent decline, while the unemployment rate is 4.5 percent or 1,714 people according to the Labour Force Survey.

The balance of power in the employment market has swung firmly from the employee to the employer with increased competition for fewer positions and candidates needing more than just the right education, skill sets and experience to get the position, with businesses looking for self-starters and providing less on-the-job training as budgets continue to be slashed.

To be successful in today's market job candidates must have the right personality, attitude

and be well-presented at all times.

Kelly Francis, president and senior consultant at Performance Solutions, said the most important factor was experience, and while education was a good differentiator, the ability to demonstrate how you have applied your skills was key for employers seeking someone who could go above and beyond their normal call of duty. She said that willingness was another attribute for which employers look.

"There are so many people looking for work that companies don't have to accept the make-dos," she said. "They are looking for those that bring that much more to the table, versus those who could just get the job done."

Ms Francis said that companies were also cracking down on the degree to which employees allowed their personal lives to interfere with their work. She said that going to doctor, dental, hair and nail appointments or attending a distant relative's funeral in the middle of the working day was no longer acceptable practice — a reality which would come as a shock to many.

"Gone are the days when you could stroll over to the supermarket for some pancakes and a fruit cup and return to the office and talk to

your friends and then maybe think about turning on your computer," she said.

And knowing what you have to sell as a commodity, as well as brushing up on your skills is central to landing the job, said Ms Francis.

Her advice to those who may think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence is to

the chance for employers to review performances and refine their training programmes as well as focusing on rewarding those employees who had excelled in their work.

Doug Soares, founding partner of Expertise Ltd., said that one of the major shifts in the job market had been a push from employers to

ers," he said.

Mr. Soares said there were numerous reports of Bermudians who were unsuccessful in getting the job they applied for and then had contacted the Department of Immigration to complain that it had been given to a non-Bermudian, only to discover it had gone to another Bermu-

ensure that you do your research properly and know what you are letting yourself in for, before making the move.

Despite the Department of Labour and Training doing its best to fill the positions available, she said there were still some jobs people were not willing to do, such as those in the domestic, kitchen and care-giver fields.

On average, Ms Francis said that out of every 15 job applicants, more than half were unemployed or only worked occasionally.

She said that employers were suffering too, due to the economic downturn and employees needed to realise they were taking necessary steps such as salary freezes and cancelling parties and events just to keep staff employed.

"Employees have to stop thinking of everything as being their right and start thinking that we have to get through this together," she said.

Acknowledging that while there was pressure on companies to hire Bermudians, Ms Francis admitted that some were just unemployable, citing the example of eight applicants going for one job, none of whom were suitable for a variety of reasons that ranged from being unable to work on certain days to having to make a court appearance. In another case, she said a candidate for a customer-facing role had problems with authority figures and was currently dealing with anger management issues.

Excuses ranged from: 'I don't like the work' and 'I've changed my mind', to 'I've been arrested', with some employees quitting after day one, failing to show up at all or phoning in sick as many as ten times during their first month.

However, she said one of the opportunities arising from the economic downturn had been

ensure that their staff were as productive as possible due to the high cost of doing business on the Island, or face the likelihood they will out-source the work overseas.

On the employee side, he said that job seekers had become less complacent and apathetic, while the Immigration Board had increased its level of scrutiny of work permit applications.

Mr. Soares said that a number of those Bermudians looking for work also felt threatened by the prospect of opening up the economy to foreign employment and investment, and the fact that the job could now be done from overseas at the click of a button, added to less protection from Government.

"Labour protection for highly-educated people is a misnomer," he said. "We must be able to compete in Bermuda with other world economies that are willing to work harder for less, and protectionism only makes us softer."

Examples of sending the wrong message to the employer include applicants showing up late for interviews, some of whom call up after the event trying to reschedule, or CVs riddled with typographical errors, said Mr. Soares. On one occasion Labour and Training put forward two candidates for a job his company had advertised on behalf of a client, but after failing to submit their CVs the employer called them only to be told by one that he was busy and the Labour Department should have sent it, while the other referred them to the Labour Department for a copy.

"To demonstrate a lack of meeting basic standards during the hiring process is something that is unfavourable, given that there are fewer job opportunities than there are job seek-

dian who was better qualified and more suitable.

Estimating that at least 3,000 or more jobs have been lost in Bermuda during the recession, he believes the positions that will return will be dependent on the recovery of the hospitality and construction industries, while the severity of the 2011 hurricane season added to the catastrophes in Australia, New Zealand and Japan creating new opportunities in the re/insurance sector.

One of the industries that have seen a tightening of the screening process has been security, with many firms keeping a closer eye on employees during their probation period.

Devrae Noel-Simmons, owner of DPA Security, said many applicants do not have a full appreciation for the job and the particular traits required to do it properly, which in the security field included maintaining a cool head under pressure and exercising negotiation skills when working the door of a bar or nightclub.

He added that he didn't rule out candidates because they had a previous conviction or misdemeanour; rather he judged them on their performance in the role.

The catering trade has a reputation for having a high turnover of staff and Marico Thomas, president and general manager of Bermuda Hospitality Group, has seen a number of employees come and go during his 20-plus years in business.

Mr. Thomas started the company in the midst of a recession in 1990 and has grown the business to 80 people, shedding a few jobs due to the completion of employees' work permit term limits. In an effort to keep staff employed and working full hours — the same issue he faced two decades ago — he has encouraged them to

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— Kelly Francis, president and senior consultant at Performance Solutions



Then and now

Then: Employees had the freedom to look for almost any job they wanted and employers would hire non-Bermudians if they were the best person for the job.

Now: Employees are just happy to have a job and employers have a mandate to hire Bermudians if they are qualified for the job.

Then: Word of mouth referrals and associations would help get you a job.

Now: There has been a bigger movement towards testing, in particular simulation, personality and skills, and reference probing, including credit history and criminal record checks. The employer is paying more attention to the requirements of the role to get the maximum return.

Then: If a Bermudian couldn't find a job at employer A then there would always be a job at employer B.

Now: They can often go many months and despite their best efforts and skills they are still not able to obtain the job they are after.

Then: A job advertised in the paper would get three or four applications.

Now: It is not uncommon to receive 40, 50 or even 60.

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Top 10 tips for getting and keeping a job

- Stay current — your CV should be a snapshot of what you have done recently.
- If you don't already have one, get your own email address.
- Back up what you have said in your CV and make sure your references will too, outlining what you have done and what you have to offer a potential employer.
- Take time to review your strengths and understand the types of roles you are best suited to and then select those jobs or companies where you will be seen as having the potential to add the most value.
- If a company has more than one position available, add a note or make a call to request that your CV is put forward for all suitable positions rather than sending multiple copies. Don't apply for jobs you are clearly not qualified for.
- Visit the company's website, read the annual report and search online for any news coverage to learn more about it and to help in your research.
- Conduct yourself the same way in the hiring process as you would if you held the job.
- Be on time for your interview and don't make any mistakes in your application.
- Be realistic about your salary expectations and demands and flexible about your work schedule.
- Above all, be motivated, determined and willing to provide the best possible service.

be more productive and efficient as well as providing a broader array of service.

Mr. Thomas said that his company was currently in a position to hire new people and he would be looking to take on between 20 and 40 employees in the next couple of months thanks to having a diverse business model to weather the economic storm, as well as the imminent reopening of its newly-renovated take-out on Bermudiana Road and the launch of Runway Café at LF Wade International Airport.

He said one of the hardest parts of the recruitment process was finding the right person for the job with the right attitude, while those candidates who hadn't been vetted were more often than not a disruptive influence on the rest of the business.

Another interesting trend witnessed by Angela Tuzo, director of recruitment at Fairmont Southampton, has been an increase in applicants for positions at the hotel from individuals with extensive backgrounds in the construction and reinsurance industries.

“With the peak season set to begin we have hired over 70 Bermudians and look to see that number grow over the next couple of months,” she said. “Our Leadership Development programme contin-

ues to thrive and is an excellent starting point for Bermudians with college degrees previously unaware of the wide variety of positions available at the hotel, opportunities for advancement and the benefits of working in the hospitality industry.”

Landscaping is one trade that has felt the full impact of Government's moratorium on work permits, with one business owner, who spoke to daily newspaper, *The Royal Gazette*, earlier this year on condition of anonymity, revealing her struggle to find and retain experienced Bermudian landscapers, an exercise which had driven the company to the brink of closure.

She said that several staff lasted just a couple of days, some were sacked for taking drugs on the job and others simply didn't turn up for work.

Frank Arnold, owner of Arnold's Markets and Café Cairo, said that a lot of job seekers were unemployable due to having criminal records and bad references for time keeping, and while there were also a lot of over qualified people willing to do anything to pay their mortgage and bills, they tended to be temporary until a better job came along.

He said that the recent work permit moratorium had meant those guest workers who had reached the end of their term limit had to be replaced with a new employee who had to be trained up and the process started all over again.

He added that in addition, because there was no guarantee of a work permit being renewed, many workers took up offers from overseas to ensure job security, and due to the short-term nature of the employment it meant that companies were unable to attract the best talent. The only alternative was trying to find Bermudians who often didn't want to do the work in the first place, or were unhireable.

“A gentleman applying for a night cleaner/kitchen porter job asked me 15 minutes into his first interview if I had a problem with him drinking during his break,” he said.

“This was for a position that would have required me to leave him alone in my establishment with open liquor behind the bar, and I am pretty sure my inventory would have gone down as a result.”

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