

Protecting our jobs

Whether we like to admit it or not, our job is one of THE most important things in our lives.

It puts food on the table, pays for our homes, clothes and educates our children, provides medical care – the list is endless.

Earning a living is a lifelong necessity.

So if this is the one thing in our lives that facilitates virtually everything else, why don't we do more to protect it?

There are two aspects we need to consider - personal responsibility and corporate social responsibility.

From a personal perspective we need to remind ourselves that jobs are not guaranteed, that they are a reciprocal exchange of cash-for-services. And when we want to participate in that exchange, we don't do it in isolation - we enter a competitive space.

So how do we remain competitive in a challenging job market? We do so by adapting to change and enhancing our skills to benefit current and future employment trends.

Dion Chang of Flux Trends recently presented a review on the employment market titled "*Now Hiring – But Differently*". It was a fascinating synopsis of where the world of work is heading and what changes we can expect. The one area which resonated was the increasing demand in the business world for soft-skills, or as he put it "An increase in teachable, adaptable attitudes trumping paper qualifications".

In other words, there is more to success than simply being clever. Strong interpersonal skills are critical to business and the number 1 differentiator at interview stage.

This is an area where individuals have the ability to stand out – if they make the effort and seek training.

From an employer perspective, companies are under increasing pressure to cut costs and tighten productivity, which inevitably results in restructuring and staff cuts.

As the South African economy continues to shrink, corporates need to reflect on their role in contributing to the alarming unemployment numbers. Cutting jobs to stay afloat is an understandable strategy; after all, a company that reduces its workforce is better than no company at all.

However, as the game of 'lean and mean' continues to unfold, corporates have a responsibility to make their strategic cuts more palatable.

So how can this be achieved? There are professional services available, which offer counselling and tactical career advice to the impacted employees, to support them in finding new employment. This service is called Outplacement. It acts as a bridge between the shock of dismissal and the daunting prospect of finding a new role, and is significantly beneficial to distressed staff.

Outplacement has been around for over 30 years overseas, yet surprisingly few South African companies have fully embraced it as a method to soften the impact of retrenchment.

From a commercial perspective the model has broader ramifications than simply supporting the exiting staff – it also protects the integrity of the remaining business.

How? Restructuring leads to internal panic, and when people are worried about the security of their jobs they are more inclined to jump to a safer ship. This puts additional pressure on company resources. However, when a company demonstrates corporate responsibility, through commitment and compassion, the remaining talent is less likely to leave, as they know they too will be cared for should another round of retrenchments occur.

And, companies who protect their professional reputations with ethical redundancy practices will be the preferred choice for in-demand talent when the upswing returns.

As Maya Angelou said “At the end of the day people won’t remember what you said or did, but they will remember how you made them feel”.

Lip service can be a bitter balm.

About the Author

Madge Gibson is the founder of The CHANGE Initiative (Pty) Ltd

www.thechangeinitiative.co.za

021 683 0485