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Employability Tips during Recessionary Times

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There is considerable coverage globally and in the Middle East about the pressures that the global recession is placing upon (hospitality) organisations generally, but what is the impact of this downturn specifically upon the hospitality job seeker at this moment in time? The obvious observation is that times are tough. That is to say competition from other job seekers is now considerably stiffer, and of course there are currently fewer jobs on the market. Matters are unlikely to improve significantly over the next couple of months realistically.

Certain Middle Eastern employers are already taking the opportunity to capitalize upon this status quo. A leading Swiss hotel school contacted me this week to ask if I felt it was fair that certain employers had changed their employment agreements for their student placements, and that they were now only willing to accept candidates who work on a voluntary (i.e. zero remuneration) basis. I agreed that I did not think this was ethical! Another example was evident at a more senior level where a candidate had been offered a position in December (2008) in the Emirates, and was then offered the same position again in January (2009) with 60% of the salary for the same role and contract! It is sad to see such practices, and let us hope that certain destinations do not use the opportunity to devalue their (already low) salary scales across the board.

'Keeping one's head down' is a phrase we are hearing a lot from hospitality managers, and it seems the whole industry is playing something of a waiting game while we see how the employment and market situation moves forward, and how long it takes to do so.

Thinking more positively, I was asked to provide some ideas on what job seekers can do to maximise their employability during these difficult economic times:

- Stay put – not unsound advice by any means, and clearly it is not a good time to be looking at leaving an employer for a new one, unless absolutely necessary. The majority of the redundancies that have been seen recently relate to candidates that have been in a role/company for a relatively short period of time. The grass is not necessarily greener on the other side!
- Minimise gaps on your CV – if you do find yourself in a situation of unemployment, the challenge is to find another role quickly so that you do not end up with a significant gap on your CV, without merely jumping into the first role that you see or can obtain. This is no easy task. Hospitality employers are notoriously fickle about understanding employment gaps, and it is certainly something of which to be very aware.
- Critically analyse your CV – it sounds obvious, however I would say that approximately 50% of management and student/graduate CVs that we receive contain basic spelling and grammatical errors, and are not presented in an appealing way. It is another sad fact that the majority of hospitality employers do not and can not respond to all the applications they receive, so if one's CV is not up to scratch, then the chances of a response are unfortunately low. Within your CV, try to promote your successes and responsibilities in each (recent) role, and do not be afraid to explain or justify an employment gap where appropriate. Take the time

to tidy up your CV presentation, and ask others that you trust to critically review it too.

- Use a cover letter and cover email – again, very basic indeed, but you would be amazed how many candidates think it is appropriate to simply attach their CV to a blank email with no email text or cover letter attachment, using the email subject line as their only means of communication! Chances of response? Zero!
- Fully research the employer – with so many new organisations and brands, it is vital to ensure that a prospective employer can offer you the right level of employment security, satisfaction and potential development. Easily compromised during difficult times, but don't be tempted to do so.
- Salary negotiation – try to be flexible on the total benefits package, to allow the employer some room for negotiation, but do not allow them to dictate a ridiculously low basic salary. This will only drive down salary scales in the region.

About Hospitality Graduate Recruitment (h-g-r)

h-g-r helps hospitality employers globally to find hotel-school students and alumni for entry level, trainee, supervisory and junior management positions. h-g-r works with over 250 international hotel schools and universities, producing a diverse database of fresh talent. Visit www.h-g-r.com for more information or contact Mr Jeff Ross, Managing Director, Hospitality Graduate Recruitment, Luzern, Switzerland, Tel Direct: +41 41 370 6759, jeff@h-g-r.com.

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HES Global is a leading senior executive search firm serving the hospitality industry exclusively, providing worldwide, industry-wide reach in finding and recruiting quality candidates for all key hospitality management positions. Visit www.hesglobal.com for more information or contact Mr Jeff Ross, Executive Director HES Global Middle East, Europe & Russia, Tel Direct: +41 41 370 6759, jross@hesglobal.com.