



APRIL 2009

## **Weathering the economic downturn as an employee or job seeker.**

By Jan Coetzee, Managing Director, Manpower South Africa

The current economic slowdown, the possibility of the dreaded “r” word, and reports of widespread job losses is all over the news at the moment. However, the results of the latest Manpower Employment Outlook Survey paint a picture which is not all doom and gloom.

The survey was conducted by interviewing a representative sample of 750 large, medium and small companies in South Africa. According to the survey, 69% of companies indicated that they will not change their staffing levels in the next three months; 21% forecasted headcount growth in the next three months, and only 7% indicated that they anticipate staff reductions in the next three months. The balance of companies (3%) indicated that they don't know whether they will increase or decrease staffing levels over the next three months. However, the survey still represents among the weakest hiring intentions by employers since the survey began in South Africa in Quarter 4 of 2006.

During these uncertain times when employers are reviewing or cutting their budgets, and are looking to new ways to further optimise their workforces, it is important that employees focus on making themselves indispensable to their companies. To do this, individuals should consider how they can add value in the roles they are currently fulfilling over and above what is expected of them, and see how they can further position their roles as business-critical to the functioning of the organisation. Getting this right will undoubtedly contribute towards increased job security.

But unfortunately some businesses have no alternative but to reduce staff. Equally, individuals may be eager to take on a new challenge but are not sure whether this is the right time to move. If you fit into either of these scenarios don't despair. There are several options available to you.

In times of uncertainty, temporary employment opportunities increase as employers naturally take a cautious, 'wait and see approach' when considering their permanent recruitment plans. Taking on a temporary position in a new organisation gives you the opportunity to expand your skill-set



and bolster your CV with relevant work experience, which will benefit you when applying for a permanent position in the future. Become more flexible by accepting roles that might not be your first choice or best suite your qualifications in the short term, rather than risk being unemployed. Also, although the business climate is uncertain in most industry sectors, a national skills shortage remains in others – some employers can't find the staff with the relevant qualifications and attributes to fill vacancies. If you are looking for a change in career, consider moving into a field which is crying out for qualified and talented workers. Make contact with a reputable recruitment agency such as Manpower to advise you in the regard.

Employers also need to think carefully before reducing staff as the loss of intellectual capital could be very detrimental to them when the economy takes a turn for the better and business begins to pick up again.

Some advice from Manpower to help you weather the current economic climate:

**To employees:**

- **Make your role business-critical:** this doesn't necessarily mean become the person in charge! Back-office and support roles are vital to the livelihood of any business. It is just a matter of making your line manager know that you are essential to keeping things running smoothly in the office and that the business would suffer without you.
- **Up-skill:** is there an additional skill-set that you know your employer would value and therefore make you even more valued in your current role? Be proactive. Go that extra mile to improve your individual brand, trade up and add to your skills-set.

**To jobseekers:**

- **Update your CV:** make sure you emphasise all of your skills and achievements. Your CV is the first opportunity to sell yourself, so make sure you seek advice if you're not sure where to start.
- **Shine in your interview:** it is very competitive out there so make sure you research the company beforehand so that you stand out and come across as more knowledgeable than other interviewees.
- **Think about accepting temporary employment:** rather than be out of work, accept a temporary position in a different sector or line of work that you're trained for. This will reflect more positively on your CV than perhaps taking time off work until your ideal permanent job opportunity arises.



For more information, please visit [www.manpower.co.za](http://www.manpower.co.za) or visit your local Manpower office.

Jan Coetzee is the Managing Director of Manpower South Africa, the local subsidiary of Manpower Incorporated, the global employment services giant with over 4400 offices in 82 countries. In South Africa, Manpower was established in 1999 and currently operates from twenty branches in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town.

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