



FOR PROFESSIONALS
SINCE 1941

TIPS FOR GRADUATES TO MAKE THEMSELVES MORE EMPLOYABLE

26 February 2015: As thousands of South African students graduate from tertiary institutions across the country, the first challenge that they will face is to find a job. This is particularly evident following figures released by Statistics SA that revealed the country's unemployment rate stood at 25.4% in the third quarter of 2014.

According to Rama Govenden, HR Executive at PPS, new graduates must ensure that they have the right skill-sets and personal traits required for the job that they wish to apply for. "These new entrants to the workforce must take the responsibility of being employable on themselves. Companies are seeking the likes of young, passionate and hardworking graduates to fulfil junior positions and only the most employable graduates will be offered these career-starting opportunities."

Govenden provides the following advice for young professionals on how they can make themselves more appealing to potential employers.

Have well-written Curriculum Vitae

A well-constructed, concise CV is critical in this regard. Graduates should make sure that the information on their CV is current and relevant to the job they are applying for. It is also important to list any previous work, education or experience - and to highlight how this will align with the opportunity they are applying for.

A spelling or grammar mistake on a CV is a big let-down for employers, points out Govenden. "It also seems that lately there has been a developing trend where people tend to exaggerate information on their CVs to attempt to gain an advantage. This type of conduct is totally unacceptable and employers will eventually find out the truth. It is of paramount importance that no untruths or half-truths are contained in your CV."

Ensure that you are computer literate

With technology evolving almost daily, graduates need to ensure that they are technologically savvy, in order to have a competitive advantage over the other potential candidates. Govenden says that employers do not want to spend precious time on teaching new employees basic computing skills. "Graduates should take responsibility to ensure that they have good typing, online Microsoft Office and research skills.

Develop new skills

Even though graduates have just gone through a comprehensive knowledge gathering experience, it is understandable that they should also develop new practical skills. "This could even mean going on additional training or professional development short-courses. It even includes getting your driver's licence, even if you do not own a car, as you may be required to use a company car," points out Govenden.

Conduct mock interviews with a mentor or coach

Graduates can practice their interview skills by conducting mock interviews with mentors or career coaches as a type of rehearsal for their actual interviews. These experts will be able to provide valued insight and feedback so that the graduate can improve their interview skills and fully express their knowledge while under the pressure of conducting a real job interview. Graduates can contact mentors from their respective academic institutions or register on the PPS Professionals Connect portal to access industry specific information.

Get relevant experience

It can be extremely valuable for graduates to do part-time work, apply for internships or learnerships, get a campus job or engage in volunteer work while studying. This will allow the graduate to gain relevant experience or broader in their chosen field and prove to employers that they have made extra effort to equip themselves with the skills necessary to enter the market. This will also empower the graduate with a positive work ethic and professional office conduct, such as answering of the telephone in a professional way or engagement with clients.

Govenden adds that one of the most valuable things graduates can acquire from career centres within their respective institutions is networks with alumni in their anticipated line of work. Furthermore, graduates should also attend conferences, industry specific events in their areas of interest for additional networking opportunities. It is also advantageous for young graduates to identify and link up with the relevant professional association to enable networking and accelerated learning.

Update your personal online profiles

“The age of social media is a reality and employers realise this,” says Govenden. “Employers will Google search potential candidates, including platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Companies will use this extra knowledge to obtain a glimpse of the candidate outside the scope of their CV. Therefore, graduates should ensure that their online profiles are clean and free of any detrimental subjects.”

Graduates are encouraged to make use of social media channels that will proactively contribute towards positioning them to finding a job, such as LinkedIn. It's crucial for students to create a LinkedIn profile by the time they are in their last year of tertiary education and connect with people that they would want to network with in future. This will enable them to start building connections, endorsements as well as recommendations.

Lastly, graduates are encouraged to register on the Professionals Connect career portal (www.professionalsconnect.co.za), which provides graduates with career advice as well as support in connecting them with employment opportunities within various companies. The portal aims to serve the needs of students and professionals with a four year degree in their career development aspirations. This is done through collaboration between specialist associations, universities and experienced professionals.

“While young professionals may not be very experienced, it is crucial for this group to develop and foster good professional habits to ensure that they land top junior posts once they graduate,” concludes Govenden.