

# Final year students need to start preparing for the workplace

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2013 Grade 11 and 12 pupils need to start preparing for their careers after school, as these actions in the last years of schooling will directly affect career development. Currently, up to 50% of youths aged 15 to 25 are unemployed in South Africa, which means that securing a job after leaving school is a very dim prospect for many matriculants.

Though everyone dreams of leaving school and finding that ideal position, this will sadly not materialise for many. In a climate in which a quarter of the population is unemployed, school leavers with no experience and the same education as millions of other school leavers will find themselves in a tough employment environment.

## Unemployment set to continue for a while

According to Stats SA, South Africa's first recession in nearly 20 years had 870 000 job losses in 2009 alone. Depressed demand impeded heavily on the manufacturing and mining sectors. The continued negativity in the global economic environment means that unemployment is set to continue for a while and slow growth in European economies will hamper exports for South Africa, which may lead to further job losses in export-reliant industries. Furthermore, a possible new round of recessions predicted in 2013 may mean that the worst is not over yet and may see companies turning to further job cuts in attempts to cut costs in an economy that has not yet recovered from the last recession.

Although the economic environment seems to spell nothing but doom and gloom, there are positive things happening in the job market and there are many positions out there for those with the right skills and qualities. Proper education and continually up-skilling yourself is the best way to ensure good job prospects. The world currently changes at a phenomenal rate, creating the threat of having what you learnt a few years ago being outdated for future employment. This is why it's necessary to continue learning and adding to your credentials even after a tertiary or other education.

What many school leavers don't realise is that the large number of unemployed people who have some experience or skills are likely to get taken up first for positions.

## Get your foot in the door

If you are fortunate to be taken into a position upon leaving school, you're more likely to experience a successful working career. However, the longer you're out of work after school the more your chances drop of becoming employed and building a career. Therefore, it is crucial to start getting experience and your foot in the door before you leave school and are faced with the prospect of starting your job search from scratch.

Experience is crucial in finding a new job. This does not necessarily have to be in the industry you want to enter. In many cases, employees just want to know that a prospective employee is a good investment. Having worked before, even in a part-time setting, gives you some credibility and also the added bonus of references. In this way, a prospective employer can gauge whether you will be an asset to the company or a problem for the company.

One of the ways in which to achieve this is through hands-on learning and experience as you work or study. Not being proactive while at school, or remaining stagnant in your position without acquiring new knowledge or skillsets within the company, is one way to leave yourself open to difficulty getting employed or job cuts. This is one of the reasons why internships or getting into an industry while still studying should be a serious consideration for most students looking to enter the job market in the next year or two.

Positions are becoming much more specialised and layered. Specialised skills are vital to finding employment in a recessionary climate along with a mix of skills. Those whose skills are in short supply or who can offer more than just a single skillset will be best positioned to secure positions in an environment of meagre recruiting.

Grade 11 and 12 pupils should now be looking for internships or after-school part-time positions in order to broaden their work experience and better the chances for employment upon leaving school. The after-school job environment is very tough currently and job seekers will need anything that will give them the upper hand and distinguish them from others in order to land a position.

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