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CAREER TRAINING

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Career Transitions:

**It's the perfect time
to switch sectors
or to upgrade your skills**

By Stephanie Wei

Forecasting the job market has become difficult over the last year. Almost every sector in Canada has been affected by the economic slowdown. In some areas, the U.S. economic crisis has had a critical impact. In particular, manufacturing has been hard hit, and construction is starting to feel the effects of the cooling real estate market.

In 2004, the Conference Board of Canada projected future job growth to 2009 by industry and by occupation. The top five industries were predicted to be: health care and social assistance; manufacturing; wholesale and retail trade; professional, scientific and technical; and education services. The five largest growing occupations were projected to be: professional and; manufacturing and processing; health care; management; and elemental sales and service. With the global economic events that have taken place in the last year, it is difficult to make any kinds of predictions regarding job growth, and in fact, most projections see the unemployment rate going up in 2009.

According to Janine Turner, an executive recruiter with Mandrake Management, there is a silver lining: While job cuts are happening everywhere, some sectors have remained relatively stable: "In some parts of the financial sector, yes, there are layoffs, but the core functions are still staying steady. Healthcare is also staying steady; the food industry is in pretty good shape right now." In every industry -- regardless of layoffs, job cuts and fears over job security -- companies still require staff in core positions. "While there may be cuts in all sectors, you still have to keep the core operators, such as finance, human resources, the sales division, shipping and receiving."

In many cases, says Turner, there is still a lot of hiring. She explains that "It's not so much a lack of work, but a lack of movement. There's stagnation: People are frightened of moving right now. They know the organization they are with, they know the budget, they feel comfortable there. Why would someone want to change to a new company now, where they don't know the company's future plans, resources, budget?"

For companies who do need to consider reducing staff, Turner suggests thinking about what they are doing for employee morale. "You need to consider the employees that are with you. You need to have a lot of honest and open communication. The worst thing you can do is hide information from them."

Many companies have career transition consultants on-hand when laying off staff or letting employees go. Tim Cork, president of NEXCareer, an outplacement and career transition company, says that as the economy slows down, business has increased as companies reduce staffing needs. "Large companies and well established companies use our services. Most companies are aware of these services and do provide some sort of help for their exiting employees," says Cork.

"The motivation for spending funds on exiting employees is to create customers for life and to help thank them for their contribution to the company," explains Cork. "It also sets the tone for the remaining

employees who watch to see what the companies do for these people. A great company takes good care of their exiting employees and treats them with dignity and respect."

NEXCareer offers services to clients such as assistance with resumes, interviewing skills, networking, goals, branding, and self-confidence. Support is offered through one-on-one coaching, workshops, webinars and an online database of contacts, job boards, search firms and government and educational programs.

Cork encourages jobseekers who have recently been let go or laid off to enroll in some form of career transition services, whether paid for by the former employer or by the individual. "You are always better to have a bunch of experts in your corner to help make the next steps in your journey. Seventy to 80 per cent of finding your next job is networking. Networking is simply connecting with people."

Turner advises that a college or university degree is paramount to long-time employees who find themselves suddenly in the job market. "You've got to have something," she says. "It's a good idea to go back to school. The majority of employers will not look at hiring someone without a university education. You've got to look at upgrading yourself continually. This is the way of the world and business needs are going to constantly change."

She suggests looking at upgrading technology skills, business knowledge, marketing and sales processes. "Things have changed from how we did them ten years ago, everything has speeded up."

If you are out of work and want assistance with upgrading your skills, there are several government programs in place to help you. A good starting point is the government's Employment Ontario webpage (www.edu.gov.on.ca, click on Employment Ontario). Programs such as Second Career, Ontario Skills Development and Ontario Works provide career counseling and financial support to help Ontarians train for new jobs.

If you are receiving Employment Insurance (EI) benefits, you can apply to the Skills Development program (www.servicecanada.gc.ca) for financial support for career skills development.

If you are not receiving EI benefits, you may be eligible for the Ontario government's Job Connect program. The program offers workshops and resources to find out about different careers and employment trends, employment planning, job placement and support.

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