

Worker Employability

(Published: Barbados Today, 25 April 2013)

As current world trends dictate, there is a growing demand for the hiring of workers who are competent, capable and proficient. This means that their knowledge base, skills and competencies are expected to be of the level required, if each applicant is to meet the demands of the prospective employer. At the very outset, this places a responsibility on job seekers to make themselves employable, by being prepared to meet the requirements today's workplace demands.

In the past, it would appear that the applicant's knowledge was of prime importance, as emphasis was seemingly placed on academic qualifications. It would be a gross error to conclude that this has entirely changed, as the expectation remains that the individuals can, by way of certification, demonstrate their academic achievement(s).

This is one phenomenon that is not expected to change, for it has been a longstanding part of the culture of our societies in measuring the academic readiness of those graduating from schools, colleges and universities. It was a time when the favoured job applicant got the nod over fellow competitors, based on the number of Cambridge 'O' Level or 'A' Level certificates, or more recently, CXC Certification. It has long been accepted that those who graduated with a degree from a recognized university were considered as having the requisite qualification for job hiring. This was something that was evident in the 1970's and 1980's in the Public Service in Barbados. Many school leavers rushed off to the University of the West Indies to complete a Bachelor of Arts Degree, mainly in the Faculty of Arts.

Clearly, this approach has had its challenges, and overtime has lead to a process of reform and transformation. Barbados has come to recognize that the employment of persons cannot be hinged basically on their academic qualification, which often bears no relation to their skill, expertise and competency to perform the demands of the job. In exercising this approach, it is fair to say that in many instances, there have been misfits where persons have been employed in positions for which they are not suited. The term 'Square pegs in round holes' has been used to describe this misnomer.

One of the basic lessons learnt from this, is the need to expose workers and those preparing to enter the job market to the appropriate level of training, which equips them with the knowledge and skills required to enable them to competently carry out the tasks that are expected. In the 1970's through to the early 1990's, the educational

system in Barbados tended to place a focus on skill development, in preparing students for entry into the workforce. Subjects such as Metal and Wood Work, Technical Drawing, Needlecraft and Tailoring were included on the curriculum in the then so called Newer Secondary Schools. To compliment this, there was once the Hotel Training School, and the Technical Institute which were located at Richmond Gap campus, alongside the St. Leonard's Boys' and Girls' Schools respectively.

It cannot be stressed enough that a highly skilled and trained workforce is important to the economic development of a nation. It is therefore important that the all able bodied members of the workforce come to grips with this, and cash in on the training opportunities that avail themselves. In an age where a variety of courses are offered at the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic, the Barbados Community College and by the Barbados Vocational Training Board, hopefully fewer Barbadians will stand a better chance of becoming unemployable.

Should there be any doubt as to who is employable; an 'employable' person is defined as an individual who is not necessarily someone who has a job. Rather, it is someone who has the abilities and potential of a good employee. They may be employed, seeking work, unemployed, or not seeking work at all, but they have qualities which make them potentially good for employment.