

Come What May, e2i Will Have A Say



By
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NTUC Assistant Secretary-General and e2i Chairman

In another two weeks, we will head into the third quarter of 2009. This will be a closely watched quarter. Businesses will know if new orders, driven by year end demand from Christmas shoppers, will materialise. Workers will know if the labour market will rebound, with new jobs and greater security of existing jobs. Let me offer our ground feel at NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute).

Immediate Term

The good news is that in the immediate term, we are seeing fewer new jobseekers, including retrenched ones, coming for assistance at e2i. This has dropped from around 500 a week in the beginning of the year to about 250 a week now. Some manufacturing plants are starting to get orders already. There is hope that the worst is behind us.

But it does not feel like a firm rebound at all. Hiring numbers in manufacturing is small and mostly on 1- to 2-year contracts. For example, one manufacturing company retrenched more than 500 workers since the start of the year, but is now looking to hire only around 50. Our colleagues from the United Workers of Electronic and Electrical Industries have feedback that the new orders will provide work till July, and not into Q3 or until Christmas. During job fairs, jobseekers also expressed concerns that the jobs are temporary.

We cannot rule out another wave of retrenchments in Q3. At the minimum, we should expect some plants to receive good orders and hire more boldly, while others which do not will start to downsize. If that indeed happens, displaced workers should approach e2i, and we will help channel you to the new vacancies.

Medium Term

In the medium term, that is, 1 to 2 years, we see a few sectors that are actively hiring. These are not projected numbers, but real vacancies, driven by new investments and longer-term demand. I see these jobs falling under two broad categories.

First is hospitality and services. Because of investments like the Integrated Resorts and ION Orchard, thousands of service staff are needed for dozens of positions – attraction hosts, room attendants, receptionists, croupiers in casinos, supervisors, security officers. The basic criteria to secure these jobs are: A good service attitude, effective language skills, especially English, and reliable in turning up for work, regardless of the timing of the shifts or days of the week.

Second is hands-on work, involving machines and equipment. Our manufacturing industry is changing, moving towards high value-added

activities, which involves more complex and higher technology machines and equipment. There is demand in the aerospace industry for technicians and engineers to maintain, repair and overhaul aircrafts and aircraft engines. Resorts World Sentosa needs to build a team of technicians to operate and maintain the high technology entertainment rides in Universal Studios. Multinational companies in areas like clean technology and medical devices also need such technicians.

Each of these activities requires specialised, vocational training. But the basic entry requirements are that workers must enjoy working on machines, possess a high degree of precision

in their work, highly conscious of workplace safety, hygiene and health, willing to work shifts, and be prepared to travel to further corners of Singapore, such as Tuas.

The Next Few Months

These are the latest requirements in the job market, which workers should be informed of. e2i must expect a frantic few months ahead. We have hired more people, consolidated our team at the Bukit Merah campus, opened a second campus at Newton, expanded training capacity, improved our processes, and linked up with more sectors. Whatever happens in the third quarter, we are ready.



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