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# New year... new job? Tips on how to optimise your search in 2024

Both employers and employees are likely to take a cautious approach to the job market in 2024, with global uncertainties aplenty and the work environment evolving rapidly.

But employment experts told The Straits Times that there will still be opportunities for people seeking new jobs in the new year, if they arm themselves with the right technical and soft skills to optimise their search.

Ms Chew Siew Mee, managing director at recruitment site Jobstreet by Seek, said that larger companies and businesses will take the lead in hiring new employees in 2024, with small and medium-sized enterprises trailing behind when it comes to new hires.

She added: "One in two employers we surveyed will continue to actively hire in the first half of the year - reflecting a cautiously optimistic outlook, with increased hiring by businesses and active job-hunting by candidates."

Ms Zen Soh, manager of commerce finance at recruitment firm Robert Walters Singapore, said that she expects companies to increase their hiring through contract positions as they take a cautious and frugal approach in their business.

"On the candidate side of the job market, there may be a growing trend of 'boomerang employees' who are returning to their former employers as they seek stability and a familiar work environment," she added.

Industries to watch in 2024 include healthcare, technology, banking and finance, and engineering, as well as green industries - not far off the 2023 trends.

Ms Yvonne Tan, director at recruitment firm Dynamic Human Capital, said that there is likely to be sustained or increased demand for jobs in manufacturing, finance, technology and services due to Singapore's strategic push towards growing these sectors.

"The high demand in these areas aligns with the nation's economic strategies, such as promoting high-value manufacturing and becoming a tech innovation hub," she said.

Ms Soh noted that industries that can expect pay increases in 2024 include technology and transformation, supply chain and procurement, and sales and marketing, as well as human resources.

She said: "The increased use of digital and generative artificial intelligence (AI) in companies, as well as a growing focus on sustainability and environmental, social and governance issues (ESG), will see companies look aggressively for talent with expertise to support these functions."

Assistant Professor Jared Nai, who teaches organisational behaviour and human resources at the Singapore Management University's (SMU) Lee Kong Chian School of Business, also said that jobs related to AI will be in high demand.

"We are witnessing a huge leap in competence, comfort and accessibility in utilising AI for all sorts of decisions and work, so companies will be looking to improve their processes and increase employee efficiency by tapping AI tools," he

Industries to watch include tech, but agility and willingness to embrace change will be key



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

said.

Prof Nai added: "With the surge in AI skills demand and excitement over AI, I expect to see disruptions to administrative jobs and more hiring for consultants dealing with AI transformations for clients."

Experts said that while many of the in-demand jobs are fairly technical, they remain within reach even for those who are currently in other industries, if they have the right training and soft skills.

Ms Tan pointed out the availability of various upskilling and graduate programmes in both online and offline formats, should job seekers be looking to equip themselves to take advantage of current and future growth industries.

AI SET TO DISRUPT ADMIN JOBS

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ASSISTANT PROFESSOR JARED NAI, who teaches organisational behaviour and human resources at the Singapore Management University's Lee Kong Chian School of Business, on the demand for jobs related to artificial intelligence (AI).

This is key as job demands and sought-after skills will continue to evolve rapidly, even within 2024.

Ms Tan said that some helpful skills and credentials include professional certifications and knowledge in ESG-related issues, as well as agility and a willingness to embrace change.

Agility, or the ability to pick up new skills in a short amount of time, was also cited by Ms Chew as being extremely important, especially in a competitive market like Singapore.

As work becomes more complex, workers with interdisciplinary skills will also be in demand.

Ms Prasanthi Guda, deputy director at SMU's Dato' Kho Hui

Meng Career Centre, said that this is because companies are going beyond core business requirements to also focus on addressing digital transformation, business optimisation and sustainability issues in their respective industries, which creates job opportunities in interdisciplinary roles for graduates to consider.

Ms Soh added that employers are looking at hiring professionals with generalist experience or multi-functional expertise to take on stretched portfolios.

"If your role can be easily outsourced or is highly transactional, it is likely that it would be the first to go when firms are looking to lower costs... Companies are also looking for talent with multiple skill sets, such as a finance or human resources person who has data analytics skill sets."

Professionals on the hunt for new jobs should leverage their networks, said Ms Soh.

This can be through meeting recruiters or going to networking events to ensure that they are in touch with current market requirements and what employers want.

She also highlighted the importance of building a professional online presence.

"More and more firms are searching for and finding talent through AI platforms and searching through algorithms, and it is important to appear in their searches, and use technology tools to your advantage to present your best self," said Ms Soh.

Several of the experts cautioned against fixating on a job's salary component or workplace arrangements, especially early in one's career.

"It would be wise to review the entire employment package offered by companies when considering acceptance, and not just look at the salary component alone. Training, mentorship and travel opportunities and other intangible benefits may add immense value to a job offer," said Ms Guda.

Ms Soh recommended that professionals who are considering a job offer look at certain factors such as culture fit, people, long-term career growth prospects, job satisfaction, scope of work, and whether the company's values align with theirs.

Meanwhile, Prof Nai said that fresh graduates should embrace the opportunity to be back in offices and not actively seek telecommuting arrangements, at least not in the early stages of their jobs.

"They should be mindful of AI disruption and train themselves to be proficient with using AI aids, and be present at the workplace to build meaningful relationships," he said.

"The telecommuting benefits can come later, after they have established relationships and have learnt the work norms and culture."

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