

Job Hunting

Adjusting expectations

Job seekers less choosy now than in 2003, though younger ones can be unrealistic

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WITH the lessons of at least one downturn behind them, not as many older job seekers this time are being choosy. Younger job seekers, however, are a different matter — with many still lacking a sense of urgency.

“For more mature job seekers who experienced the last recession, they are definitely aware of what is happening to the economy and how they need to be more flexible,” said Ms Lynne Ng, regional director of Adecco South East Asia.

Recruitment firm Chris Allen Search partner Christopher Leong added that mature workers with families also face a heavier financial burden, and are hence more willing to adjust expectations. “Younger workers might still have firm ideas of what their career is going to be. Sometimes they will have unrealistic expectations about pay, or wanting to stay in the same line,” he said.

Experienced workers are also more aware of how to make use of the same skills in different fields. “They can see that entering a new industry doesn't mean starting from nothing,” said Mr Leong.

During this month's debates in Parliament, Central Singapore mayor Zainudin Nordin noted that at least 75 people a month turn down good jobs, even as the number of job seekers swelled from an average of 400 a month between January and October, to 800 last month.

But while acknowledging that picky job seekers do exist, employers Today spoke to observed that most job seekers appear more

open to trying new fields and adjusting their expectations to land jobs, compared to the 2001 and 2003 downturns.

What has helped: A more comprehensive training and referral network that has better prepared job seekers and enabled employers to find workers who are the right fit, said Ms May Foo, vice-president for human resources and capability development at Apex-Pal International. The company is “keen” on hiring those who have been through preparation and training courses, as they tend to be more positive.

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Still, some pickiness is to be expected initially with job seekers struggling to move out of their “comfort zones”, while some resist training as financial concerns drive their interest in landing a job first, said a North West CDC spokesperson.

With counselling, though, job-hunters usually come around to their limitations. Since the last recession in 2003, the Workforce Development Agency has set up centres at the five CDCs staffed with career counsellors.

Each consultation session usually lasts 30 to 40 minutes. “We used to spend an hour with each client, but now we see so many more cases, we had to cut down,” said NorthEastCDC senior manager Brenda Lim, adding that last week, the centre saw 50 new cases every day.

Even as the severity of the current recession is making job seekers more realistic, there is also “more information in the media now and a lot more awareness of where to go for help,” noted Ms Lim.