

Job search – same game, different rules

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If you have a job, you will definitely know by now that there are people out there who are looking for jobs. Ever so often a CV will cross your table with the hope that you will be able to use your influence to get someone you know (and in some cases someone you even don't know) the much needed connection to get a job. With economic dynamics of Tanzania improving, opportunities are abound but limited still on one side, and multitudes are on the look out for the same limited opportunities on the other side. This for many presents an inexplicable dilemma leaving many confused and frustrated in process.

Can getting a job be as simple as 'who knows who'? Do you increase your chances a getting a job by simply knowing the right person to hand-over your CV to? In Tanzania's past, jobs were allocated, more or less like everything else, and eligible candidates did not have to think beyond their qualifications to get one. It was almost guaranteed that once you graduated there would be a job waiting for you to fill. An 'invincible' hand (preferably that of some who knows you) would direct you to a job that fits your qualifications. And in the absence of a transparent system for managing accountability, you were also guaranteed to keep this job for a very long time (in some cases till death do us part)...

The search 'game' has not really changed as much as the players and the rules have. The search 'game' is far easier and arguably more efficient when just one party is searching and in the case of Tanzania's past that would be the

Government (who is still Tanzania's biggest employer). The government would identify opportunities and fill them with candidates meeting the required qualifications. The search 'game' is less efficient when there are multiple parties with varying interests. What happens when there is more than one company/ employer that wants to employ candidates with the same qualifications and several candidates are in the market with such qualifications? The search 'game' under such circumstances ceases to be as efficient and will depend on how much each party (the potential employer and candidate) knows about the other party's needs and abilities. The more insight into these needs and abilities that these parties have, the greater the likelihood of getting the right employee and/ or employer. Simply 'knowing' doesn't always expose you to the needs and abilities of the candidate or employer in question.

Then where do we go wrong when looking for a job? The biggest mistake people make is to look for a job when they need one! It is ever so common to see young people eagerly seeking job opportunities soon after completing their studies; or frustrated employees who have been terminated or can foresee such happening in the near future panicking to get another job. Under such circumstances your negotiating capabilities are compromised and you have to take what you get if you get anything at all. As a matter of principle you are always in the market and need continually to demonstrate your abilities even when there is no work relationship or monetary stake: e.g. when in school or in an entry position that does not use your qualifications; by doing so you will demonstrate your abilities and establish a base for future reference.

Every encounter we have with people can be transformed into an opportunity to build a relationship that reflects our career intentions. Just as much as you

may have no formal work experience, you could build on your informal work experience. Many young people fail to put together convincing CVs for this same reason: they have nothing to show. They sit in school waiting for their exams to pass overlooking the need to actively demonstrate their practical abilities that make the degree they want to earn work for them and their potential employer. A CV is not an academic certificate; it serves the primary purpose of showcasing your demonstrated abilities and evidenced potential given your basic qualifications giving an employer who does not know you comfort that at least they know what is really important – ‘what you know’.

It is not as much about ‘who you know’ as it is about ‘who knows what you know’! ‘Who knows who’ may work for you or your employer at the offset, but if it is not supported by ‘what you know’ it is likely not to work in the long-run. Networking is the buzz word in corporate circles nowadays and it is simply about getting people to know you for the right reasons and not just for ‘knowing’ sake. In a dynamic economy, it is critical to build ones networking skills so that they span beyond family ties to enable potential employees and employers to have first hand exposure to your evidenced abilities and potential.

Our lack of exposure, as Tanzanians with a vibrant and liberal economy can easily lead us to confuse networking with its less objective cousins: nepotisms and favoritism, which are generally negative. As a result, in the absence of such networking skills or proper understanding of the same, you may opt to engage the services of professional firms that specialize in forging these networks (between potential employers and employees) as they could determine ‘who knows what you know’!

