

Job redesign gets mum back to work

SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT: After 13 years out of the workforce, Ms Christine Ting, 46, has benefited from a job redesign by The GMP Group that changed a full-time position to a part-time role to suit her needs. (C) Singapore Press Holdings Limited

FEATURE ARTICLE
 By Adrian Lim

HAVING been out of the workforce for about 13 years to look after her children, Ms Christine Ting felt apprehensive about and had little hope of landing a job again.

So, when the 46-year-old was offered a part-time position in corporate services - which she had no relevant experience in - she was surprised.

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NEWS FLASH

Degree holders face greatest risk of losing jobs

Singapore - In the last two years, degree holders have been found to be the most vulnerable to losing their jobs. Since 2011, they have also made up a higher proportion of residents made redundant than among all resident workers.

Experts suggested three reasons for this - jobs lost in restructuring tending to be held by graduates, greater demand for non-academic skills, and substitution by skilled foreign labour.

Studies by the Ministry of Manpower on retrenchment revealed that among Singapore residents, degree-holders made up 39% of workers who were laid off last year, but only 34% of all employees.



Expats workers get pollution pay

China - Japanese electronics giant Panasonic will give its expats in China a wage premium for air pollution.

The move was part of a wider deal reached in Japan's annual labour talks, which saw major firms agree to boost workers' salaries for the first time in years.

'Hardship pay' is not unusual for employees of foreign firms sent to China as 'premium for expatriates to compensate for a different living environment'. However, Panasonic is believed to be the first to compensate for polluted air, which in China is reported to be 16 times the World Health Organisation safety guideline.

Hong Kong's first interior design school set up to plug gap in job market



Hong Kong - Hong Kong now has its first dedicated interior design school.

Insight School of Interior Design is the brainchild of Eve Mercier, a qualified interior designer and art historian in response to much feedback from architects and developers during her work in the city-state.

"When you interview for jobs, employers want to see you being savvy and practical and having a strong portfolio. That's what we bring to the school, as well as a lot of industry links," says Mercier.

The senior-executive position at a human-resource consultancy covered responsibilities such as handling press inquiries, writing for an in-house newsletter and HR marketing support, which were unfamiliar to Ms Ting.

The mother of three felt that she was “definitely not” suited for the job at The GMP Group in May last year, and initially thought of turning it down.

But her husband and friends encouraged her to give it a try, and she changed her mind after having a discussion with her future supervisor.

“I was assured that I would be put through some training while I was on the job and there would be a proper handover...with somebody to show me the ropes,” said Ms Ting.

She was sent to four Workforce Skills Qualifications courses progressively, conducted by the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore, to beef up her industry skills and knowledge.

“I was probably the oldest in all the classes, but it made me feel good that I had the chance to go back to ‘school’ again... It felt good not to be written off,” she quipped.

Despite admitting to being overwhelmed on her first day, Ms Ting kept at it. “A year later, I’m slightly more confident, (but) there is still lots of room for improvement,” she said.

She gives credit to her supervisor, Mr Josh Goh, the assistant director of corporate services, for redesigning what was previously a full-time position into a part-time job.

On how he did it, Mr Goh said: “I made the job more ‘compact’. I removed the fringe, or not-so-critical (roles) and focused more on the core jobs.”

For example, responsibilities like designing the company newsletter were outsourced, so Ms Ting could concentrate on preparing and writing the content alone.

Mr Goh also mapped out for the year what tasks needed to be completed and by when, so Ms Ting could prioritise her time accordingly.

Ms Ean Yeo, president and founder of non-profit organisation Women Empowered for Work and Mothering, said women returning to the workforce face several challenges.

How challenging it will be depends on factors such as the degree of job match, interpersonal relationships with managers and colleagues, ability to pick up new skills, as well as adjusting to having less time with family.

Employers themselves can look into implementing flexi-work arrangements, like allowing employees to work from home for certain periods of the day, or having staggered hours so employees can return home earlier, Ms Yeo said.

Before jumping back into the job market, women can also get ready by registering with employment-support organisations and attending courses like resume writing.

At home, they can prepare the family for their return to work. For Ms Ting, it meant teaching her children to be independent.

Household chores were split among the family members, including her son, 14, and two daughters, 12 and seven.

For example, her younger daughter would help to fold the clothes while her two older children would help prepare dinner.

Ms Ting said with a laugh: “Just simple stuff, not gourmet dining.”

Summing up her return to the workforce so far, she said: “It’s success redefined, because I’m not up there on the corporate ladder as some of my friends are.

“I may not have done a lot, but I have achieved something with my kids.”



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