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MEDIA RELEASE

Graduates need to be flexible in their job searches as COVID-19 economic impact hits – recruitment experts

PRETORIA – “Network, network, network.” This is the simple advice that Sasha Hermann, manager at Jurumani Solutions, has for graduates and other job-seekers who are on the cusp of entering the job market.

Hermann participated in a recent online panel of expert recruiters as part of the University of Pretoria’s LeadUP Alumni Career Chats, organised by the Alumni Office and Career Services Office. The discussion, titled “Job-seekers: How to build your career strategy in today’s job market”, focused on how graduates can stand out in a competitive job market, where the youth unemployment rate is more than 40%.

“The University of Pretoria is invested in the success of its graduates,” says Samantha Castle, Senior Manager of Alumni Relations. “Through the Alumni Career Chats, we hope to provide alumni with useful tips to equip them in succeeding in today’s job market. UP graduates can also join the UP Alumni Connect platform to access more job opportunities and network with fellow alumni.”

Other panellists included Rudhir Ramasar of Investec Careers and Stewart Samkange of the Graduate Activation Programme: Africa Lead of LinkedIn, an online professional networking platform. UP alumnus and award-winning MetroFM radio presenter Nthabeleng Matela was the moderator.

Hermann recommended that graduates make use of university networks and use their time to volunteer while job hunting; these activities can then be indicated on their CVs. She also encouraged other job-seekers to utilise the connections they have with colleagues they’ve previously worked with.

Hermann added that in a constantly evolving, technologically driven environment, companies are looking for people who can adapt to change. “In the past, there was a focus on IQ (intelligence quotient), then EQ (emotional quotient); now it is on LQ (learnability quotient) – it is about how quickly people can learn a skill and apply it.”

All the panellists agreed that the job market is tough and that graduates should do thorough research on the companies they would like to work for as well as connect with employees of those companies on LinkedIn. They could start a relationship by following influencers and commenting on content they post. This opens doors for graduates to ask their new-found connections about the culture of the company they work for, its strategic goals and the issues it faces. Samkange advised graduates to first build an online relationship with connections before “asking for a job”. He added that there are many jobs in nursing, logistics, sales and driving, and that graduates should put their egos and pride aside and “get their hands dirty”.

Ramasar urged those entering the job market to work on an elevator pitch: they should be able to tell a potential recruiter who they are and why they would be a good fit for the company in two minutes. He said that online interviews should be treated like face-to-face interviews.

All the panellists advised graduates to do the following for online interviews:

- research the company thoroughly beforehand
- be dressed professionally
- have a stable internet connection
- be in a noise-free room with good lighting and ensure the webcam is in the correct position
- check the loadshedding schedule before the interview.

Transferrable skills are also something to take into account, and graduates should be wary of boxing themselves into a particular career trajectory, said Ramasar. “They need to be flexible during these times.” He explained that if a graduate has a degree in engineering but cannot find a job in that field, they should look at other industries, as the skills acquired in that degree should be transferrable.

For job-seekers who need help preparing their CV, Samkange suggests they access LinkedIn’s free content, which includes information on how to do this, among other things, and can be downloaded and shared. The platform also offers several free courses where people can receive certificates after they have completed the courses; they could post the certificates on the platform to showcase their skills. Samkange also urged young people to be creative by using their social media accounts to post images, presentations and documents that they have produced to show potential employers what they can deliver.

Retrenchments are on the rise, globally and in South Africa, following the lockdown that has resulted from COVID-19. To those who have been retrenched, Samkange has this to say: “Accept that there will be good days and bad ones. Surround yourself with fire starters who will remind you of your true sense of self and value, and avoid people who will drain you.”

Watch the full discussion [here](#).

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 112-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In June 2019, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

As one of South Africa's research-intensive universities, UP launched the *Future Africa Campus* in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research community to maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In 2020 UP will launch Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of 'science for transformation'.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za