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10 ways to ride the bad times

Amidst a global economic downturn, Indian companies are trimming costs. But there are ways of beating the tough times, says **Varuna verma**



The worst is yet to come. Management students graduating from business schools in 2009 will face the real brunt of the current global economic crisis, warn experts. For starters, high paying industries like investment banking and financial services will not recruit next year, says Kris Lakshmikant, CEO and managing director of the Bangalore-based recruitment firm The Head Hunters. "Day One companies such as Lehman Brothers and Goldman Sachs that visit the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) campuses will not be recruiting next year. About 10 to 15 IIM graduates are recruited by these companies," says Lakshmikant. He adds that consulting companies like McKinsey will also go slow on recruitment.

Many high paying jobs will disappear. The realty industry, for instance, was booming last year. "Companies like DLF took away graduates at salaries of Rs 60 lakh to 70 lakh per annum last year. They won't go to campuses in 2009," says Lakshmikant. He expects average salaries to dip by 10 to 15 per cent.

Till last year, the employee was king in the Indian job market. But now the tables have turned. Although jobs are still being created in India — as the economy continues to grow at seven per cent — the sentiment is not as bullish as before. "Industries whose business is exposed to western economies — like the IT and finance sectors — have been impacted by the crisis," says Karthik Ramamurthy, associate director and head, Synovate Business Consulting, Mumbai.

So companies are cutting flab. "Today, firms are taking a serious look at their talent pool and are shedding all excess baggage in a bid to rationalise existing operations," explains Ramamurthy.

Retrenchment is happening across industries. In the aviation industry, Kingfisher has cut jobs. In the IT sector, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys and Wipro have cut jobs. "About 25,000 to 35,000 jobs in the IT sector will be lost," says Lakshmikant. ICICI Bank, which was slated to hire 40,000 employees this year, is just filling up vacancies. Realty companies are also postponing recruitment.

The global economy will take about a year to recover from the crisis, predict experts. So in the meantime, hold tight. Here's how.

1.

This is a cyclone, not a tsunami

● Experts predict that the slump in the job market will pass in one year's time. So stay put in your job, till the rough weather ends. Hold on for dear life and stay where you are, says Lakshmikant. "If you are in a good job, stick to it. Don't look around," he says. Nirupama V.G., managing director, Ad Astra Consultants, Bangalore, agrees. "Don't be choosy while selecting jobs. Take what comes, for now," she says.

2.

Money isn't everything

● Look at the exposure and growth opportunities while picking a job, rather than compensation packages. "That way, when we are back in the bull run phase, the foundation that a person sets would help scale up his career well," explains Ramamurthy. Reddy agrees. "Don't look at salaries. Take a job if there is an

opportunity to learn. Use this period to enhance your skills," he says.

3.

Man needs *roti, kapda, makaan* and cellphone

● Look at industries that are not directly connected with the slowdown. "There are a lot of jobs available in sectors like infrastructure and healthcare. The telecom sector is also booming. Management graduates could explore opportunities in these industries," says Lakshmikant.

Charan Arora, principal consultant, E Source Global HR, Mumbai, adds, "The media and oil and gas are robust industries. But when job hunting, always look for big names to work for. That way, you'll be certain that the company is not a fly-by-night operator."

Vardhan Srinivasan, company secretary, Sree Raam Associates, Chennai, recommends that management graduates look at mergers and acquisitions (M&A) as a work option. "M&A is of very recent origin in India. Sick companies are being taken over by healthy ones. Reverse mergers and demergers are happening," he explains. Srinivasan adds that only lawyers work in the M&A domain in India today. "It can be a lucrative work option for management consultants and company secretaries as well," he says.

4.

Have employable skills

● Even today, there is a shortage of talented people, says Lakshmikant. "So keep updating your skills," he advises.

Nirupama V.G. says that many industries are looking for the right talent with specific skill sets. "The retail and infrastructure industries need specific skills. So people should hone themselves and use a skill-based approach," she says.

5.

Shoulder more responsibility

● Arora advises management cadres to shoulder more responsibility. "Companies always downsize those they don't value. So widen your work horizons," he says. But just working harder is not enough. The management needs to know this. "You don't just add value but also communicate this to the management, through memos, mails and so on," adds Arora.

6.

Target, focus, groom

● Ramamurthy advises that the mantra for management students should be to "target, focus and groom yourself right". "Till the bull run lasted, companies fell over one another to hire and retain talent," he says. But now, times have changed. With the shift in balance, graduates need to prioritise the industry they want to build a career in. Then, they should equip themselves with the right skill sets, in line with the hiring firm's needs. "That way the choice is clear to the hiring manager," explains Ramamurthy.

7.

There is life beyond the metros

● Experts point out that there are job opportunities galore in rural India. “Don’t just look at jobs in multinationals. Try other sectors like agro industries, where massive recruitment is happening,” says V.K. Lakshmi Narayanan, general manager, operations, Brinda Group of Companies, Chennai.

8.

Try to be in a good company

● The fall of Lehman Brothers has proved that there are no safe jobs anymore. But Lakshmi Kant says that when job hunting join a good company, even if the compensation is less. “Stable companies act as better buffers against the ups and downs of the economy,” says Lakshmi Kant.

9.

We can get through this

● This is a shake down but not a recession, says Arora. “There still are foreign direct investments (FDI) coming in and consolidation will happen. If employees update themselves, they can move forward when the worst is over,” he explains.

10.

Don’t invest — for now

● Finally, Lakshmi Kant advises management-level employees to play safe while investing. “Don’t make any major personal capital investments for the moment. It’s best to play safe,” he says.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1081016/jsp/careergraph/story_9971729.jsp#