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May 1, 2010

Foreign Talent

More spouses of expatriates now seeking work, and human resource experts say they have job skills and should be tapped

By Melissa Sim



Mr Malta-Bey, who found a job in franchise development recently, said he would not just quit if his wife Christine Teinturier, 45, is posted elsewhere. -- ST PHOTO: CAROLINE CHIA

THE image of the spouses of expatriates living out lives of leisure in Singapore - comprising weekday shopping, lunches and tennis - may not hold any more.

It is true that a large group of them do not work because their other halves have plum jobs. But change has come over a growing number of these so-called trailing spouses, who are the wives (or husbands) of expatriates posted here to work.

They now do not want to idle away their time here, say human resource specialists.

Given that many have job skills, they are an untapped source of talent.

The Career Resource Centre for Expatriates (CRCE), run by the non-profit American Association of Singapore, hopes to put out this message to companies here, to urge them to view expatriates' spouses as potential employees.

Membership in the decade-old CRCE has grown 20 per cent in recent years. It now has close to 700 members of 40 nationalities, mostly aged between 30 and 50 and keen on jobs in industries such as health care, information technology or management.

CRCE serves by helping them find openings and dispensing information useful to job seekers.

CRCE membership manager Alka Chandiramani said: 'The locals' impression is that expat partners are here to have fun and that's the perception we've got to get away from.'

Historically, the CRCE has had more women members - the wives who have followed their husbands here - but its male membership has grown.

Mr David Ang, the executive director of the Singapore Human Resource Institute, noted that the trailing spouses of expatriates these days are likely to have held mid-level positions back home, are young and so are eager to find work.

Their motivation could also be financial: In a reflection of the changing times, the job offers their spouses were posted here to take up are now less likely to come bundled with big housing and education benefits, he said.

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) said it had 115,000 employment pass holders in its records as of last December, but it has not kept figures on the number of dependant pass holders.

Among the international surveys which have identified spouses and partners of expatriates as an educated and under-utilised talent pool is a 2008 one by the Permits Foundation, a non-profit Dutch group which pushes for better work permit terms.

It found that, among the 3,300 expatriate spouses polled around the world, only 11 per cent had not worked back home; but when they came to their new host country, 65 per cent did not.

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Global mobility specialist Yvonne McNulty said difficulty in getting work permits is usually the reason. In her own study of 264 trailing spouses, 55 per cent could not land jobs because of this.

In Singapore, this may not be a problem. Dependants of employment pass or S Pass holders are allowed to work if they meet certain criteria.

The MOM website said eight in 10 such applications made online are processed within seven days.

Employers open to hiring the spouses of expatriates will, however, have to deal with the uncertainty of how long these employees will stay.

Mrs Pamela Odhner, 43, for example, who came here with her husband seven years ago and started job-hunting a year ago, said one employer told her the firm hired a local over her because they were uncertain if she would 'stay around'.

Frenchman Louis Malta-Bey, 52, who came here in late 2008 - when his wife Christine Teinturier was posted here - and found an executive position in franchise development six months ago, had a similar experience while job-hunting.

He said he would not drop his job and leave just because his wife, 45, who is senior finance director in Microsoft operations in Asia Pacific, is posted elsewhere. 'We both decided to come, so if we go, we will both have to decide to go,' he said.

But Mr Ang said employers have become more open to project or part-time work arrangements in recent years, so job prospects may be improving for these trailing spouses.

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govt policies are designed around these stupid men, hence the stupid policies...can't blame the govt.

Posted by: lowlife1940s at Sat May 01 17:41:34 SGT 2010

For those sickapore men born around the 1940s, it is rather common that they seldom use their brainsthe only qualities they have are laziness, timid, talk alot but do little with their hands, self-claimed smarter than their fathers and even more smarter than their sons.that's why they need foreign talents, because only them can TAHAN their bullshits! and continue to destroy the nation.

Posted by: lowlife1940s at Sat May 01 17:33:06 SGT 2010

After all that blarney and bullshit and going through the motions of so-called differentiating between citizens and PR, one thing has remained unchanged, and that is the government is still more keen on importing foreigners than tapping the resources of their own people.

Really, we should start wondering what is the true agenda of the government?

Posted by: fcxiao at Sat May 01 16:57:01 SGT 2010

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Mr Han forgot to add that Singaporeans don t have choice.
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i am not a twitter guy, bro

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