

Job prospects still strong if you look in the right direction

By Denise Deveau, Canwest News Service May 25, 2009



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Photograph by: Jenelle Schneider, Canwest News Service

Dave Stone says he's never had to seek a job in his life. Now a ship's captain with Shell, he and his classmates were all recruited while in their last year of Nautical Science studies at the Fisheries & Marine Institute of Memorial University in St. Johns, Nfld. back in 1997 by corporations hungry for top notch marine talent.

Things haven't changed much. Part of Stone's job description these days is finding 800 new officers and 1,000 new crew members. “Shipping is big business,” he says.

“Right now there is a shortage of seafarers,” says Catherine Dutton, head of the School of Maritime Studies at the Institute. “If a marine engineer isn't working right now it's because they chose not to.” Jobs are in demand right across the board, from scientific and mechanical roles to vessel design and ROV (remote operated vehicle) skills.

While a life on the high seas may not be top-of-mind for most seeking employment, it's good to know there are still jobs to be had despite rising unemployment numbers and layoffs. Talk to industry experts and they have a long checklist of where job opportunities continue to grow.

There are the usual areas, such as IT and engineering, where there have always been and will continue to be a high demand. “Information technology is now embedded in all jobs and market sectors so there is always a requirement for individuals with the skills to fill both technical and more generic job functions,” says Doug Watt, associate director organizational effectiveness and learning for the Conference Board of Canada in Ottawa.

The service sector, healthcare, biotechnology, logistics, financial services and education are still hiring. Expertise in anything to do with green technology and services are a pretty good bet. There's a decided shortage of middle-management skills. And the hunt for all manner of skilled trades continues.

Greg Arbitman, founder and president of ReCareer in Toronto, a recruiting and human resources firm, reports that demand remains high for people with financial and technology certifications. "Companies in a lot of sectors are aggressively hiring people with CA [chartered accountant], CMA [certified management accountant] and CTP [certified treasury professional] designations. They're also looking for IT people with the networking skills to install and manage applications."

The recent push to retrofits and clean energy on the part of governments is also increasing the need for certified home inspectors, as well as any other skills that support going green. "Anything to do with green [energy] technology is growing," Watt says.

He adds that while domestic manufacturing may be suffering, migration to offshore production has generated an ever-growing need for logistics management expertise, which happens to be in very short supply.

An aging population is also increasing the need for skills in integrated health services, from medical doctors to therapists and trained nurses. For anyone wanting to get a strong indicator of where the highest demand jobs in this sector are, they only need to look to the priority listing for Immigration Canada, Watt says. "Its priority occupations - i.e. those in the highest demand - include occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses, technologists, physicians and audiology/speech pathologists.

"Healthcare is just one of those areas that are recession proof," says Paula Mastrilli, program manager, continuing education, nursing for Ryerson University. "There is going to be a huge shortage of nurses in the near future for example - especially in smaller communities. There's also an emerging demand for people in alternative therapies, such as acupuncture."

Education is also facing a skills shortage as more people return to school and there are fewer instructors to fill the quota. Claude Balthazard, director of HR excellence with the Human Resources Professionals Association in Toronto says, "Some of that demand for teachers has been driven by the big hiring boom in the 1960s."

He adds that skilled trades are still in demand even through the construction trade is taking a beating. "There is a need for aviation and automotive technicians for example."

One last piece of advice from Arbitman is don't discount small companies in your job search. "Many continue to be in growth mode and a lot are more receptive to hiring new people. Job seekers think about working with the big fish, but small business is where the future is going for many."