

Addressing the root cause of unemployment in SA

The educational structure is failing the South African youth as they continue to battle against unemployment, skills acquisition and career growth. This is according to Kay Vittee, CEO of Quest Staffing Solutions, who believes that it is time for youth, educational institutions and business to address the root cause of unemployment in South Africa.

In response to Statistics South Africa's (Stats SA) youth unemployment report released on Monday (15 September), Vittee says, "While the level of unemployment is extremely high, Quest and many other agencies and companies have a number of open and unfilled vacancies. Quest battles to fill these positions."

The report revealed that Black South African youth have regressed in acquiring skills over the past 20 years when compared to their Coloured, Indian and White counterparts. Statistician-General, Pali Lehohla also noted that youth unemployment now stands at 36% and that youth make up 75% of the country's total unemployed.

To provide youth with appropriate career guidance

Vittee says that a major issue contributing to this national problem is that youth lack the specific skills required by the market and are rather enrolling in soft courses, acquiring skills and knowledge with which they are unable to find work.

Vittee says that in this regard, public and private educational institutions at all levels need to address their responsibility to provide youth with appropriate career guidance.

"At school level, skills required by the South African economy - and their corresponding required subjects - need to be communicated to the learners. They need to be encouraged to choose subjects for qualifications that will lead them on a successful career path and address the need for required skills," she says.

Vittee adds, "As they fight for high enrolment numbers, universities and other tertiary institutions push courses which are either not required by the market or have already saturated the market. These institutions need to analyse the market and identify courses which will address the skills shortage in specific industries. Enrolling focused on the demand by the market rather than demand by learners will have a positive impact on both youth unemployment and economic growth."

No substitute for experience



According to Vittee it is a reality that when entering the workforce, young job seekers need to compromise and work their way up the ladder in order to gain practical skills and experience. She highlights that this is where internships and learnerships can really make a difference in skills development and is where both businesses and young job seekers need to apply greater attention.

Vittee says, "There is no substitute for experience. If you dream of one day being that manager, that executive, the person in charge, earning the big money, making the decisions, then apply the same thinking and realise that you will have to work for that respect and success, sometimes starting at the bottom."

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"There is a growing sense of entitlement amongst the young men and women who register with us. Their expectations of positions and remuneration are often unrealistic and not aligned to what they are qualified and experienced to do and to earn," she says.

In contrast to these individuals, Vittee notes that there are those who are eager to just get their foot in the door. "They are prepared to start at the bottom, keen to demonstrate their determination and commitment and to work hard always giving of

their best. These individuals are quickly noticed and promoted," Vittee says.

Vittee suggests that youth who do have a tertiary qualification may still lack practical workplace experience and need to consider compromising at the beginning of their career. This means compromising and taking a job or internship that does not pay much - or at all - at the beginning.

"This is where business can play their part. Many organisations insist on a degree when the position they wish to fill can, in actual fact, be filled by a matriculate who could be trained on the job," Vittee concludes.

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