

The call centre: a pocket of opportunity

Unemployment among South African youths is a widely known reality: it is estimated that among 15 to 34-year-olds, 36% do not have a job.



This places South Africa as third in the world with regards to the global youth jobs crisis*. Yet despite this bleak picture, there are pockets of opportunity that give young people - who don't have tertiary education or extensive work experience- a chance. A case in point is within the fast-growing South African BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) industry, or as it's more commonly known, contact centres.

At the last count, BPOs contributed R9 billion to the Western Cape's GDP and created 41,000 jobs (BPesa) - largely among young people who want to upskill themselves and accelerate a career. Based predominantly in Cape Town, the BPO industry is thriving both locally and among the offshore market.

Mogamad Gierdien, Operations Director of SA Commercial, explained: "Our industry is an economic gem: it's in an upward growth cycle, creates thousands of jobs and significantly adds to the local GDP. Despite this, its potential to uplift South African youths is not that well-known and flies under the radar."

Focus on training

SA Commercial, for instance, has a staff complement of 170, each representing clients such as Capitec Bank, Old Mutual and The Western Cape Government. "Staff are exposed to big businesses when they join us. This affords them the opportunity to work across a range of diverse industries and carve their careers. We put plenty of focus on training so they can confidently act as their client's most trusted partner, and offer mentoring to guide them," said Gierdien.

Voice training remains a key cog in the contact centre communications wheel, too, and, despite the evolving digital landscape that includes email and social media channels, clients "still prefer an old-school telephone call or, for a modern

twist, web chat," said Gierdien.

As such, SA Commercial has teamed-up with Helen O'Grady drama academy to train its team on voice techniques, tone, annunciation, pronunciation, and voice range. "We resemble a band warming up for a concert, complete with practice runs of "doh-ray-me"! It's good fun, creates camaraderie and, of course, warms up the staff's voices so they can master their calls."

A close-knit team

Besides these unusual tips and tricks of the trade, SA Commercial is also committed to the upliftment of its staff. "As a company, we're a close-knit team. We're also a family-run business, which is why we place so much emphasis on staff wellbeing and personal growth. Our MD, Renee Keeble, is a great mentor - inside and outside of the office - and she hosts regular one-on-one sessions with staff so as to motivate and empower them," said Gierdien.

It's attention to detail like this that is reaping notable dividends for the company - especially in a fast-growing and competitive industry in which staff turnover can be high. "Our staff turnover is below the market average. This is testament to our focus on people development and to providing a stimulating atmosphere where young people can grow professionally," concluded Gierdien.

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