

## **IT ZONE**

By Alexander J. Hanna

### **Do we need foreign IT professionals in The Bahamas?**

This question cannot be answered by a simple yes or no. Wooh! This sentence is scary, I sound like a lawyer; you know them, they hardly ever provide a yes or no answer to a question. I guess that's why they can charge the fees that they do. In all seriousness, the question whether we need foreign IT professionals in The Bahamas might be complicated for some people, but for me, it's a very simple matter.

First off, I do not have a problem with foreign IT professionals provided they are experts at what they do. However, if they are second rate, then I question the need for them to be here.

There are always several questions that come to mind when reflecting on foreign IT professionals such as:

- If they are so good, then why are they here in The Bahamas which is still behind the 8 ball when it comes to IT? I can say that we are behind the 8 ball because my experience tells me so.
- Is it that they are unable to find work in their country?
- What is the true cost of their employment in The Bahamas?
- Are businesses in The Bahamas looking to cut cost?

Now, before you all get anxious (Bahamians and foreigners alike), please read the entire article before making your judgment.

#### **I was a foreigner**

Let me confess that I went to college in the US as a foreign student and after graduation had a permit to work in the US for two years. I was fortunate to work for a company where I had interned while I was a college student. I worked with extremely talented software developers and engineers and recognized this experience as part of my professional development. As a matter of fact, the Chairman of the company was an engineer by training and had designed and manufactured one of the first telephone cards that worked on a personal computer (PC). My work experience in that company included developing telephone software that allowed operators to manage callers for hotel guests using our telecommunications network.

The team I worked with was "tight"; by that I mean they were really good at what they did. At the end of my internship with the company, I was made an offer to join the team, and believe you me; I had to hold my own. There were no slackers on the team. You were assigned work with deadlines, and you had no choice but to meet them.

When Bahamian college students (or their parents) ask me for advice on their career after college (IT related field), I always advise them to ensure that they spend at least one year working in the US (or any other country) to gain experience. Don't focus on the salary, but rather the opportunity for knowledge and experience.

So there you have it, I have declared that I was a working foreigner. And who knows, I might still become a working foreigner again in the future.

### **Local IT Job Advertisements**

I have often been involved in discussions about IT job advertisements in the local papers. You know the ones where the employer requires so many qualifications including a foreign language. The conclusion we invariably arrive at is that the employer has already selected a foreigner for the job and that the job advertisement is only to satisfy Immigration authorities. I really don't know if this surmise is true or not. However, what is clear to me is that there is a perception that jobs are reserved for foreigners. On the other hand, when I do see these advertisements, I am left with no choice but to question the real intent of some of them. Some of these advertisements are so "loaded" with requirements that I often wonder if the employer is looking for someone from out of space (perhaps Mars). Frankly, if someone did meet all the required qualifications, I would question their up-to-date expertise in all the requisite areas.

### **Not Impressed**

I have worked with foreign IT professionals here in The Bahamas on numerous occasions over the years, and I can tell you, that in most instances I have not been impressed by their IT skills. People who know me will insist that when it comes to IT, I am not easily impressed and I accept this. However, my allegedly high standards do not change my opinion of most foreign IT professionals I have encountered here in The Bahamas. I often ask - where do they find these people?

Let me also add that I am not impressed with many Bahamian IT professionals either. For the most part, these professionals think they know everything when in fact they are not ready for prime time. However, that's for another day and another article.

### **Responsibility**

I humbly suggest that when and if foreign IT professionals are required to work in The Bahamas, employers should adhere to the following prerequisites:

- They should be experts in their area of IT
- As part of their employment, they should be required to provide measurable training and mentoring to other IT staff.
- They should provide a defined number of hours of training/mentoring COB IT students.
- Their contribution to Bahamian society should be validated before work permits are issued in future.

Additionally, I believe that each and every business (Bahamian or International) that employs foreign IT professionals should ensure that local IT talent benefits in some way from this arrangement. After all, it will benefit the country where we all reside. The transfer of skills must always be incorporated into work permits of foreign IT professionals.

### **What Should Now Happen**

Every effort should be made by local IT professionals to assist their colleagues in the field. And I do not mean just talking; they should provide meaningful solutions including setting up an IT association. In the past, attempts were made to set up such associations but they have not been implemented, till date. Everyone seems to be too busy to offer meaningful contributions but such a state of affairs cannot continue to be an excuse.

I have argued for years that the biggest benefit for IT will be Government involvement. Therefore, when the government plans to implement IT, it should always consider local talent and the development of the sector. However, the government often turns to foreign professionals for solutions. The government should always try to allow local professionals to assist in IT projects.



In conclusion, The Bahamas will always be faced with this pertinent question. I have always thought that when we allow foreign IT professionals to work in our country, we must ensure that they are “tight” and are prepared to impart knowledge by training/mentoring locals. Anything less is a disservice to this country. Remember, for every foreigner employed here, there is a high probability that a qualified Bahamian (whether locally in The Bahamas or abroad) has lost an opportunity to gain meaningful experience. Until next time (UNT).

P.S. In my next article I will address some issues regarding local IT professionals.

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