

## ★ Finding it hard work in a difficult employment market?

Dave Wright, a career practitioner at Workbridge in Northland, observes that jobseekers with a disability have had to lift their game like everyone else.

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Many who are working as Career Guidance and Job Placement Consultants in Northland will be finding aspects of their job a wee bit more challenging of late. The number of advertised jobs has significantly dropped in the last year and competition for University and Polytechnic places has also increased. Business market place employers selecting the best candidates can choose from a large pool of potential employees.

The tight labour market raises a number of issues for Workbridge's client group – those with disabilities or impairments. Our clients were already at a disadvantage in the race for jobs. We have noticed that it has become increasingly difficult as even more employers are unwilling to take the risk of employing someone with a disability. But those employers who have given a chance to someone with a disability are mostly very positive.

Given the chance, employees with disabilities will work hard to prove themselves. They take real ownership of the job and their determination makes them reliable employees.

Our clients have had to lift their game. In the tight labour market, our clients have had to consider jobsearch options that they may not have looked at before, for instance enrolling with a temp agency. These agencies charge their client (the employer) a premium on top of the wage they pay the temp. I have found that sometimes workers with disabilities are not put forward because the agency does not want to take the risk.

This raises the issue of disclosure. Some of our clients say they can't win. If they disclose an impairment or disability they will be disadvantaged, but when the application form asks "have you any injury or impairment that may be aggravated by carrying out this type of employment?" and they don't answer honestly, they run the risk of instant dismissal. At Workbridge, we re commend full disclosure, if relevant to the disability. Employers' objections can often be overcome. However we always respect our clients' right to privacy if they choose not to disclose.

Northland employers are often more willing to take the chance of employing someone they already know of or someone who has been recommended by a friend or business colleague. Our clients can get good results when they utilise their own networks and go door-knocking.

Despite a challenging year, we have certainly taught a good few of our clients the ins and outs of successful job hunting. The old adage "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you will feed him for life" rings true. The sense of achievement for our clients is much greater than if the opportunity had been given to them on a plate.

