

The times, they are a'changin'

Bill Mantle's pre-graduation weeks would be the envy of any graduate today. He left Algonquin's former incarnation, the Eastern Ontario Institute of Technology, in 1963, with an electronic technology diploma. "Employers would actually come to the school, and we would have recruiting days," he says. "They just couldn't get trained people. They would spend time interviewing the students. Usually, it resulted in a job offer — I had seven. Those were the good days."

Merlyn Gamble's post-graduation weeks would be the envy of no one. She left EOIT in 1965, with a business administration diploma. "I stood out because I was the only female graduate of the whole school," she says. "I couldn't get a job. Those were the days when employers were pounding at the door, and I couldn't even get an interview. I ended up back in a typing job, because women were supposed to type."

"Those were the days, my friend / We thought they'd never end..." — but, good or bad, they did. There's been a

Workplace (r)evolution:



Susan Turcotte photo

EVER-CHANGING: Increased competition and an across-the-board move to high technology have altered the way students approach their entry into the work force.

Employees adapt or...

By Ruthanne Urquhart
Algonquin Times staff

It's a new world out there in terms of jobs, and it belongs not to men or WASPs or university graduates, but to those who are flexible.

"Anyone can just do the job," says Ann Gregory, president of Ottawa's Centretown Corporate Services. "But the flexibility, the taking initiative — that's what's important. Employers want to know where you'll fit into the company. Have you got good contacts? Are you going to save the company money? Today, it's much more than skills."

Statistics Canada reports one in five people younger than 25 had no work experience in 1996 — that's doubled since 1989.

But Gregory says employers are looking for more than experience — good news for graduates.

"The common mistake that students make on their resumes is that they don't include their volunteer experience or placement history," she says. "Today, a work history isn't enough. There might be other life experiences that are more relevant, and employers want to see that."

Lucie Denis, of Ottawa's Hunt Personnel, agrees.

"Accomplishments are important," she says. "If you've worked somewhere, find out if your work made an impact in dollars and cents, and put that in your resume. Students who win awards are willing and able to go that extra mile, and they'll do it for an employer, too."

Denis and colleague Pierrette Brousseau stress the need for good communication skills.

"It's hard out there," says Brousseau. "It's not like it was 20 years ago. Today you have to make a good impression right away because there are 50 other people trying for the job."

"Your resume, your language skills, are the first things people see," adds Denis. "And it's the same when you speak over the phone."

Hope for graduates

Both Denis and Brousseau offer hope to students on the job hunt for the first time.

"New graduates are fresh, trainable, they have no bad habits yet. The energy is there, the mind is rolling, they offer something different."

The hiring practice which has changed the most in the last 15 years, says Denis, is the move to temporary help being made by government, companies and associations.

"I've never seen so much temp," she says. "Employers have no relationship with the temp. They pay no benefits, no vacation pay, just say goodbye at the end of the week or month."

But temporary work is not all bad news for graduates. It may give the employer a chance to see if the employee fits into the company, but it also gives the employee a chance to decide if that company is where he/she wants to be.

"It's a win-win situation," says Denis. "You can be a temporary employee, and work all your life." Another change in the workplace is the move to

technology. Computers have made their way into retail, design, horticulture — you'd be hard-pressed to find a workplace without at least one terminal.

Sandy Kronick, co-ordinator of Algonquin's hospitality and tourism program, is pleased the college is keeping up with the move to high-tech.

"We have state-of-the-art software geared for the industry," she says. "We're matching what the hotels have. It used to take five to 10 minutes to check a guest in. Now it takes 30 to 45 seconds. All of our students are hospitality-computer friendly when they graduate. They have to be."

In the hospitality business, this move to high-tech has brought about another change. Saving time means staff have time on their hands — time now filled with public relations.

"Companies are focusing more and more on guest relations," says Kronick. "And we are doing the same. Every course places great emphasis on dealing with the guests, how to handle yourself, how to work as a team member for the guests."

Smarter through technology

In some workplaces, the move to high-tech has left employees with less rather than more time on their hands.

At Foster Motors, a 36-year-old company on Merivale Road, mechanics aren't mechanics any more — they're automotive technicians.

"Mechanics are guys who used to fix cars, fix brakes, get their hands dirty," says owner Len Foster. "Hands and tools did the job. Now it's brains. The kids today are much smarter than they were years ago, because of the technology."

And that means Foster's mechanics work all day in the shop and then go to school at night to become automotive technicians.

"It's something you have to do if you're going to stay in business today," he says. "Every six months to a year there's a change in technology, something new you have to adapt to. It's an ongoing thing."

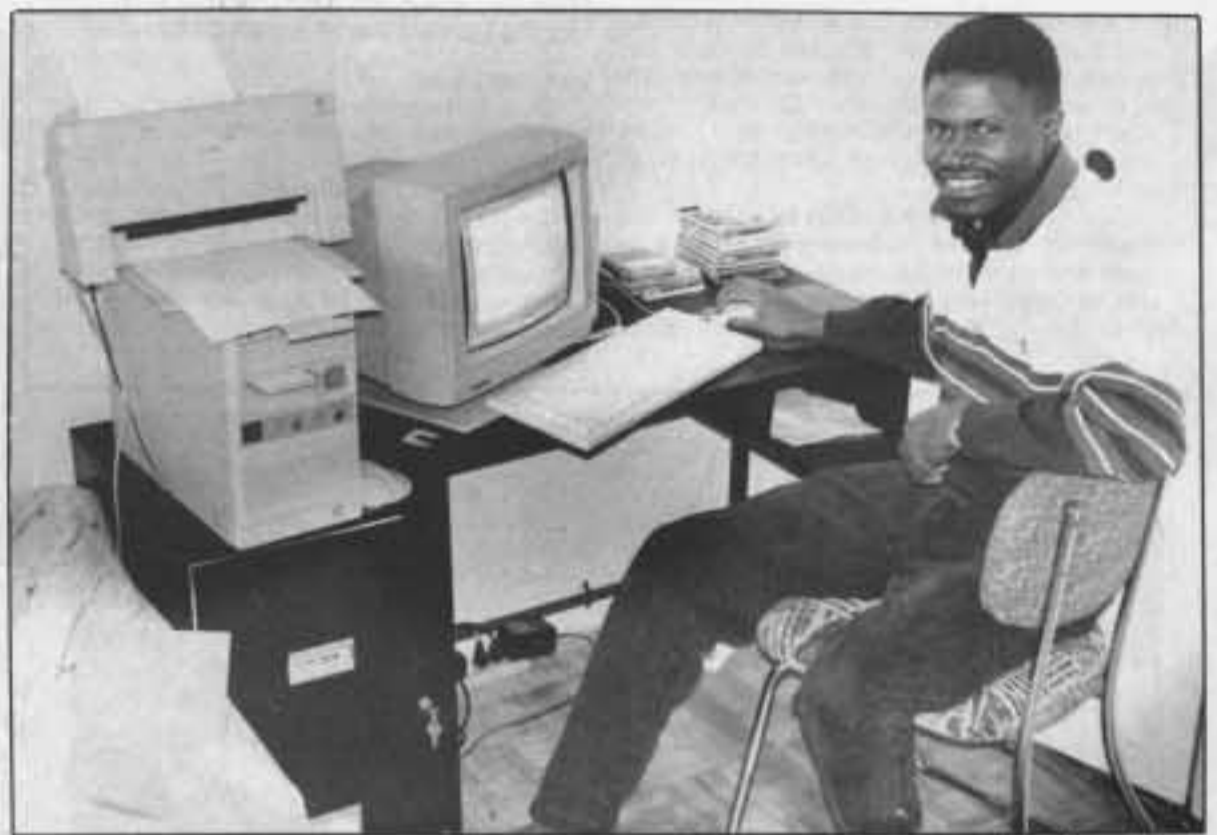
One thing never changes, though. Foster knows that doing is learning, and while he'd hire an automotive technician, that technician would have to put in time in the shop.

"You learn the technology in school," he says, "but you don't get the same hands-on stuff as you would here. New technicians here would have to be well supervised to make sure they're taking it apart right and putting it back together right."

And when all is said and done, it still comes down to selling yourself to an employer.

"I don't have any tricks in my kitbag," says Bill Mantle, "but I like the innovative approach, somebody who's persistent and confident in their own ability — the person who turns up on your doorstep whether you want them there or not."

"For students to find a job today, they have to research the employers they want to work for," says Lucie Denis. "You always have to sell yourself on paper. And remember — there's a good job out there for everybody."



Althea Samuels photo

IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION: Peter Ajani, second-year graphics technician - printing student, runs his own home-based business, Glory Printing Services.

...opt for alternatives to suit today's employment realities

By Althea Samuels
Algonquin Times staff

Some types of employees are a dime a dozen. If they lose their jobs tomorrow, there are others waiting to take their place.

Peter Ajani was one of those people. While working in the paint manufacturing business, he realized he was employed at something anybody could "be picked up off the street to do." He wanted something better for himself.

Ajani is in his last year of the graphics technician - printing program at Algonquin's Woodroffe campus. He also owns Glory Printing Services, which he operates out of his home.

His jobs range from printing children's books to the layout and printing of a community newspaper.

He, like many others who have turned to home-based businesses, finds working for somebody else too restricting. He decided to become his own boss to make ends meet, and to be in charge of his life.

"When you're working at a place, everybody's looking for a promotion. Everybody wants to become somebody," says Ajani. "The highest is

always what you look for in anything you do." The only disadvantage, he says, is everything can't be done at home. There are some services he has to purchase, and some jobs he must have another printer complete.

Violet Crossley, his program coordinator, feels printing works well as a home-based business.

"It's a good area if that's what you want to do," she says. "A lot of our students are doing that. If you have the software, scanner, printer and the know-how, you can do it."

To Crossley, know-how is the key element. "Anyone can have the equipment but not have the knowledge," she says. "A solid knowledge of printing is essential because in desktop publishing you're generally preparing things for print."

Crossley thinks it's the skills Ajani has learned at Algonquin that have enabled him to do his extra-curricular activities.

Ajani agrees, and credits Crossley and professor Charles Reid with inspiring him. When he graduates, he plans on getting a job but continuing with his own business as well.

"Being your own boss gives you control of your own life, of what you're going to be," says Ajani. "I don't want to die in a factory."