

Outplacement Need Not be a Prohibitive Cost

By Melissa Martin, Director, The Clarity Group, a boutique provider of HR Consulting, Outplacement and Career Coaching.

Support for your retrenched employees, or Outplacement as it is commonly known, need not be an expensive exercise.

As a direct result of the current economic climate, it's obvious that businesses are tightening their purse strings. It is also not rocket science to understand that a business' biggest income drain is usually their employment costs. We are therefore consistently seeing the harsh reality of the economic downturn in the increasing number of redundancies that are occurring.

With redundancies often comes the human quandary in that whilst businesses want to support their exiting employees they more often than not do not have the funds readily available to do so. Redundancies in themselves are expensive in the short term so adding to the cost is a difficult thing to do from a financial perspective.

It is important to note however that redundancy support need not be as prohibitive a cost as an employer may think. There are many alternatives to the larger, structured outplacement programs that we often hear about in the media. Boutique Human Resource (HR) Consultancies, Career Coaches and Career Counsellors do offer support to individuals who have experienced redundancy and are often worth exploring.

Utilizing a boutique agency or career coach adds immense value in the following ways:

- The support is often provided in a one on one capacity hence the service is more personalised and specific to the individual;
- Some boutique providers do also provide small group workshops, again with the content being specifically designed to the needs of your retrenched staff members;
- You will be paying for time that is actually used as opposed to additional services which are not deemed to be relevant (eg office space, use of fax machines, photocopiers etc);
- There is often more flexibility in terms of appointment times (as opposed to a timetable of pre-set workshops);
- And of course, the fee structure is normally more reasonable as many career coaches or boutique HR consultancies charge by the hour as opposed to a one-off fee.

As a professional who works with retrenched individuals in a one on one capacity, I see great value in offering some form of outplacement support as part of the redundancy process. The simple gesture of three or four hours of support goes along way to:

- Provide the retrenched individual with the support they require to accept the situation and focus on the future;
- Create a sense of goodwill not only with those leaving but also with your employees who are staying in the organisation;
- Protect your employer brand ensuring that when the market picks up again you will be able to attract quality applicants.
- And finally, it also provides piece of mind and a degree of comfort to the HR Manager or Senior Management who have had to make the tough decision and deliver the message.