

## Seasonal Employment

The traditional hustle and bustle associated with the annual Christmas celebrations, is a signal that there is an increase in economic activity. The volume of commercial activity means that there is likely to be increased seasonal employment. It is customary for many persons to find temporary employment in the retail sectors. What is disheartening about it is that the period of employment is usually limited to engagement during the month of December. Those who are fortunate to be employed have the satisfaction of earning a small wage. These employees fall within the category of the working poor. For most, the monies earned are spent on Christmas shopping and New Year's Celebrations. Invariably, this does little to improve their standing, as they once again find themselves on the breadline.

The fact that there are seasonal activities in many countries across the world where commercial activities boom, means that many unemployed persons welcome the opportunity to have access to some form of temporary employment. It can be depressing for some, particularly mature and experienced persons who may have been laid off from work, and find themselves being overlooked by employers, who now look to engage in apprentice labour. In the context of the global economic downturn and the move by businesses to reduce operating expenditure, it is understandable why this development has arisen. The distinct advantage which employers enjoy, resides in the fact that there is a reduction in the need to engage full time employees and consequently the payment to temporary employees is not fixed annual payroll expenditure.

Seasonal workers start and end at a disadvantage, for not only are they paid less than the sector wage or the agreed bargaining wage, but they can often be subject to working split shifts and in some case less than a forty-hour work week. Generally, employers can potentially exploit the fact that seasonal work can attract high interest amongst the unemployed, and can often negotiate wage payments with individuals which fall below the current rates of pay. To avoid exploitation, it is advisable that job seekers ensure that the pay they receive, particularly in the retail sector, does not fall below the legal national minimum wage. In the case of Barbados, those who seek employment should be aware that under the Shop Acts, the minimum rate of pay is that of \$6.25 per hour.

Traditionally, businesses have tended to offer vacation jobs to students drawn from secondary schools, colleges and universities. Over the years, this has provided students with the chance to gain some work experience and the opportunity to earn some cash which will assist them with the purchase of school supplies or even pay tuition fees. The business community must be encouraged to continue this practice. It remains a feather in their cap as far as the exercise of their corporate social responsibility is concerned. What should also be encouraged is the payment of the agreed rate of pay to the category of workers in the area of work which the apprentice is required to function. It would be unfair and unreasonable to place them under pressure to perform at the level required, and not pay them the base pay.

**Seasonal Employment: DENNIS DE PEIZA: Labour Management and Employee Relations Consultant, Regional Management Services Inc. 6 December 2019**

Those who are fortunate to find seasonal employment should be aware that they are not entitled to the many benefits which are reserved for full time employees. The hard fact is that seasonal employees are not paid benefits. If this occurs, it is usually on a rare occasion and in an instance where special circumstances will more than likely exist. Employers are saved the headache of having to pay pensions benefits and even vacation/holiday pay for their seasonal employees. This is where the door is basically opened for employers to enjoy the luxury of manipulating workers to their advantage. Seasonal employees should be aware that they are usually employed under a contract for service. This means that they accept to perform a particular job assignment for a fixed period of time, and for an agreed pay or remuneration.

According to the definition for a contract of service, it is an agreement between the individual employee and employer for an agreed pay for a limited period of service. There is the understanding that the individual does not enjoy the status of a full-time employee. It is a fact that seasonal employees may be engaged as part time or full-time employees. This would be dependent on the nature of the business operations. There is the example of the tourism sectors, where there can be high hotel occupancy in the winter season in tropical destinations, and low employment levels in other months where there are low occupancy rates.

When it comes to seasonal employment, some might find that they are engaged as a casual worker. This means that they do not have regular or systematic hours of work or an expectation of continuing work. If the individual is hired as a temporary employee, then it is clear that the individual is an employee who is expected to remain in a position for only a certain period of time. In the case of the temporary employee, there is always the possibility of the individual being offered a full-time job where a vacancy exists. This is always provided that the on the job performance meets the business expectations.

Despite all the draw backs identified with seasonal employment, the good news is that seasonal employees are covered by existing labour laws. These labour laws provide for the basic labour standards which should apply. In Barbados the Shops Act and the Employment Rights Act, ensures the protection of all categories of workers, in much the same way that seasonal employees in the United States of America are covered by the Fair Labour Standards Act.

It is important to remind seasonal employees that they are entitled to overtime pay at a rate of one and a half times their regular rate of pay, if they work more than 40 hours during their standard work week, and double time where they are required to work on an off day or public holiday. This law applies whether the employee is a temporary, seasonal or a full-time employee.

**Seasonal Employment: DENNIS DE PEIZA: Labour Management and Employee Relations Consultant, Regional Management Services Inc. 6 December 2019**