

The International Job Market

The international job market is just that, a market driven by economic forces of supply and demand. Why do organizations hire Westerners and nations grant work visas? For our professional skills and products. Westerners are too expensive to hire as unskilled labor, but worth paying for our technology and our products. This demand fuels jobs for about 5,000,000 westerners overseas.

All countries protect jobs for their own people. Also, all countries go outside to meet real needs.

1. Vocational profile of the global job market. The need to develop is the primary force driving the job market in most developing nations. Development requires the transfer of technology and especially the training of any nation's greatest resource—its people. Consequently, education at all levels is the single largest vocational field. Because English is crucial for globalization, English teaching is a huge arena all by itself. Further, as schools and other organizations overseas learn that they can get teachers who will work in their limited settings, the demand increases. Recently I have heard story after story of schools and universities asking tentmakers to help them find more teachers because they see what the tentmaker is providing. Especially at the university level, openings exist for almost all fields.

The second area providing international jobs is business and industry. There is tremendous demand in computers, communications, engineering, marketing, manufacturing, health care, and basic development. This is also considerable demand in banking, accounting, financial services, law, transportation, agriculture, tourism, and arts and media. Some vocations offer fewer openings like recreation and social services.

2. The two markets. There are essentially two overseas job markets, expatriate and local hire. The expatriate market pays Western wages in order to obtain qualified Western expertise and job openings are advertised publicly. The "local hire" expatriate market consists basically of local agencies which are open to hiring Westerners who are willing to work for local wages. Jobs in this market are not generally listed, but are discovered by networking. The President of Kyrgyzstan a few years ago wanted to hire 7,000 EFL teachers. But there is no way Kyrgyzstan could pay anything close to Western wages. There is similar interest in Kazakhstan and other countries. This is why it is not generally wise to go overseas to look for a job. You will not likely find a competitive Western job, will not be able to live on the income, and will harm your credibility if you take such a job and live on almost full support.

In reality, these two poles are oversimplified. Market forces drive this situation. Many organizations want more Westerners, but cannot afford any or many at Western salaries. So when Westerners are willing to work for less, they take them. Why do they work for less? Desire for travel, missions motivation, service motivation. For instance, a person can find numerous jobs that provide adequate income to live in China, though low by western standards. In other situations, a person will need supplemental support. In such settings, it is vital to negotiate hard for other forms of compensation like housing, in-country transportation rates, health care, etc. This lowers a person's need for support and enhances credibility. Another caution should be added: Live appropriately to your role in the community. Identifying and connecting with the people is one of the great blessings of tentmaking. When tentmakers live beyond the means of their job, they undermine credibility and distance themselves from the people.

3. The four job providing entities. Basically four entities provide work to Westerners overseas: 1) international or local corporations, 2) indigenous national institutions like colleges, universities, and government agencies, 3) relief and development agencies, and 4) new start-up businesses. These are the arenas in which to look for jobs. Starting a business offers some wonderful advantages like ability to stay indefinitely and greater evangelistic freedom. However, it demands special skills and experience. More on this later.

4. Structural nature of the global job market. The international job market is very decentralized, fragmented, and unstructured. This is a natural result of specialization in skills and needs. With globalization and modern communication, it is easy for a university in Tajikistan to communicate with a chemical engineer in Idaho who is open to working there, but how do they find each other. Because of this challenge, the global job market is really a collection of hundreds or even thousands of relatively small, vertical job markets, which communicate through specialized networks, publications, websites, and job agencies. For this reason, it is vital for job seekers to take initiative and persist in pursuing all these channels.

5. Relatively closed character of the global job market. The job market tends to be closed to outsiders for a couple of reasons. First, western organizations have a strong tendency to promote and transfer from within for overseas jobs even when the person has little cross-cultural skill or experience. The reason for this is that organizations need people with intimate knowledge of the organization, its culture, products, services, and authority structure. The consequence of this approach is big adjustment problems and a high turnover rate for workers going overseas. Nevertheless, this pattern is likely to continue for some time. Some companies are recognizing the problem and a new industry is developing to provide cross-cultural training for employees.

The second reason for the relatively closed market is that there are few entry-level jobs for westerners. Generally openings require a bachelor's plus two or more years experience in one's field. This applies across the board with English teaching being the only exception. Almost any native English speaker can find a job teaching English somewhere, though qualifications are rising and pay is limited for those without TEFL certification. But going without good skills serves people poorly and dishonors Christ. In addition to vocational competency, employers often look for travel, overseas work experience, relational skills, and even language competency for obvious reasons.

6. Length of contracts. Overseas contracts tend to last 1-3 years. After that, a person must renew or find another job. Corporate jobs tend to last 1-3 years because they expect that employees will want to return home. Development agency jobs tend to be limited because they are tied to government grants and specific projects. Another factor is that national organizations want expatriates to equip their own people so that they can take over as soon as possible. The result of this trend is that international jobs and careers tend to evolve unpredictably and require ongoing changes. Since many jobs actually isolate people from the larger global job market, it is imperative to develop a broad range of contacts and keep one's ears open to impending vacancies. Networking is indispensable. Furthermore, most job moves tend to be horizontal rather than hierarchical because most jobs are oriented toward delivering specialized direct services. Only larger corporations and government agencies provide more vertical job changes. However, such changes usually move people away from direct work in the field where many find greater satisfaction and excitement. Again, running a business is a big contrast to this.

Regional Job Markets

Regions of the world vary significantly in the numbers and kinds of jobs available. Interestingly, the greatest concentrations of jobs occur within the 10-40 window.

North Africa – Greatly unreached, N. Africa is opening up to the West. Opportunities exist in education, information technology, English teaching, running a business, tourism, and some business and technology jobs with U.S. companies.

Middle East & Gulf – Greatly unreached. There are jobs in many fields: education, computers, English teaching, business, communications, engineering, relief and development in certain countries, aviation, and health care. Running a business is an option, though in some countries the businessperson has to allow 51% ownership to a national partner. Saudi Arabia is opening many industries to outsiders without the partnership requirement. There are many oil-related jobs in the Gulf and jobs tend to provide good compensation and benefits. In some Gulf countries, expatriates (skilled from the West and unskilled from the developing world) comprise 50% or more of the population.

Central Asia – Greatly unreached, but with growing young churches. Because the area is poor, there are fewer Western level jobs in the region. Nevertheless, there are openings in education, computers and communications, business and technology with some U.S. corporations, health care, development, and running a business. There are more possibilities for work at more local wages. For instance, the president of Kyrgyzstan stated his desire for 7,000 English teachers several years ago. But the government could not pay competitive wages. These kinds of openings are not generally advertised because who would take such jobs ordinarily? Christians could also develop more openings like this by networking in country. However, a major caution: taking such jobs needs to be done credibly. This requires negotiating hard for other forms of compensation, and preferably, going with a broad-scope development agency versus a mission agency. This provides full integrity because the tentmaker does not become a religious professional. Further, people expect development agencies to provide funding.

India – There are a number of Christians in the southern India, but overall India is largely unreached with thousands of towns, villages, and people groups without a witness. Christians among the upper castes are very few. It is much easier for members of the British Commonwealth to find jobs there. Openings are available in education and technology fields, various business fields with international companies, health care, and in relief and development. The fields of information technology and digital communications are enormous in India. Business alliances and partnerships along with entrepreneurship in certain fields provide openings to work and serve in India.

China – China has a vibrant, growing church, but many peoples and regions are still largely unreached. Also, the educated classes are much more unreached. The job market in China is growing with potential jobs in many fields. Education is big and the demand for English teachers is enormous. And that demand keeps growing as more institutions learn of the possibility of obtaining native English teachers. Though it varies considerably by region, China is often very restrictive on Christian witness. There is also opportunity for starting businesses or partnering in business. However, the challenges of the business environment are great.

SE Asia – SE Asia has many largely unreached people groups, yet a growing church has developed in certain groups and countries. The job market is fairly diverse because of international involvement. Jobs exist in many fields—education, engineering, computers, communications, business professions, mining, health care, and relief and development. There are also opportunities to start businesses, to partner with existing businesses, and to provide small business development.

Japan – Even after a century of missions, Japan is less than 1% evangelized, especially the men. Tentmaking is especially strategic in Japan because it is so hard to connect with the men. Obviously Japan has much less need of western technology and thus has fewer jobs for them. Openings are available in information technology, marketing, accounting, management, engineering, and, of course, English teaching. Demand for English teachers is quite high.

Eastern Europe & Russia – Not totally unreached, yet deeply impacted by secularism and communism, Russia and Eastern European nations do have small churches and the Orthodox Church is again active. In some cases there are solid Evangelical Christians in leadership of the Orthodox Church, but in many cases, the church is more formal and political. The job market has been hurt by the recent economic struggles of the region. However, there is a wide range of jobs for qualified people. Again, information technology and communications are big area. Openings exist in science and engineering, banking, business professions, agriculture, and relief and development in certain countries. Business start-ups, alliances, and partnerships are possible And small business development is needed.

Western Europe – Heavily secular, post-Christian, and post modern, much of Europe has become quite unevangelized. Many of the jobs in EU require a high level of expertise and experience, i.e., strong university credentials and experience. Another way of working in Europe is to provide consulting services in high demand fields or to start a business. Education generally and English teaching in particular also provide jobs. It is also possible to obtain jobs with U.N. and European development agencies.

South America – Because SA is more developed and protects more jobs, it offers fewer international jobs. Fortunately, SA has a vibrant, fast-growing Bible-believing church so that the need for missions outreach is fairly low except in Uruguay, some parts of Mexico, and certain tribal groups. Job openings exist in education, English teaching, relief and development in certain countries, and business and technology. Partnering in and starting a business are also possible.

Sub-Saharan Africa – Africa is also more evangelized with a fast-growing Bible-believing church. and has less need of missions outreach. However, a few countries are more unevangelized like Mozambique. Because Africa is so undeveloped, there are many job possibilities, though many require supplemental support. Major openings can be found in education, relief and development, business development, health care, and entrepreneurship.

Implications for job acquisition and working overseas

Choosing a vocation:

The basic question to ask is, “Where do my gifts, skills, and motivations best fit the many needs of peoples overseas?” In reality, there are varying needs in different countries, in different provinces, and even among different peoples. If you are early enough in choosing a vocation, the first step is to research needs related to any vocations in which you are interested. Do general research to learn what kinds of jobs are available and the specific tasks and skills involved. If you have any sense of God’s leading you to a particular region of the world, research that region and the job market in that region. Progressively adjust your vocational focus and training to best serve those needs.

It is also helpful to do some vocational, work profile testing to better understand yourself—your interests, task motivations, and abilities. Gaining some experience in a proposed vocation is extremely helpful because many students end up working in jobs they have never really observed or experienced before.

Building your competence:

What if you have already chosen a vocation? Trust God’s leading, do the research to focus your vocation to best meet real needs, and get further training and experience if needed to better serve. We do not need to be in such a rush to get overseas. What we are doing at home can provide invaluable training to increase our work and our ministry effectiveness. In fact, since your goal is to serve people well, you want to intentionally build your competence through good training, work experience, cross-cultural experience, and even language training based on good research. It is becoming increasingly valuable to have cross-cultural experience in obtaining jobs in addition to preparing the tentmaker to be more effective.

Finding jobs:

The crucial secret to finding a job is to take initiative and doggedly persist at it. R. & C. Krannich (1992) say that most job search firms cannot do better than you can, and in fact, probably do less well, in conducting your job search. The reality is that the reputable firms make their money from employers, not from you. No one has your interests more at heart than you do. Since there is no organized, centralized job market, but only a web of needs and personnel, no firm has anywhere near all the contact or openings in your field. Many jobs are never advertised and over 80% of job acquisition involves some networking. No one is better at doing the job search than you.

Research the companies which work overseas in your field. Black and Gregersen (1999) report that nearly 80% of mid-size to large companies deploy employees on extended overseas assignments and 45% plan to increase the number. Apply directly to these companies even when jobs have been filled. Many firms maintain an in-house résumé bank from which they draw for future openings. Many appreciate the initiative of people who network with their company and are especially responsive to people with special skills. So network. Also research development agencies and NGOs which hire people in your field and work in areas of the world in which you are interested.

Look for overseas jobs in your country first. Most corporations initiate and pursue recruitment within their own nations. If you want to take more initiative, travel to the cities where companies are located to search for international jobs.

Go overseas to look for jobs when you are seeking to meet needs that are unlikely to provide Western salaries. This can open up many additional options, but must be pursued very carefully so as not to undermine credibility and ministry. However, there are enormous opportunities for teaching English, small business development, university teaching, and running a useful business. Where tentmakers are taking positions, they need to negotiate hard for alternate compensation to reduce costs and to enhance credibility.

Network, network, network! The vast majority of jobs are obtained through some kind of networking. Ultimately, people connect with people, not paper. Managers are much more likely to hire someone who has been referred to them than someone who is only a name on a résumé. Researching jobs will alert you to companies in which you have contacts. Use those contacts. Network to increase your number of contacts. With the interconnectedness of the world today, experts claim that we are at most six levels removed from any person on the planet. In other words, if you knew the right path, you know someone who knows someone who knows someone, etc. who know each individual on earth.

Use the Internet. The Internet is changing the whole job market. More and more jobs are being listed through more and more services because of the relative ease, speed, and low cost of the Internet. Set aside regular time to surf for job openings. You will find that Global Opportunities can significantly shorten your initial research because it has researched and organized many, many job sites.

Subscribe to professional journals in your field. Almost all good professional publications have job listings. Subscribe to and read the one that has many international listings.

Getting the job:

Customize your CV and résumé to fit the job opening. Recruiters and personnel people scan résumés and CVs to see whether the skills they need are listed and keep recurring. If not, they are on to the next résumé/CV, often in less than five minutes. So you have to show that you have the competencies that they need. Of course, don't say you do if you don't. Within the limits of good form, lay out your résumé/CV to set you apart and highlight the competencies the company needs, usually in a separate section. You want to be memorable, to stand out. GO's Associates website has resources to help with this area and with developing a CV which is more personal and extensive than a résumé. You may also want to borrow or buy a book on CVs.

Spread your résumé/CV widely. This may seem contradictory at first. But it is usually helpful to spread the net widely. Still customize your résumé/CV as much as possible to the prevailing needs in the international job market. Network, network, network! This is very important as we discussed previously.

Connect in the interview. One of the most important things to do in a job interview is to make a human connection with the hiring person. This enables the person to tune in to you and really listen. Then it is important to be targeted to their needs, to show how you can contribute to their goals and make them successful. You want to be memorable as a person who can meet their needs and who would really like to work with them (if you would). These goals require that you research the company, projects, and position ahead of time.

Take long-haul approach. Take the process as an adventure and learning experience, which can contribute to your relational and communication skills. It often takes time to find suitable jobs in one's area of expertise. Effective cross-cultural workers are good at taking initiative and not giving up.

Keeping employed: Most contracts last one or two years and then have to be renewed. Many jobs are tied to specific projects. Therefore, international workers must frequently change jobs. By the way, this can be taken in to account in choosing the kind of job you prepare for and seek. Performing your job with excellence and genuine servanthood will help to make you so valuable that your contract will be renewed. In some settings, this can continue for decades.

But many will have to find new jobs in the same city to continue there. When that becomes impossible, we can trust that God is moving us on. Tentmakers must keep networking and seeking for leads on new job openings in the area where they live.

Tentmakers also need to update their skills and knowledge. Many companies tend to pass over people who have been overseas too long because they fear they are out of touch with current knowledge and technology. Therefore it is important to read in one's field and to find ways to keep updating skills. Consider using some travel time to take cutting-edge courses in the States or equivalent courses offered abroad.

Running a business There are significant advantages to running a business overseas.

- 1) Effective businesspeople are able to stay indefinitely in the country if they are providing something of real value like greater productivity, foreign exchange, and job creation.
- 2) They have more freedom for witness within their company and beyond. It is easier for them to share their faith without threat and to offer Bible studies. They can use company facilities. Of course, they must be careful not to violate employees who are a captive audience.
- 3) They often have many networks of contacts among the people: workers, suppliers, customers, government officials, transport people, etc. What a great opportunity for witness!
- 4) They model and set patterns of hard work, of integrity, of running a successful business, and of the validity and proper use of profits.

This is very important. The central non-spiritual need in developing countries is real economic development which increase productivity. Without it, no other development can be sustained whether health care, transportation, communications, or general quality of life. And core to this is developing a genuinely good work ethic—morally good, not American with all our get ahead-better life values. Effective businesses provide jobs, increase productivity, and build people's fruitfulness and self-worth. It also provides work and income for Christians in oppressive nations who are refused or fired from jobs.

But there are disadvantages.

Running a business is consuming. There are enormous hurdles overseas—taxes, regulations, customs, and relationship patterns. Legally required taxes can be so high as to make profitability virtually impossible. Bureaucratic regulation can be paralyzing. Dishonesty and fraud may be so common that running a business is almost unworkable. People need special gifts, skills, training, and experience to pull off a business.

The business must be real. Phantom businesses dishonor Christ and often hurt people. The business must genuinely depend on its earnings or else fail. If it just provides a cover to live in a country, it provides a model that deception and circumventing authorities is okay justified for a good cause. Even running a business without full commitment to its success and dependence on its income creates a bad model. It usually communicates a low view of work and profit—that work and faith do not integrate and that profit is illegitimate. It also models a poor work ethic. But a truly good work ethic is core to discipleship and precisely one of the greatest needs in many developing countries. Such a model robs the people of seeing how to run a successful business and the skills they need to do it.

It also contributes little to job creation, which is so desperately needed. People need to see a Christian model of effectiveness business. A genuine Christian business provide jobs, increases skills, builds better work ethics and character, raise people's expectations of what they could do, stimulates more businesses, and expands the economy. Committed, effective business people are greatly needed.

How can tentmakers go about launching a successful business?

First, they need to get training and experience here. In fact, generally they should have a successful start-up under their belts before trying overseas. Second, they need to research the culture, market, and business environment. How do relationships and decision-making work in the culture? How does work itself proceed? What are the tax laws? Business laws and regulations? Government bureaucracy? What products and services are needed in the country? Which ones are marketable and how? Where and how is best to set up the physical operation? What capital is needed? It is preferable to live and work in the country for a year or two to observe and learn the culture and business setting. This also enables the businessperson to build relationships for future business plans. The third step after good research is to develop a strong, but flexible business plan which covers all areas previously mentioned. As part of this planning, Christian businesspeople should develop a set of Christian company values and cultural strategies to build these into the company.

Along with the business plan, tentmakers need to develop a tentative ministry plan for reaching the people they will be working with. Fourth, the tentmaker must find resources of money and people to run the business. Once these are in place, it is time to set up the physical location, equipment, and systems to make the business work. At that point, the business can be launched and developed. But the work is only beginning. From there the Christian businessperson must keep adapting both in business and in ministry.

Running a business is not for everyone, but the payoff can be very exciting!

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