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BE PREPARED TO WORK THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

As Australians prepared to welcome in 2009 with firework spectacles, party poppers and champagne, our newspapers were yet to publish images and stories of these celebratory events and instead were reporting on predictions for the year ahead – and it didn't look like the party was going to last for long.

Reports by some economists were predicting unemployment will hit the one million mark in 2009. In what is essentially a doubling of the end of year 2008 unemployment rate, the prime minister in his new year's message urged all Australians to go into 2009 with "optimism and energy". But is that really all you can do to try and keep your job in the current financial climate?

Consider the following to boost your chances of working through the tough times.

- Find ways to increase your value – Being valuable is more important than being important. In an organisation in tough times, being a contributor who can be counted on is more important than being important.

- Improve your skills proficiency – Show transferable skills and be able to take on other new tasks and duties, while also being flexible and adaptable to new markets.
- Be visible – This is the time to be a star performer. Be visible at the right times and places. Make sure people understand what you do and how you add value.
- Be happy – No one likes a whiner. Yes it is difficult when times are unstable but it serves no purpose to complain about it. Happy people are nice to have around and less likely to get laid off.
- Watch the dollars – This is the time to stick to the budget. Better yet find ways to save and generate income, no sane employer would want to let you go if you are making them money.
- Take the initiative and shout about it – Don't be the person who just does what he/she is told and no more. Look around to see what needs doing and volunteer to take on those critical tasks.
- Be Prepared – Nobody's job is totally safe so it is always best to have your network in tact, your resume ready and an idea of where you might like to go if the worst should happen.

Good luck.



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VISAS FOR WEDDINGS

Congratulations you are getting married. If you are getting married to a non-Australian, not only do you need a marriage licence, but you need a visa too. As wedding season arrives so does the demand for spouse and partner visa applications. Relationships can be hard work and the bliss of a tropical romance can easily fade if you have to navigate your way through numerous visa subclasses and some very unromantic migration legislation. Australia's partner migration allows for Australian citizens, Australian permanent residents and eligible New Zealand citizens to sponsor their overseas spouse, fiancée or interdependent partner to enter and remain permanently in Australia. There are three types of partner visas: spouse visas, interdependency visas and prospective marriage visas. The type of partner visa for which you should apply for depends on the type of relationship you are in.

The spouse visa category allows overseas applicants to enter or remain in Australia on the basis of a married or de facto spouse relationship with an Australian partner. De facto partners must have been in a de facto spouse relationship for 12 months immediately prior to lodging an application. The interdependency visa category is for people who have an interdependent relationship with an Australian partner. Generally this visa is for partners in a same-sex relationship.

The prospective marriage visa is for applicants overseas who wish to marry their Australian fiancée. Spouse and interdependency visas are a two-stage process. Applicants

are first granted a temporary spouse visa followed by a permanent spouse visa if the relationship is still continuing at the end of two years after the initial lodgement. In some circumstances it is possible for the applicant to apply directly for permanent residency.

The prospective marriage visa is a three step process to permanent residency. Fiances who apply successfully for a prospective marriage visa receive a temporary visa which is valid for nine months from the date of visa grant. Once the visa is approved applicants must travel into Australia and marry their Australian fiancée. Within the nine month time frame they then must apply for the temporary spouse visa (as above) before becoming eligible for permanent residency at the end of two years after lodgement of the visa.

For Australian's sponsoring their partner to enter or remain here in Australia, there are certain sponsorship undertakings. Australia's family migration program has grown steadily with 49,870 visas granted under the family program in 2007 to 2008.

The planning level for the family stream in 2008 to 2009 is set at 56,500 which represents 29.7 percent of Australia's total migration program. Not only should you plan ahead for your wedding, you also should plan ahead for a spouse or partner visa. For further advice it is recommended you seek assistance from a registered migration agent.