

# Landing a job may be tough, but not impossible

Former student at a Korean university gives advice for like-minded foreigners

BY LEE SUNG-EUN, KIM JEE-HEE

Elena Kuznetcova was writing her master's thesis at Seoul National University when she noticed a friend struggling to land a job in Korea. The friend, a fellow foreigner, had graduated from a Korean university and was applying to every Korean company she came across, hoping to extend her visa and stay in the country.



But she kept getting rejected. Kuznetcova, who flew in from Russia in 2016 to study political science and international relations on a Korean government scholarship, wanted to help. That's when she remembered the website of her school's career development center.

Kuznetcova gave the friend her ID and password, allowing her access to the stream of job advertisements sent to the nation's top university every day.

Scrolling through the bulletin board, the friend saw an internship opportunity for foreigners at a large company. A position was open in HR, which she knew was Kuznetcova's main field of interest. She forwarded the link, nudging Kuznetcova to apply.

Fast forward seven years, and Kuznetcova is now a HR specialist at CJ CheilJedang, one of Korea's top food companies with brands including Bibigo, known for its packaged Korean food, and Hetbahn, the microwavable rice.

"That's how my Korean journey started," Kuznetcova said during a networking event for international students hosted by the Korea JoongAng Daily on Feb. 8 to promote K-campus. Nearly 70 people were in the audience.

K-campus, which officially launches on Thursday, is a brand by the Korea JoongAng



Above left: Some 50 international students listen to what it's like working at CJ CheilJedang, at the JoongAng Ilbo building in Sangam-dong of Mapo District, western Seoul, on Feb. 8 during a networking event hosted by the Korea JoongAng Daily ahead of the official launch of its K-campus brand. Above right: Participants take photos and mingle.



Daily that creates content helping international students navigate their life in Korea.

Kuznetcova is one of nearly 70 foreigners in Korea working at CJ CheilJedang, a figure that the company hopes to increase as it expands its overseas business and takes *hansik*, or Korean food, to a whole new level of globalization.

Kuznetcova's account on how she got employed by a domestic company after graduating from a Korean university may sound extremely simple. However, for many others like her friend, it's more common that international students be turned down countless times before they find a job in Korea.

During the Feb. 8 event, Kuznetcova suggested international students assess their strengths and interests, and build their portfolios based on those aspects by participating in relevant events and internships and meeting professionals in their desired fields.

While she emphasized that attending networking events can be useful, she said jobseekers must be "strategic" as they have limited time and resources.

"If you have the time it's okay, but for me that wasn't the case," she recalled, stressing how it's important for people to find events that can actually help them build networks with people working in the fields of their interest.

On resumes, Kuznetcova warned against abbreviating and said applications must "tell a story."

"Some [applicants submit] resumes that say they did internships in marketing and sales, but then they're applying for [a position] in IT," said Kuznetcova, adding such applications tend to confuse the reader.

"If you apply [for a position in HR] and did an internship in marketing, then say, for instance, that you were in charge of recruitment. You should sell yourself."

With interviews, confidence is key, Kuznetcova underscored, even if the applicant can't speak fluent Korean.

"Even if you're not confident, you should be," she said. "It's okay to ask if you can do the interview in English, because they want to hire a foreigner and they don't expect you to speak

Korean fluently."

Met a bad Korean boss? It's not the end of the world.

"If you had a bad experience during your internship, don't give up. Don't stress over it. You might have had a bad boss who said you can't do [something] because you're a foreigner," said Kuznetcova. "Don't think that all [Korean] companies are like that. CJ five years ago was different from what it is now."

Other HR managers share similar opinions with Kuznetcova when it comes to tips on working at Korean companies.

Daniel Nahm, leader of CJ CheilJedang's Talent Acquisition Team, who also spoke at the networking event, advised prospective applicants to keep an open mind.

"It's an uphill battle for everyone if you focus on cultural differences," said Nahm. "It's important to learn and accept differences in cultures and be open-minded."

Sharon Yang, an HR officer at Line Plus, a Korean subsidiary of Line, also advised applicants to keep an open mind and be willing to

communicate even if they are not fluent in Korean.

"We are looking for someone with an open mind and who enjoys or appreciates the differences between each other and those who are always ready for open communication with each other," Yang told the Korea JoongAng Daily during an interview last Friday at Line Plus's office in Gyeonggi.

Despite concerns of miscommunication and cultural barriers, it's important for job applicants to note that companies do have a need for foreign talent, especially if their companies have business overseas.

"[Foreign talents] are really quick on the trends of their home countries," said Son Jeong-min, HR manager at Amorepacific.

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Find everything you need to navigate student life in Korea at K-campus, launching on Feb. 16



## EMPLOYEES: Some Korean companies still not ready to hire

FROM PAGE 1.

Even as the Korean government envisions solving the country's population decline by inviting more foreign workers and creating new visa categories, many critics say that the nation and its business sector still have a long way to go to fully open up to the newcomers.

In a recent survey of 300 Korean businesses that own a research center, 76 percent replied that they weren't hiring foreign researchers, of which 43.2 percent replied that it was due to a lack of information on the foreign labor force.

Among other reasons, 16.7 percent replied they were good enough with hiring Korean

Foreign workers by industry (Unit: 1,000 people)

|                             | Total | Farming, fisheries | Mining, manufacturing | Construction | Retail, food, accommodation | Electronics, telecom, finance | Self-employed, public service |
|-----------------------------|-------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| May 2021                    | 855.3 | 61.0               | 370.4                 | 102.1        | 161.6                       | 20.7                          | 139.6                         |
| May 2022                    | 843.0 | 45.8               | 370.3                 | 102.6        | 157.3                       | 25.8                          | 141.2                         |
| Proportion (Unit:%)         | 100   | 5.4                | 43.9                  | 12.2         | 18.7                        | 3.1                           | 16.7                          |
| Difference on-year (Unit:%) | -1.4  | -24.9              | 0                     | 0.5          | -2.7                        | 24.6                          | 1.1                           |

Source: Statistics Korea

researchers, while 15 percent cited difficulties in communication and 8.8 percent cited administrative costs and visa hassles.

The survey was conducted by the Korea Industrial Technology Association and the University of Science and Technology, a graduate-level university in Daejeon.

Lee Kwang-hyung, president of KAIST, said Korea should learn from U.S. immigration policy and allow more high-performing international students to domestically settle after graduation.

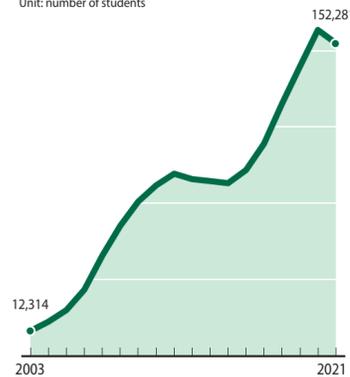
"One of the biggest drivers of America's growth is the way it accepts international stu-

dents," said Lee. "When it comes to immigration policy, we must look to the United States. Universities must accept many international students in the fields of science and engineering," and must grant permanent residency and nationality to talented graduates.

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## International students on the rise

Unit: number of students



Source: Ministry of Education

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