

Beware of Fraudulent Recruiters

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The recent report of a scheme to recruit Filipino teachers for placement in Texas school districts brings to the fore the recurring problem of fraudulent recruitment practices.

Filipino professionals have been a particularly vulnerable group. News of shortages in the fields of teaching, accountancy, computer technology, nursing and the allied medical professions in the US must have filtered through international media and reached the Philippines where thousands of highly-qualified professionals labor under poor working conditions and low wages. This, along with the Philippines' strong labor export policy, could only result in strengthening the Filipino professionals' resolve to find better opportunities overseas.

There are many variations to the standard recruitment scam where a recruiter offers job placement overseas for a fee. Some agencies would sponsor a foreign national for a job even if the job is not available and they would charge a fee.

Some would even create bogus companies and use these bogus companies to petition foreign workers. There are instances when Filipino registered nurses are sponsored as a supervisor to qualify for H-1B but end up working as a general nurse.

Unfortunately, there will always be people in our midst who will prey on our deepest hopes for a better life and try to rip us off. There are, however, ways to avoid being victimized by these fraudulent schemes.

True, it is difficult to curb one's enthusiasm in the face of what would seem like an opportunity of a lifetime. But the Filipino recruit must be wary, and resist the temptation to hang on to every promise the recruiter makes.

The recruitment process must be viewed as a business transaction, not as a favor from the recruiter to the recruit. In a business transaction between parties who come to the negotiating table for the first time, there is no trust yet, although there may already be some kind of rapport.

At the negotiating table, both the recruiter and the recruit must earn each other's trust. This means, the recruit has as much right to demand from the recruiter his credentials and references. Once these are presented, the recruit herself must make verifications.

While the Philippine government, through its Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), has received a lot of criticism for supposedly delaying the deployment of Filipino workers overseas, it exists precisely to avoid recruitment scams.

It would help to touch base with the POEA, which would most likely have some form of registry or accreditation for international recruiters. Professional organizations and peer groups may also provide verification services and other important information to its members about recruitment.

Considering the worsening economic problems in the Philippines and the irresistible call of employment opportunities in developed countries like the US, Filipino professionals would have to protect themselves as more and more predatory recruiters lurk for easy prey. In matters like this, it is always better to be safe than sorry.

And if you are a victim, don't hesitate to report these fraudulent practices to the USCIS. In the event that you would be considered an undocumented worker, you may still be allowed to

stay in the US if you qualify for certain types of visa. These include an "S" visa, which is available to those who are willing to supply critical information regarding the US presence of criminal syndicates or organizations; a "T" visa, which is available to a victim of human trafficking or smuggling; or a "U" visa, which is available to victims of certain types of criminal activities or where you suffered mental and physical abuse.