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JOBS in restaurants, hotels and the leisure business may have been ranked as among the worst-paying jobs in America in a survey by **Forbes.com** last year, but renowned services marketing guru Professor Christopher Lovelock reckons that the service sector is where the prospects are this year in Asia.

“(The sector) has become among the fastest growing sectors in almost all Asian economies. Big investments are being made in infrastructure. New technologies are also opening up new career options,” says Lovelock.

In Malaysia, the service sector accounts for an estimated 44 per cent of gross domestic product and includes a wide array of industries operated by private companies and government agencies. Among the industries represented are healthcare, education, hotels, food service, repair and maintenance, cleaning and landscaping, retail and wholesale, wireless and land line telecommunications, entertainment, banking and financial services.

In the survey by Forbes, the top eight spots were “firmly in the healing hands of various specialist practitioners” — from anaesthetists to paediatricians.

People who “cook, prepare and serve food in fast food joints and those who show you to your seats in coffee shops” were among the lowest paid of all.

“(Yet) many new jobs in the service industry pay well and offer better working conditions than manufacturing or agriculture, the traditional mainstay,” says Lovelock, an adjunct professor at Yale University who will be speaking at a one-day seminar titled *Competing through Services* on Jan 29 in Kuala Lumpur.

Jointly organised by the Institute of Management Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and PUTEH Consulting Sdn Bhd, the seminar will provide an opportunity for participants to “step back from the pressures of day-to-day work; reflect on how good service is developed and implemented in different settings; discover useful parallels from industries that appear to be different from the participants’ own and look for new ideas that they might adapt and implement in their own businesses”.

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The onus is on employers to match workers with suitable jobs, says Lovelock

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Lovelock

This will be the third time the British-born professor of non-profit management will speak in Malaysia after more than 10 years.

Lovelock classifies service jobs according to how much contact employees have with customers or their colleagues.

Some service employees work in teams and their jobs require relating to other people and understanding the role each member plays in the group.

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“Others require lots of contact with customers,” he says, adding that these positions are best filled by individuals who understand and can empathise with customers’ needs and those who are eager to be of service to others.

Those who are less social often have a different psychological make-up and present a different set of useful skills. They may instead enjoy working alone on problem-solving and technical tasks such as working as a repair technician.

So, before youngsters start applying for jobs in the service industry, Lovelock advises them to think carefully about how well their skills, personalities, career goals, lifestyles, and interests would fit the diverse job categories in different industries.

He also feels that the onus is on employers — aided by advice from human resource experts in large firms — to match workers with the right personality types with the suitable jobs.

Training is crucial for

producing competent, productive and motivated members of staff. But in Lovelock’s experience, many organisations make the mistake of cutting corners when it comes to training.

“I constantly encounter smart people in the hospitality industry who seem to love their jobs and look forward to a career in the field.

“But I also see frustrated and unhappy people who perform poorly and seem unmotivated. Perhaps they were the wrong people for the job, weren’t trained properly or are underpaid and treated disrespectfully by managers and supervisors. Everyone deserves respect!” says Lovelock, who has co-authored best-selling books such as *Services Marketing: People, Technology,*

Strategy Sixth Edition (with Jochen Wirtz); *Marketing Challenges*, and *Public and Nonprofit Marketing* (both with Charles Weinberg).

He urges managers in the industry to study their best competitors and high performers in other countries to examine these companies’ recruiting, selection, training, motivation, compensation, and promotion policies if they want to lure and retain good workers.

“Young people have higher expectations than their parents. They know what life is like in other countries. They are better able to find out from the media or the Internet what is happening in competing firms. You can’t hope to get and keep good young people on the cheap.”

A smart youngster who enters the hospitality and

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tourism industry, says Lovelock, doesn't want to remain a valet, waiter, or receptionist forever.

"They want to know there is a career path to management and how their entry level job can get them there," he adds.

At the seminar, Lovelock will offer examples of good and bad practice from a variety of industries and companies in different countries.

"I anticipate that everyone will get something slightly different from it, depending on their own jobs, industry, and current situation," says Lovelock.

For enquiries, call 03-4256-2834 (Devi) or e-mail rajasarasa@perceptionmanagement.com.my