

Stranded Airline Workers Face An Uncertain Future

As More Aussie Airline Staff Face a Bleak Future, Help is at Hand

Ben McCrea was 14 months into the esteemed Qantas graduate program when Covid began to emerge. As the virus took hold, he was stood down temporarily, and was fortunate to find a contract role in a major financial institution while he waited to return to the airline.

And then...three months later, as Covid hit its stride, Ben was made redundant from Qantas. It was a crushing blow.

He talks to Alethea Merthouris about how he persevered, and who helped him.

What's your background?

I studied Business with a major in Finance and Marketing at the University of Technology Sydney, and then worked hard to get into the graduate program at Qantas. I'd always had a desire to work for Australia's largest airline, being an avid traveller, it was a perfect fit.

It was a general graduate program, which provided exposure to strategy, customer experience, sales, and operations.

How did your situation change during Covid?

Initially I was temporarily stood down from Qantas because of the major impact of Covid on the travel industry.

So while I was waiting to return, I got a contract role with AMP Financial Services. I was working there for a few months, before being told I was made redundant from Qantas in July last year.

It was very upsetting. In a graduate program, you have the view that you'll finish it and be rolled over into a permanent role, so it was hard to come to terms with the fact I wouldn't be able to do that. I'd been hoping to be at Qantas for the foreseeable future, but I understood the severity of the economic situation.

At the time, contract work was convenient. It worked well for my situation but after I was made redundant from Qantas, I started looking for a more permanent role with leave entitlements and longer-term prospects.

And I found it – I've just been offered a role with NAB. I'm pleased – I know I'll learn from it, and the pay is what I was after. I feel there'll be a lot of opportunity at a bank; I'll develop some lifelong skills that will help with my career.

How did you find out about Project Displaced?

On the day I was made redundant, I put up a LinkedIn post stipulating that I was leaving Qantas and explaining my situation. Anthony Cohen from Project Displaced reached out to me and put me in touch with Kate Napier, who is a recruitment and HR specialist. I never expected the Project Displaced services would be free to use.

What did you learn from Kate?

Kate was really helpful. We had a few catch-ups. She looked at my credentials, and she helped me with a lot of cover letters, my CV. She also had a few contacts she reached out to, and this gave me options I could have explored. She also helped me on a personal level with the worry I was feeling, the uncertainty, all the emotions.

She encouraged me to do an interview purely for practice, and gave me good guidance to help me prepare. It wasn't the right role for me though – and Kate agreed I shouldn't be taking a role that didn't inspire or challenge me. What she told me helped me a lot.

Without Kate, things would have been a lot harder, I would have struggled with the initial shock and emotional strain. It's always good to talk to people who have been in different roles – you can lean on their professional experience. They look at things with a new set of eyes, and that's invaluable because they give you an unbiased view, based on extensive experience, with thoughts only of helping you achieve your goals.

What's been the single biggest takeaway from Project Displaced?

The biggest thing I've learnt from Kate has been: Try to be as authentic as you can, remain patient and persistent.

The other thing I learned was that I had time. She reassured me I was still young, had plenty of time, and I should dedicate set hours per week to job searching. It helped that I had work at the time, but ultimately, I had to try to find a new pathway. And I did.

About Project Displaced

Project Displaced was the first Australian social enterprise in response to the COVID pandemic. Specifically set up to support anyone in Australia who has lost their job and is in financial distress, Project Displaced is an independent not-for-profit.

Today they offer more than 500 hours of free qualified career coaching, online classes and mental health first aid to displaced workers from more than 54 industries, Australia-wide.

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