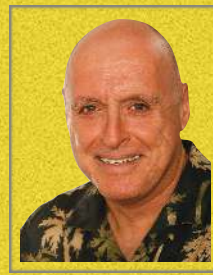


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



277 Planting Seeds for Future Harvest

I saw the story online and it grabbed my attention. Three thousand remote customer service workers are about to be hired by Amazon in 18 U.S. states. Is that right? I'm Jerry Roberts and today, let's ask some questions about this, on The Extra Point.

Online giant Amazon put out the call that they intend to hire 3,000 remote workers in 18 states. I wanted to know more.

My search revealed these jobs will pay \$15 per hour for 20-29 hours a week, with folks working from home, fielding calls, emails and chats, solving customer issues. After 90 days they toss in health care coverage and overtime pay. This is significant, as it's not uncommon for the work week to stretch to 60 hours in times of need. If you include the overtime, we're looking at a job worth probably \$30,000 a year, plus benefits. To apply, all you need is a high school diploma or GED.

Couldn't people in Guam do work like that? I think so. We've thought about call centers in Guam in the past but the idea got no traction. Maybe we should look again. Companies of all sizes are seeking to beef up their customer service. Maybe we should find out why a company like Amazon that has farmed this work out to the Philippines and India for years, is now hiring Americans and paying more. As well, if the biggest player in the game wants to expand the use of remote workers, will that spark others to follow suit. Can Guam play a role in providing remote service, or maybe we should revisit the idea of setting up call centers.

The Philippines is cheaper, no doubt. Workers don't make 15 bucks an hour. Guam, however, offers the U.S. flag and protections that a business would find attractive, plus a talent pool for whom English is their primary tongue. We don't need to be Manila, with thousands of call center workers. What if we could land just 500 or 1,000 of those jobs?

Some companies hire their own people like Amazon does, and a large percentage outsource. Some need hundreds of workers, some dozens, and others just a few. The thing is, the overall number of companies that pay for this service total many thousands. It's a big, big market.

If you're thinking, "No, Jerry, we don't have 500 or 1,000 workers to do those jobs," I would disagree. First of all, it will take a little time to plant the seeds to bring companies here. Second, there are a lot of service workers in Guam who don't earn that kind of money. Kids coming out of school will be interested, as will military dependents. If we had the opportunity, we'd find the talent.

And no, this doesn't mean that all of a sudden, Guam's minimum wage would jump up to \$15 for everybody. We need to make sure that argument doesn't prevent us from seeking the opportunities that we're not getting now.

Guam is set up well for telecom and we offer the right kind of companies good reasons for doing business here. I think it's an idea worth investigating. Again, we don't need to score big with this. Maybe a handful of medium-sized clients and one big one, and we'd be just fine with that. Perhaps one day, in addition to being the tip of the spear in terms of defense, and snakes, we'll also be known as the place where America's customer service begins.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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