

The Virgin Islands Consortium

80 Innovative Employees Face Unemployment As Company Implements Mandatory Reduction

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ST. THOMAS -- Innovative Communications Corporation customers here and on St. Croix were inconvenienced on Tuesday morning between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., as the company shut its doors for an hour-long meeting it held with employees to announce changes -- the mandatory reduction of 80 employees -- being made at the company, even as it has continued to hire contract workers from the U.S. mainland.

The information was relayed to The Consortium by employees present at the meeting, who know the inner workings of the company and requested anonymity to speak freely on the matter.

Innovative has arms in St. Maarten, Tortola and the U.S. Virgin Islands. However, the meeting was only held with employees in the territory.

Shawn O'Donnell, president and chief executive officer at Caribbean Asset Holdings (Innovative Companies) -- part of RFTC, the company owing the Government of the Virgin Islands [hundreds of millions in taxes](#) -- informed employees on both islands through conference call on Tuesday, that the company had to let go 80 people as it's in the process of selling, and would offer bonus packages to those who chose what Innovative is calling "voluntary separation" to employees eligible for retirement.

After having accounted for those who choose the package, Innovative will then make a decision on how it will meet its reduction quota of 80 -- pending there are less than that number of retirees who accept the voluntary separation package. And employees who do not accept the deal but have been selected for termination, will be given 10 weeks of pay across the board as part of a severance package.

Employees who are eligible for retirement between Sept. 2015 and March 2016, can do so immediately, or in the September 15 to November 30, 2015 window Innovative has made available for employees to accept or refuse the offer.

Since the Innovative companies bankruptcy, about 100 hundred or so contract employees have been hired from the mainland, according to the employees. Some have lived in expensive hotels on this island for multiple months as part of their per diem package, costing Innovative between \$6,000 to \$8,000 monthly.

Locally, union employees start at around \$18 per hour, and non-union employees start at around \$30,000 annually. The voluntary separation package will mostly affect union employees who work on the field and management, these employees said.

The Consortium was also provided with an email sent to all employees by Palm Schrad, senior vice president of Information Technology and Human Resources -- in regards to the changes being made at the company. Its contents can be seen immediately below.

"Privileged and Confidential:

"Today, Shawn O'Donnell had a meeting with all the employees to discuss a number of circumstances, including the upcoming completion of the [HFC network](#) and customer conversion, and the U.S. Virgin Islands economy all having an impact on the workforce needed for the company's future operations.

"Because of our years, many employees have expressed an interest company-sponsored separation incentive. When a company considers different ways its future operations, this was the first option that was explored. As a result, the company will offer a voluntary separation incentive (VSI) bonus option for employees who are eligible to retire, and who sign up for VSI during a 30-day period September 15, 2015 and November 14, 2015.

"Employees who sign up for the VSI must be eligible to retire between September 15, 2015 and March 31, 2016.

"Once the company determines whether eligibility criteria is met, the company will select an employees separation database on its business needs. Interested employees should

contact Human Resources Department (contact names redacted) before October 14, 2015, for more details about the VSI eligibility, and the process to sign up for the VSI."

Innovative employs just over 400 people in the territory, BVI and St. Maarten. Employees in the territory were given a mandatory confidentiality agreement to sign sometime last year that locked them into a contract with the firm to only perform communications work for Innovative -- even after leaving the company.

Feature Image: Exterior of Innovative building.

Image Credit: Chris Hanley.

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