



Bringing down the barriers

Written by Heather Douglas, President & CEO
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The Talent Pool Development Society of Calgary, an offspring of the Chamber of Commerce, polled Chamber members to discover what barriers employers face when hiring immigrants.

In the spirit of Miss Manners, here is a look at their top issues.

DEAR MISS TALENT POOL: The labour shortage is our No. 1 issue. Can you help?

-- 10 WORKERS SHORT

DEAR 10: The bad news is 2005 was the last year there were more employees entering the Canadian workforce than retiring. We predict the labour shortage in Calgary will continue indefinitely. Every country is looking globally for talent. Anyone who wants to make money is already here. The challenge is to find the best and brightest and make it easy for them to settle here.

DEAR MISS TALENT POOL: We are thinking of hiring immigrants but our people are so busy they do not know if they can take the extra time to bring someone with no Canadian work experience up-to-speed.

HESITANT

DEAR HESITANT: Our survey discovered 97.5% of workplaces want to hire foreign- trained professionals and skilled workers. Of these, 57.5% have initiatives to help and 32.5% are, like you, unsure. This city has resources to help integrate immigrants -- cross-cultural training, workplace English, computer upgrading, and corporate policies and practices.

DEAR MISS TALENT POOL: How important is English at the office and work site?

SAFETY CHIEF

DEAR SAFETY CHIEF: Our findings show 95% of Calgary businesses only hire employees proficient enough to quickly understand instructions and complete safety or regulatory training. Of those, 92% agreed their people must speak



English well enough to be easily understood on the telephone, know industry jargon and technical terms, and be able to write comprehensive e-mails to their colleagues and clients.

DEAR MISS TALENT POOL: How do I know if an immigrant candidate's education and degree is comparable to one from a Canadian university or college?

UNIVERSITY ALUMNUS

DEAR U-ALUM: Interestingly, 72.5% said every candidate's education had to be comparable with our institutions. Although 45% report they have a process to confirm international credentials, 52.5% did not. The good news is Alberta Employment and Immigration has an International Qualifications Assessment Service to verify international education qualifications. Some 85% of respondents will consider hiring an applicant who is applying for Canadian or Alberta credentials.

DEAR MISS TALENT POOL: My company requires that all applicants apply online with a resume and cover letter that matches the position. I am frustrated because my operations people seem to bypass qualified immigrants for less qualified people.

FRUSTRATED RECRUITER

DEAR FRUSTRATED: Interviewers need to be briefed on cross-cultural communication so they are sensitive to how business is practised around the world. Many immigrants come from cultures that demand modesty about personal and team accomplishments. Interestingly, the survey found some departments are more open and ready than others. The challenge for the human resources team is how to prepare line managers and supervisors to recognize the best-qualified candidate among those interviewed and integrate qualified foreign-trained workers into their groups.

As the shortage of skilled workers increases, a competitive advantage goes to companies developing new ways to find and recognize the skills immigrants bring.

We salute those who have immigrated to this city in search of a better future.