

3.

Building an international workforce

What qualifications are necessary for this job?

Sometimes employers have processes in place that exclude many qualified workers. For instance, if Canadian experience and education are a requirement, many immigrants are automatically excluded from consideration.

It may be worth your while to take some time to ensure you are:

- Sourcing from a wide pool of applicants;
- Assessing job criteria to make sure some groups are not excluded;
- Providing interviewers with the skills they need to be culturally aware during interviews;
- Clearly identifying the competencies required for a job;
- Using recruitment practices that can focus on assessing those competencies.

Transferable Skills

According to the Conference Board of Canada, employers are looking for people who:

1. Communicate well, think critically, solve problems, and learn for life;
2. Exhibit personal management skills such as a positive attitude and responsibility;
3. Work effectively as part of a team.

Most of these transferable skills transcend cultural background, with the exception perhaps of communication or more specifically, language skills.

While an applicant may not have specific experience in your industry, they may have the skills you are looking for. Specialized job skills can be learned on the job.

It is helpful to be very clear in your own mind, and to outline in your job descriptions, the separation between the skills that are really necessary for a job, and what are merely preferences.



“Business leaders realize the workforce is getting tighter and are taking steps to prepare. For many companies, hiring more immigrants will be a key component of workforce planning.”

— Gerry McCartney, General Manager
London Chamber of Commerce

“Many newcomers remain unemployed, but part of our reality is that immigrants are getting jobs – many of them. It is not all anguish and rejection.”

— Kate Kennedy
WIL Employment Connections

*Edgar Marquez,
a Law Clerk at Lerner's*

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How can a company interview to increase diversity?

Begin with a fair process that recognizes that international candidates may perform differently in interview situations than non-immigrant candidates.

Total objectivity by those performing interviews is almost impossible to achieve. Most recruiters and interviewers work hard to avoid bias, but studies prove that even the most open-minded among us are inclined to make assumptions based on appearance and behavior that may not reflect reality. By recognizing our biases, we can avoid discriminating based on those conscious or unconscious preconceptions.

"I tell my friends that if you don't make a strong impression in an interview, you're done. I also think that sometimes interviewers mistake people who are quiet for people who are not smart."

— A London newcomer

Here are some tips:

- ✓ If you have a panel of interviewers, try to make sure that the group reflects some degree of diversity. At the least, those conducting the interviews should receive training in cultural diversity.
- ✓ Be aware that the way Canadians use words can be very different from the way they are used in other cultures. Avoid using colloquialisms and metaphors such as, "stumbling blocks, hitting a homerun or jumping through hoops." These may hold no meaning for many people from other cultures.
- ✓ Body language also varies greatly from culture to culture, so it pays to be aware of some of those differences, for example:
 - In some cultures, it is considered disrespectful to look directly at an interviewer, as it is a challenge to authority. What may appear to you to be shyness or lack of confidence may actually be a sign of respect.
 - Conversely, what you may perceive as overt boldness or vanity, may be a respected approach and attitude in some cultures.
 - Some cultures place a high value on team-work, while others stress an individual's ability to stand out from the crowd.

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- ✓ Work to limit your judgement to the answers provided, rather than allow yourself to be heavily influenced by every facial expression, posture, eye contact and other body language.
- ✓ Use behavior-based interviewing techniques that focus on past behaviour rather than theoretical situations. For instance, instead of asking “What would you do if...” you could ask, “Tell me about a time when you...”.
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions that invite descriptive answers, rather than those that can be answered with a yes or no answer.
- ✓ Develop specific criteria for evaluating candidates and apply them consistently.
- ✓ Ask the same questions of all candidates so that each can be evaluated fairly.
- ✓ Make sure you give credit for international experience, rather than diminish its importance. That experience may help you compete regionally in what is an increasingly multicultural marketplace, or it may help you go global!

*Li Chang Chen,
Engineering at
Trojan Technologies*





Peter Cuddy, Director and Almas Goher, Production Worker at Touché Bakery

A common purpose: success!

Touché Bakery

Touché Bakery Director, Peter Cuddy, can tell you a story about each one of Touché's 15 employees. He's proud of the men and women who work for them, and grateful for the hard work they do to make Touché run smoothly. Touché products, including high quality biscotti, meringues and cookies are sold in some of the best bakeries and specialty stores in Ontario and as far away as the southern United States.

Since Touché was brought to London in 2004 by Peter and his partner Allan Swartz, the company has hired workers recruited through the Job Connect program at the London Unemployment Help Centre, including newcomers. Job Connect is a provincially funded program designed to link

willing employers with workers who wish to gain employment and experience.

Peter says, "We see a real sense of purpose. We believe that the commitment of our employees comes from feeling comfortable, feeling like they are part of a family working toward a common purpose. Some of the people here have faced great struggles in their lives, are from impoverished backgrounds or have had a life consumed by violence or conflict."

"The individuals who work here, work very hard," he says. "We give staff a lot of latitude here, and they respect it. There's tremendous respect among all of us, for our differences, and for what we have in common."

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Isn't it just a matter of hiring the best person available?

That approach sounds right, but unless you are sure your process is bias-free you may run into problems:

- As workforce shortages increase, finding qualified candidates will become more difficult.
- If your workforce is not welcoming to a diversity of workers, you may have difficulty meeting workforce demands to remain competitive.
- You may be passing over some of the most qualified candidates because your hiring practices may intentionally or unintentionally be geared to favour Canadian born applicants.

Evaluating current practices and implementing a new and more inclusive approach to recruiting will pay dividends. It will not only help achieve diversity, but it will stimulate the removal of systemic barriers that are keeping great people from becoming a part of your workforce.

Employers Facing Skills Shortage

1. In ranking the challenges facing the economy and labour market, private sector managers rank the shortage of skilled labour #3, behind high personal and corporate taxes.
2. Skill shortages out-rank concerns about productivity performance and innovation.
3. Competition from other employers for qualified workers and difficulties increasing compensation to attract and retain workers were commonly identified as "serious problems".

— *Some findings from the Canada Labour and Business Centre – Survey of Business, Labour and Public Sector Leaders 2005*

- ▲ As many as 140,000 newcomers arrive in Ontario each year. In the past two years, more than half were university educated. Within five years, newcomers will account for all of the province's net labour force growth.

— *Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration*

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Why someone with a PhD applies for a less challenging job

When a newcomer arrives in Canada, employment is a top priority. Finding a job of any kind may be difficult because:

- They have not had time to develop and practice their English skills.
- They may lack the Canadian experience required by many employers.
- They may not yet have been able to obtain professional certification or upgrading in their profession, as this can take a number of years.

For these reasons, many highly-skilled newcomers apply for jobs that are far below their level of education and experience.

Employers with foresight realize that when they hire a newcomer who is overqualified for a position, they are benefiting from a more highly-skilled worker for less pay. In exchange, employers give newcomers a chance to develop language skills and gain an understanding of the Canadian work culture.

Will newcomers just get Canadian experience here and take a better job?

Like all employees, if newcomers are given the opportunity for job progression and a salary that reflects the level of responsibility and experience they have, they will most likely remain talented and loyal employees for many years to come.

Manufacturing Workforce

- ↑ Canada's reliance on immigration for labour force growth is evident within the manufacturing sector. Census data shows that the labour force within manufacturing industries increased by 125,335 between 1991 and 2001, with recent immigrants representing 166% of the sector's net labour force growth.

— *Workforce Profile of the Manufacturing Sector 2004*
Canadian Labour and Business Centre



Yahya Almoufadhhal, Dafalla Yousif, Syed Haider – Brokers at Checker Limousine

Turning a job into a business

Voyageur Transportation – Checker Limousine

It is a classic taxi experience – learning that the person driving you to your doctor’s appointment is actually a physician – or an engineer, or holds a PhD in philosophy! It is not a myth. Many newcomers who were respected professionals in their country of origin are accepting these jobs in Canada – and some have even turned them into a successful venture!

Such is the case at Voyageur Transportation’s Checker Limousine division, where management estimates that about 65% of their brokers and drivers (both are independent contractors) are immigrants. Brokers can own and manage more than one car and can establish a successful business doing so.

At Checker, an up-scale taxi alternative, drivers wear uniforms, drive luxury sedans and are expected to provide a higher level of service – not difficult if you are a former lawyer, engineer or business owner.

Brad Rice of Voyageur Transportation is Division Manager for Checker Limousine.

“Many of our drivers have that international customer service experience. They appreciate the opportunity to be entrepreneurial, to have flexibility and they understand that the income they make is often dependent on the level of service they provide.”

Syed Haider has a commerce degree and owned a building material store in his native Pakistan. He began driving for Checker five years ago and is now a broker with five cars and eleven drivers working for him.

Dafalla Yousif came to Canada with an engineering degree from his homeland of Sudan, a diploma from Italy, a Master’s from Holland and PhD from England. He did some research contract work when he came to London, but found that he was able to turn the opportunities offered as a Checker broker and driver into an excellent way to support his family.

Yahya Almoufadhhal had just started to practice law in his native Iraq when the Gulf War drove him to Saudi Arabia as a refugee. He landed in Vancouver but was lured to London by a friend. Yahya enjoys his work for Checker, where he is now a broker but as many of his Iraqi classmates and friends are now judges, he is considering a return to Iraq where he can practice law.

Each story is different, but all three men at one time or another applied for various jobs and were turned away because they lacked Canadian job experience. They were left wondering why employers were not more interested in putting their skills and education to work in Canada. Instead, they have built a success story of their own.