Attracting Cultural Diversity To Your Organization



When we talk about diversity we often reference several aspect of diversity. Diversity as defined by Employment Equity refers to 4 groups: Women, visible minorities, aboriginal people and people with a disability. However, diversity is more than employment equity groups. Diversity really includes cultural, ethnic, generational, lifestyle (including sexual identity) and gender identity and it can also include a diversity of belief, family status and much more. In this article we consider cultural diversity and focus on visible minorities and foreign-born Canadians.

The Canadian cultural and ethnic landscape is a diverse one. According to Stats Canada in 2011 20% of the Canadian population was foreign born and there were 6,264,800+ Canadians who identify themselves as a 'visible minority' (19.1%). Tapping into the diversity of the Canadian landscape is a great way to discover wonderful employees who may bring a different perspective to your organization.

4 Advantages of Hiring a Culturally Diverse Workforce

1) Sends a positive message to your community that you are open to diversity and inclusion

2) Enables increased competitiveness by bringing in different perspectives that can spur change and even drive innovation

3) Attract more or different customers who feel represented by your business and/or become more aware of your business as a result of your increased visibility

4) Brings into your business culture new skills, experiences and perceptions which may prove helpful

Challenges When Trying to Hire a Culturally Diverse Workforce

1) Qualifications for internationally educated professionals (IEP's) may be difficult to reconcile with your requirements

2) Language barriers (including not only language but cultural references) can make communications and relationship building more challenging

3) Work expectations and styles may appear too different and, as a result, a

diverse candidate may not appear to be a ‘company culture fit’

4) Perception that your workplace is not diverse or accepting of other cultures may reduce your pool of interested qualified applicants

5) Recruiting efforts may miss qualified culturally diverse candidates because you are not tapping into the relevant words or channels

6 Simple Steps to Finding and Connecting with Culturally Diverse Candidates

1) ***Identify the cultural diversity in your own community.*** Do your homework and understand the diversity makeup of your community so you can position your workplace to be open to diversity.

2) ***Build connections to your local cultural and immigration support groups.*** Participate and be visible in your community. Offer to be a sponsor of a culturally diverse event, invite community leaders to your workplace, attend culturally diverse business events.

3) ***Identify if there are any ‘bridging’ programs in your community***; programs designed to offer new Canadians opportunities to gain Canadian experience by participating in ‘volunteer’ or limited work placements

4) ***Review your practices for cultural inclusiveness.*** Does your marketing and recruiting information and website reflect a diverse community? Is the wording on job descriptions written in plan language or full of Canadian insider jargon or specific Canadian only requirements, do they leave room for skills, training and education that reflects an international workforce?

5) ***Stop unconsciously screening out candidates of diversity.*** When you see names that are difficult to pronounce or education institutions that you do not recognize, work experience that is not Canadian, resumes that do not look Canadian and more do you unconsciously move that candidate into the ‘reject pile’ a little quicker? Consider any hidden bias you may bring to the screening and interviewing process. Candidates from different cultures may interact differently than other candidates that may cause an interviewer to question ‘company culture fit’. But different is not always as different as it seems. Cultural norms for interactions may be in play and it is useful to be conscious to not misinterpret what you see as more than it is.

6) ***Understand cultural differences***: Educating yourself on cultural differences in communication, working relationships, expectations and more can position you to better attract a diverse pool of candidates. In the book “Canadian Workplace Culture: Mastering the Unspoken Rules’ author Matt Adolphe presents information to new Canadians about expectations in the Canadian workplace. It is an eye opening look at how new Canadians experience the Canadian workplace. Education and exposure to other perspectives can be a useful way to address steps 1-5.

Cultural diversity in the workplace may cause a few confusing and even uncomfortable moments but ultimately the benefits will outweigh any inconveniences. The Canadian cultural landscape is changing and changing with it will position more organizations to stay competitive.