Rewriting the Job Ad: How to Recruit Fairly and Legally in the Post-Canadian Experience Era



For years, job ads across Canada carried a quiet gatekeeper in plain sight. One small phrase — "Canadian experience required" — closed the door on thousands of talented newcomers before they even had a chance to knock.

Ontario has now locked that door for good. With the **ban on Canadian experience requirements** taking effect, HR managers can no longer rely on this once-common phrase in job postings or interviews. But this is more than a compliance change. It's a cultural shift in how we define what makes someone "qualified."

For HR professionals, the challenge is clear: how do you attract and assess the right talent while staying within the law and ensuring fairness?

Why Job Ads Matter More Than You Think

A job posting might seem like a formality — a simple notice of opportunity. In reality, it's one of the most powerful cultural documents a company produces. Every word signals who belongs, who doesn't, and what the organization values.

When a posting includes phrases like "Canadian experience required" or "North American client experience preferred," it tells newcomers that their past achievements, no matter how substantial, are somehow less relevant.

And that's not just unfair — it's bad for business. Canada is in a demographic shift unlike any before. Immigrants now make up **26 percent of the national workforce**, and the country relies on immigration for **nearly 100 percent of its net labour force growth**, according to Statistics Canada. Ignoring or alienating that talent pool is not only unethical but economically unsustainable.

The Legal Ground Has Shifted

Ontario's amendment to the **Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act** makes it illegal for employers to ask for or prefer "Canadian experience" unless it is an explicit legal requirement of the role — for example, where a license or security clearance demands it.

In practice, this means HR managers must remove any mention of “Canadian experience” in job postings, screening questions, and interview prompts. But more importantly, they must rethink what those words were really trying to measure.

Most employers didn’t mean to discriminate. They wanted reassurance — that a candidate understands Canadian workplace norms, safety standards, or customer expectations. Those are legitimate needs. The problem is that “Canadian experience” was a blunt instrument for measuring them.

The law forces a smarter approach: focusing on skills, outcomes, and adaptability rather than geography.

What to Replace “Canadian Experience” With

Let’s say you’re hiring a finance manager. Instead of writing, “3+ years of Canadian experience required,” consider:

“Minimum 3 years of experience in financial reporting, audit preparation, and regulatory compliance for medium to large organizations. Knowledge of Canadian GAAP and federal tax laws is an asset.”

See the difference? You’re still asking for the skills the role demands — but you’re measuring them by function, not location.

A similar change works for customer-facing jobs:
Instead of: “Canadian customer service experience required.”
Try: “Demonstrated ability to manage customer relationships in a fast-paced, multicultural environment.”

The goal is precision. The more specific you are about the work being done, the less room there is for bias to slip in.

The Subtle Bias Hidden in Job Language

Language shapes perception. Words like “Canadian experience,” “native English speaker,” or even “must be familiar with local business culture” create unintentional barriers.

A 2023 **Indeed Canada** survey found that **over 40 percent of immigrant job seekers** had seen postings that made them feel unwelcome or unqualified, even when they met all formal criteria.

HR managers should review postings not only for legality but also for tone. Does the ad invite diverse candidates to apply, or does it quietly warn them off? Does it describe the actual work, or does it use coded language that assumes a certain kind of background?

For instance, an ad that says “fast-paced, competitive environment” might unintentionally deter candidates from collectivist cultures that value collaboration. Small shifts, like saying “dynamic and team-oriented,” can make a big difference in who feels encouraged to apply.

Building Fairness Into the Process

Writing inclusive job ads is only the first step. The process that follows must support the same principles.

Start with **blind resume screening** to reduce name, address, or accent bias. Evaluate

applicants on objective criteria such as certifications, deliverables, or technical competencies.

Structured interviews help too. Ask every candidate the same questions, in the same order, and use scoring rubrics. It’s not as spontaneous, but it’s fairer — and fairness is what compliance is really about.

Some HR teams also use **skills-based assessments** that let candidates demonstrate their abilities through practical tasks or simulations. This not only levels the playing field but often reveals talent that might otherwise be overlooked due to nontraditional backgrounds.

The Risk of “Token Compliance”

There’s a temptation to treat Ontario’s rule as a checkbox exercise — remove one phrase, move on. But HR managers who stop there will miss the point.

Removing “Canadian experience” doesn’t fix bias; it just removes the evidence of it. A recruiter can still screen out a candidate based on accent, lack of local references, or the assumption that they’ll “need too much training.”

Real compliance is cultural, not cosmetic. It requires training hiring teams, rewriting internal templates, and making inclusion a daily discipline. It also means holding hiring managers accountable for outcomes, not just processes.

An organization might proudly say it complies with the new law — yet if none of its hires are newcomers, the message rings hollow.

When Compliance Becomes Competitive Advantage

There’s another way to view this shift — as an opportunity to lead.

Take the example of a Mississauga logistics company that rewrote its postings using skill-based criteria and partnered with a local immigrant employment council to review its screening process. Within a year, 30 percent of new hires were internationally trained professionals, and turnover dropped by nearly half.

The HR director later shared that the biggest surprise wasn’t compliance success but innovation. “These employees brought process ideas from other countries that made us faster and safer,” she said. “We weren’t just meeting legal standards — we were evolving.”

A National Wake-Up Call

While Ontario is the first province to formally ban “Canadian experience” requirements, others are watching. **British Columbia**, **Québec**, and the **federal sector** are exploring similar measures.

HR leaders across Canada would be wise to act now, not later. Standardize your job ad templates, review interview scripts, and document hiring criteria that focus on outcomes and competencies. The organizations that adapt early will be the ones that thrive when this becomes the national norm.

The Takeaway

Ontario’s law is not about lowering standards. It’s about removing barriers that never measured skill in the first place.

By rewriting job ads with clarity and fairness, HR managers are not just complying with the law — they're opening the door to a wider range of ideas, innovations, and human potential.

Experience doesn't need a postal code. And when HR stops treating it like it does, Canadian workplaces will finally reflect the diversity that already defines the country.