Working with New immigrant Employees – Part 2 – Onboarding and Integration



How prepared is your organization to screen, hire, manage and retain new immigrant employees?

In the first article we discussed the volume of immigrant's who may be headed to Canada in 2016. As you may recall the new Canadian government has committed to bringing in an increased number of refugees over the next few months, 25,000 or more, many of who will be working age adults and some of whom will seek employment opportunities in 2016. And Canada may also be bringing over 100,000 economic immigrants to Canada in 2016, in addition to the 100's of thousands who have arrived in the past few years. With a large number of immigrants with excellent skills and knowledge to share ensuring a smooth onboarding and integration into your organization is a smart move.

Working with Your Immigrant Employee

Immigrants can bring a wealth of ideas and insights into your workplace. Having an employee with a different approach, experience and different way of learning and doing business can positively impact how well your organization functions. However, anytime you bring a new and different element into the workplace it can result in some challenges. The more you anticipate and plan for these challenges the quicker you can gain a benefit from your new hire.

Economic immigrants, including those who come through Canada's new Express Entry system, are screened for a variety of items including educational credentials assessment as equivalent to a Canadian degree and English (or French) language skills. However, they are not usually prepared for the often-dramatic shift in their experience in the Canadian labour market. Keep in mind a few tips as you prepare to onboard and manage your new immigrant employee.

- **Onboarding:** For your new immigrant employee onboarding is very important. Be prepared to provide more time and consider language and cultural differences that may cause unspoken challenges. Language barriers may require you to provide information in a second language or to have someone explain in more depth some of nuances around the information a new immigrate employee will hear.

  Do not assume that your new employee understands what is being said or read, ask overtly for the employee to explain their understanding of the information. Some

immigrants may be uncomfortable asking questions or speaking up, that is why you have to anticipate this and proactively ask questions of them in formal and informal ways.

New immigrants may function similarly to interns or recent graduate employees in that they may not be as aware of workplace expectations and etiquette. Sharing information around workplace behaviours including routines (start and stop times, breaks, lunch), co-worker engagement and socializing.

- **Actively Embrace Diversity:** Ask questions and talk about the value of different perspectives in the workplace and actively invite new employees to ask questions and share their different perspectives. New employees may not speak up or they may speak up in ways that are different, either too abrupt or subtlety. Remind supervisors and co-workers to be open to questions and actively engage in requesting ideas and information.

Your new immigrant employees may hesitate to share a different perspective if they are not actively encouraged to speak up and make the contribution. This does mean that managers, supervisors and co-workers need to be reminded to ask for other perspectives. Provide different mediums and forums to encourage questions and contributions including in writing and anonymously.

- **Use Workplace Buddies effectively:** Assigning a buddy is a super way to integrate and onboard a new employee but Cultural norms may make this process for challenging. If you are pairing a new immigrant with a member of the other gender you may initially want to pair the new employee with another employee so there are three people in the relationship. This may make the new hire more confortable initially. Provide your hire with information on tolerance of differences in the workplace. A book called “Canadian Workplace Culture: Mastering the Unspoken rules’, can provide you with some valuable insights as to why a new immigrant hire an

10 Ways to Demonstrate a Commitment to Supporting Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

- **Recruit Diversity**: Reach out to local immigrant or new Canadian programs and organizations to post jobs and ask how to reach and invite diversity hiring
- **Explore Diversity**: Establish a diversity committee in the organization to review and explore diversity practices and ways in which diversity can be invited and leveraged
- **Review Practices**: Conduct a review of policies and practices to determine if any policies or practices make work more difficult for employees of diversity. For example working hours or expectations may impact workers of particular religions more than others.
- **Value foreign qualifications**: recognize and communicate you value of an employees foreign credentials and experience.
- **Offer support**: Establish a diversity mentor or buddy network and avenues for a new immigrant employee to obtain support. You may have to explain the options that include an organizations EAP (Employee assistance program)
- **Facilitate licensing:** Help immigrant employees learn about and work towards recognition of their credentials and licenses.
- **Onboarding:** Develop extensive onboarding to help with a smooth transition
- **Diversity training**: Provide employees with information and training on diversity practices including various cultural practices they may not be familiar or comfortable with but that the employee of diversity is entitled to practice.
- **Train on Canadian expectations**: As you train all employees on diversity also

train new immigrant employees on Canadian workplace expectations

Promote A Culture of Diversity: Reflect the best of your community and take a lead in supporting acceptance and embracing of new Canadians. Visibly supporting and embracing diversity and other ways of doing things does not diminish valuing the Canadian way of doing things, it augments the Canadian way of doing things.