

New Canadians - The Untapped Workforce

An Overview of the Immigrant Situation in Calgary and How You Can Help

One Immigrant's Story

About four years ago in 2002, Abdul (not his real name), his wife, his two boys and one girl arrived in Calgary full of hope and joy to begin a new life where jobs were abundant and political stability meant no longer living in fear. Abdul had no idea at that time that this may have been the biggest mistake of his life.

Abdul graduated from high school in Iraq and went on to study to be a Petroleum Engineer and quickly found a job in the oil fields and over the years was promoted to an Operations Manager, overseeing a large production field of several hundred employees. The political situation was tenuous and the economic sanctions imposed on the people by the West created severe hardships for his family. Abdul always dreamt of a better life for his family and wanted to see his children obtain a Western education and to live without fear of death threats or imprisonment for associating with the wrong person or speaking against the political figureheads.

Abdul's higher level position allowed him to make several business trips to one of the Gulf countries where he was able to approach the Canadian Embassy and file his application for entry into Canada. He was repeatedly told by the kindly Canadian Immigration Authorities that because he was a Petroleum Engineer, he would have no problem getting a job because the oil patch in Calgary was always looking for engineers. Little did Abdul know what was in store.

The Job Search



After settling his family into an apartment in Calgary and registering with the local immigrant organizations for assistance in his job search,

Abdul began contacting some of the larger oil companies. He very quickly discovered that Recruiters do not accept phone calls so he attempted to personally stop by and drop off his resume. These drop-ins were not at all well received by the company receptionists who told Abdul in no uncertain terms that candidates were never seen without an appointment and he should submit his resume through the company website. This was very different to what Abdul was used to at home where face to face visits were the norm over the unreliable and expensive telephone system. Abdul then began to apply on line through company websites to jobs that appear to suit his background. His applications were almost always acknowledged by a polite email thanking him for his resume so Abdul waited for hours by his phone for the call to come in for an interview. They

One Immigrant's nightmare experience of job hunting in Calgary and how Companies can help.

never called. He then tried to follow-up by phone to see if his resume was being considered but the Recruiters either would not take his phone, or when Abdul was lucky enough to be put through to a Recruiter's voice mail, they never called him back. For the next two years Abdul send in resume after resume and even wrote letters to the Vice Presidents of Human Resources for some of these big companies, but not one of them replied to him or called him back.

Abdul also found from the job ads that Engineering jobs required registration with APEGGA but

when he contacted APEGGA to apply for his professional designation, they told him he would first need to acquire Canadian experience. What a classic Catch 22!

Two Years Later

Abdul's nest egg of savings ran out over the two years and he and his family were forced to leave their apartment and move into government assisted housing. He soon met his neighbours, other immigrants who were in a similar situation. His

The Immigrant Catch 22. Companies require P.Eng status before they hire, but APEGGA will not grant P.Eng status without Canadian experience.

next door neighbour, an Accountant from Nigeria had not been able to find a job for seven years. He also found other neighbours who had forfeited their professional careers as engineers, geologist and medical technicians all driving taxis and soon Abdul found himself also driving a taxi just to feed his family.



Abdul's eldest son began having problems. He would not do his homework and

constantly played games on the computer. "Why you not study," Abdul would tell him. "You have an opportunity to make something of yourself, but you must study hard." The son would talk back to him, "What's the point, look what education has done to you, now you drive taxi." This

new attitude was a blow to Abdul. At home in Iraq, he was respected both outside and inside the home and his son would never before have spoken with such disrespect. Now Abdul felt humiliated, a loss of face, respect and lost in a supposedly



a friendly community that had never even given him a chance. He thought about trying to return home, but since 911 and the war in Iraq, it was near impossible and the situation would be very dangerous.

“Why are Alberta Companies going overseas to recruit when I am right under your nose!”

Over the next few months, Abdul became very depressed and stopped applying for jobs as he could no longer stand the rejection. He even stopped reading the newspaper because he would become angry at the everyday articles describing the current labour shortages in Alberta and how companies would have to go overseas to recruit. “Here I am he would shout, I am right under your nose. I came here on my own motivation and my own expense. Why not hire me!!”

One day at the mosque a quiet young man who was a frequent worshipper, came up to Abdul and

asked him if he had found a job. Abdul wondered how this young man knew he was looking but told him he had not but was still trying. The young man began to spew forth in Arabic a speech about these arrogant Westerners and if Abdul wanted to shake these Infidels out of their complacency and teach them a lesson, then he could help Abdul. Abdul shuddered knowing this young man might have some very powerful but terrifying connections. Abdul politely said he a few irons in the fire and something in the job front may be coming up shortly. The young man said, “Well if you change your mind, you know where to find me.” Abdul was relieved when he left because he certainly did not want to become involved; at least not yet.

Conclusion

The above story was true with the names changed to protect Abdul’s real identity. Where the story became fictionalized was the meeting in the mosque with the young man who was potentially a terrorist but this is how terrorist groups recruit through enticing people who are feeling humiliated and oppressed and want revenge. The recent riots in Paris were as a result of huge unemployed immigrant ghettos feeling the rate of oppression and discrimination. Paris could happen in Calgary.

Abdul made a good point about companies recruiting overseas when they are ignoring skilled immigrants here at home.

What Can Be Done?

The following page shows some statistics about the immigrant situation in Calgary with some recommendations and solutions.

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The Reality

- Calgary recruits up to 10,000 immigrants each year and currently 47% of the immigrant population is unemployed.
- 6 out of 10 immigrants are forced to make a downward shift in job level
- To keep Canada's labour pool stable, it requires a replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman, now at 1.7.
- In 2005, Alberta had the lowest unemployment rate in Canada – 3.9%
- 5% unemployment rate is the balanced labour rate in Canada. Anything under 5% indicates a labour shortage and Alberta's unemployment as of Jan-06 was 3.5%. The labour balance for the Oil Sands sector is 8% to meet demand and supply.
- Between 2005 and 2015, over 400,000 new jobs will be created in Alberta (\$115 billion in oil sands projects alone). Alberta will be short by 100,000 workers (75,000 construction workers alone are required for Vancouver Olympics).
- Canada will have to rely on immigrants to supplement the labour pool as well as other untapped sources such as Aboriginals.
- This will only be successful if companies will facilitate the integration of foreign born talent.
- Approximately half of the immigrants to Alberta (24,000 per year to Alberta) are highly educated and qualified, yet 60% of these newcomers did not find employment in their area of expertise.

Sources: Alberta Economic Development, Stats Canada and Catholic Immigration Society.

The Causes

- What Canadian Immigration are telling prospective immigrants does not correlate with market reality. They should better prepare Immigrants for the challenges that lie ahead.
- Why are company's overlooking immigrants in their hiring processes? Some findings as follows:
 1. Poor communication skills
 2. Lack of depth and knowledge of Western business language.
 3. Accents are strong and difficult to understand.
 4. Poor interviewing skills. Immigrants unfamiliar with behavioural based interview techniques and unfamiliarity with marketing own skills.
 5. Workplace culture that relies on self promotion and networking.
 6. A self-managed career in a new concept for many immigrants.
 7. Interpreting the behaviour of Canadian employers and not knowing the rules of the Corporate game.
 8. Poverty which impacts the ability to look and dress the part and not knowing what recruiters look for in personal presentation.
 9. Lack of recognition of foreign education, work experience and professional credentials.
 10. Lack of Canadian or "valued" Western experience.
 11. Perception that foreign technology they have worked on is outdated.

Source: Calgary Chamber of Commerce Talent Pool

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Recommendation

That companies apply long range vision in filling their future labour demands by training and development today through a New Canadian Hiring program in conjunction with their other human resource programs such as; new grads, summer students, development for women, disabled. That companies try to take at least one New Canadian each year (larger companies could take 2 or 3). If every company did their part the following would occur:

- A reduction in the number of people on unemployment insurance, welfare and other assistance programs. These are all being paid for by you and me, so the less we have on there the better.
- Similarly to the new grad programs, the long term payback would be to have committed and motivated people trained for the skills required in the future. A plan to bridge the labour shortages and replacements for the retirees.
- Minimizing the opportunities for the potential of terrorism through encouragement and acceptance of diversity into the workforce. Removing the oppression and humiliation felt by immigrants through gainful employment and contributing to the quality of life.
- Taking immigrants out of the poverty ghettos and providing them a means to support themselves and their families.

For more information or assistance on how your company can implement an Immigrant Placement Program, please contact Lynda Costello at (403) 616-8730; lyncostello@workforceplanning.ca or www.workforceplanning.ca