



WORK FORCE

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What's going on with Diversity Canada?

To stay competitive in the global economy, successful companies need knowledge capital and high-yielding value propositions, yet the strength of home-grown, diverse talent may be overlooked.

Just look at landed immigrants in Canada with degrees who, having left significant careers, may end up working in a wage bracket far below their capacity but remain under-developed and under-used in the workforce.

Though we may be uncomfortable with it, there are still employment and promotion barriers due to lack of acceptance of diversity. Lack of acceptance of immigrants.

What is the real barrier? Racism? Agism? Intolerance? Conservative business models? The whole concept of diversity refers to the basic differences between people in an organization. It encompasses race, gender, ethnicity, age, education and other backgrounds.

Yet in today's constantly changing business environment, having a diverse employee base can have a dramatic and profitable impact on an organization's success and longevity, affecting such areas as innovation, engagement, succession planning and economic growth.

Successful organizations not only embrace diversity and inclusion, but dominate

the increasingly competitive global environment. With an agile, diversified workforce, every organization can use a variety of available resources to service its market to its full extent.

In a recent HSBC Business Without Borders initiative, 833 Canadian companies were surveyed.

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According to responses, 82% strongly or somewhat agreed that their organization has a multicultural workforce, but only 38% felt that companies generally took advantage of it to do business abroad. Among those employed in a multicultural workplace, just 63% felt their own company leveraged that advantage to conduct business internationally.

But leveraging diversity requires a special talent and skill set.

What do you do, for example, in a company of eight people where there might

be intolerant undertones? Employers and managers must always be aware when working to develop a solution to a challenging problem, to include everyone and welcome different viewpoints.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, what do you do in a larger company where people feel almost invisible? Recognize and reward those who cultivate this inclusive atmosphere in their own decision-making process or other workplace behaviour.

Diversity is all about setting the mindset of valuing the differences in people and recognizing the similarities. Once this way of thinking is established, the benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace will naturally develop.

Diversity at work does not only reflect how people perceive themselves but also how they perceive others. Those perceptions can affect their interactions and overall performance.

Establishing a diverse workforce does not just happen; an organization needs a specific strategy with stated goals and metrics as part of the program. It occurs through strong sponsorship and accountability from top leaders and management who are actively and openly engaged in the organization's diversity agenda. A company needs to establish diversity goals, strategies and practices

at every level to ensure they are well embedded with constant checks and balances. Diversity must be driven by the CEO and senior leadership to be supported in the workplace.

Including people with different backgrounds, experiences and cultures can bring a fresh perspective and approach to the table.

By welcoming these different viewpoints and perspectives from employees with diverse areas of expertise and knowledge, employees can feel more engaged with a greater stake in the solution.

Actively engaging new initiatives, programs and plans can also bring a higher level of motivation and a greater sense of ownership in the final outcome of the project or plan.

The concept of developing and accepting diversification is not short term, and neither is the resolution. Those involved in workplace diversification must take a strategic

approach, observing and monitoring meaningful actions and behaviours to assist the entire organization toward transformation.

There are no guarantees, but if diversification is ignored, opportunities to engage well-meaning and performing employees may be lost. This could not only affect an organization's business goals, but might end up directly benefiting a competitor. Managers and employees alike should heed the call to become more actively engaged by taking full advantage of the opportunities presented through diversity, acceptance and inclusion. ■

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BUSINESS TODAY

B.C. small businesses to capitalize on high dollar for upgrades and staffing

Fifty-eight per cent of B.C.'s small businesses plan to capitalize on the high Canadian dollar by upgrading their processes, equipment and machinery, according to a survey released by **BMO Bank of Montreal** (TSX: BMO, NYSE: BMO.US).

The survey noted that B.C.'s small businesses are more likely than their counterparts elsewhere in Canada to capitalize on the high dollar by expanding their operations across Canada.

Also, 21% of B.C.'s small-business owners plan on an expansion into either the U.S. or Mexico, and 21% plan to increase staffing levels.

BMO Economics is forecasting the Canadian dollar will stay above par for 2011. **Thursday, April 14**

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Counter offers: Think before accepting

from Employee, 20

will soon have figured out that they have a very powerful bargaining tool at hand. Do you really want to put your company into such a vulnerable position?

That said, there is one circumstance when touching the forbidden fruit can be excused: in a pinch, a manager may very well want to use this tool, especially when the immediate cost of losing the individual outweighs the risks of the counter offer.

Keep in mind that the odds are against you if you think you will be able to retain the individual permanently. Instead, use the counter-offer strategy to buy yourself some time. Remember, by threatening to leave, the employee has just shown you how little they

believe in a future with your company. You can no longer be sure of their loyalty and commitment. Use the time you bought with the counter offer wisely and do whatever you can to find a replacement as soon as possible.

A word of caution to any professional considering accepting a counter offer: think very carefully about the implications of your decision. If you have gone through an in-depth interview process with another company but turn down the offer because you accepted a better deal from your current employer, your true motivations will be questioned.

In my experience, companies don't make job offers lightly and will wonder whether you were simply out shopping for a better

deal. This will definitely limit your future chances with this company and whomever you met during the interview process.

Receiving a counter offer is very flattering but be aware that you will invariably be considered a flight risk even if you decide to stay on. Your employer can no longer be sure of your loyalty. What will this mean for your future career? ■

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As one of Canada's fastest growing companies, Best Buy Canada Ltd. has built its success on recruiting the best and building a strong corporate culture. The Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) designation has offered tremendous value both internally and externally: anchoring excellence and enhancing HR's credibility with business partners on all levels. Recognizing a body of knowledge and set of professional standards that crosses all industries, the CHRP provides a key competitive edge to Best Buy Canada's growth and development nationwide.

The CHRP designation is the most recognized and sought-after mark of an HR professional. CHRPs bring the people management skills organizations need to develop a workforce that aligns with winning business strategy. There are currently over 21,000 CHRPs across Canada and 2,300 in BC alone - with over 60% of BC HRMA members either holding or pursuing the designation.



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