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Immigrants who grasp Canadian culture fare better - Study

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**Silma
Roddau**

Internationally trained professionals who quickly grasp an understanding of Canadian culture and are able to communicate effectively are more likely to succeed in Canada, a new study concludes.

The Progress & Career Planning Institute (PCPI) commissioned the survey which was unveiled at the eighth annual Internationally Educated Professionals (IEP) conference last Friday at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

Some 168 IEPs and 20 Toronto regional private and public sector employers were surveyed during the six-month study.

"We did a study last year and found that IEPs were finding work which was not commensurate with their credentials," said PCPI president and IEP conference chair Silma Roddau. "As an employer who has worked with IEPs for the past 13 years, I've had the privilege of witnessing first hand some of the challenges IEPs face every day and the techniques they use to persevere.

"What we wanted to do with this report is not just look at what's not working, but what is working. That's why we have chosen to focus the research study on exploring what is working today for IEPs. It's one thing to find work, but we want to make sure that people secure employment within their field and that they are excelling. It's important that they do not remain in entry level positions. Instead, they should be moving."

Based on the study, highly motivated IEPs who take control of their lives and work hard towards their goals; those who are open-minded, able to learn effectively and are aware of cultural difference; individuals who seek and listen to advice; those willing to invest time

and energy to improve their language and communication skills and skilled networkers who take risks to meet new people and capitalize on the connections they offer, stand an excellent chance of achieving workplace success and satisfaction.

The study also found that IEPs also thrive in a supportive environment when they receive strong backing from the start of their employment.

The survey was supported by four case studies conducted with IEPs from the education, banking & finance, human resources and government sectors.

"A lack of understanding of the Canadian workplace often creates a complicated situation for IEPs," said Ryerson University program manager Dr. Nava Israel who was involved in one of the case studies. "This was especially true in my first month at Ryerson when I realized that my communication style differed from the norm. I noticed that some people valued my input while others found my style intolerable. Still, others saw me as intrusive and tried to halt my progress.

"Although I spoke English before coming to Canada, I discovered subtle, but significant differences between language and communication in Israeli culture and Canadian culture. Israeli culture is blunt and direct which is different from the Canadian norm."

Israel read avidly and kept an open mind to overcome the challenge.

"As immigrants, often times we don't know that we walk on mines," said Israel. "We don't see the explosions because they happen behind our backs and people don't tell us, either because they don't want to or because they think we don't see it. They think we just don't care or they are just too polite to say something and we don't learn which is terrible."

Leonard Kanga, who migrated from Nigeria five years ago with a sociology degree and banking experience, landed his first job in 2007 as a trainee account manager at the Royal Bank of Canada which has a mentorship and training program that pairs employees with mentors.

"The mentorship and support played a significant role in my integration into RBC," said Kanga. "I also tried to be of service to all my colleagues. For instance, if they were going on vacation, I would volunteer to cover for them. That way, I would learn quite a lot while managing their desks. Also, for those that had high workloads, I would offer to help when they had a lot of transactions coming off at the same time."

Roddau says the study proves that mutually beneficial outcomes are achieved when employers invest in mentorships and other programs to support IEPs in their workplace. "By using case studies, we are also able to showcase effective strategies and lessons learned as well as other insights from the practical experiences of IEPs and their employers in the Greater Toronto Area," she said.

"The conclusion from this exercise is that the journey to successful integration is long. It requires well thought out strategies that include communication on the part of employers and IEPs...We know that a lot of research has been done on immigration and immigrants

and their experiences in the workplace. This one is about integrating into the workplace. What we found from this study is that there is progress which is slow, but it's happening. That's good news. The other thing which is good is that employers are playing their part."

The PCPI conference is designed to help IEPs market themselves to prospective employers. It's the largest networking event of its kind in Canada, bringing together nearly 1,000 IEPs, employers and employment experts from over 100 countries to share their success and strategies in integrating foreign trained professionals into Canada's workforce.

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