

The Canadian Employment Embarrassment

By Bill Caswell

Canada, the land of beauty, designated as the best place in the world to live by the United Nations four years in a row, tops in fresh water reserves in the world, number seven in economic wealth despite a population of only 30 millions – what a place! Yes indeed what a place – one, however, if you look deeper, should have all Canadians hanging their heads in shame.

The message goes out for all the world to hear: "Emigrate to Canada where opportunities abound especially for engineers, scientists and doctors! Enjoy one of the greatest standards of living in the world." But when these professionals, who were highly respected in their native lands, who earned well above average incomes there, arrive in Canada what do they find as a reception? "You lack Canadian experience." "Your English is not sufficient for this job." "Where is your professional engineering certification for Canada?" They are asked to repeat medical school or engineering school, when they have neither the time, the funds nor the inclination for a repetition of what they went through 20 years ago at home.

As career counsellors, we meet, almost daily, professionals from abroad who are exasperated with Canada, with their professions and with their lives. They had arrived in Canada full of optimism and hope. They had been led to believe that they would thrive like never before. Instead I have met a psychiatrist who is cleaning offices, an MD general practitioner who is scrubbing floors, a PhD who is washing dishes to make ends meet and a PhD who has work as a security guard. After one or two years looking for a job, with funds totally depleted, debts escalating, bill collectors in hot pursuit the individual's self esteem, despite the person's obvious accomplishments, is at rock bottom. "I'm 50 years old, have two degrees and can't even provide for my family." Meanwhile, oblivious to the reality, the newspapers wax on about the exodus of intellectuals from Canada, the need for more doctors, and rave on about Canada as the land of hope and glory.

In our company we have successfully placed, not only native Canadians, but also professionals from Russia, the Ukraine, India, the US, Hong Kong, etc. Let's cite one example. An engineer from India visited my office with his sad story and expressed his justifiable anger and frustration at being lured to Canada. I could not apologize for our Government but I could assure him of our company's best effort to find him a good job here.

He lamented about his rejection because he had no Canadian degrees, his lack of Canadian experience and his absence of bilingualism. The fact that he had a Bachelors of Engineering, a Masters of Engineering and an MBA was of little or no value because the papers were foreign. The fact that he spoke three languages – but not the right ones – was of no advantage. The fact that he had successfully run a manufacturing plant in India was deemed of no importance here.

While I agreed that he had met these objections, I did not agree at their validity. I asked him if a kilogram weighed more in India than Canada, if a lathe operated on a different principle in Canada than India or if lazy and hardworking people were a monopoly of one country over another. Did not a person work to get an engineering degree in India just as a young person pushes to the limit to get a degree here? Was English not the language used by over 90% of private sector employees in the Ottawa area?

Having decided to trust our approach to the job search we reached a point where we attempted to define the kind of opportunity on which to focus. Because of his experience, I suggested we seek a position for him to head a manufacturing facility. "No, no" he protested, "let's begin more modestly. I will apply for a position as second or third in a plant, prove myself and gradually work my way up." I asked: "Can you or can you not run a manufacturing facility?" He replied, "Of course I can, but I am not a Canadian." Since he was capable of running plant and since such a job would

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give him the greatest personal satisfaction and self esteem, not to mention money, we recommended that plant leadership should be our focus. Reluctantly he agreed to follow our lead.

Five weeks later this gentleman was running a manufacturing facility near Ottawa. Within three months, that plant had been able to double its production because of the methods he introduced.

Conclusions

- ♦ People hire based on what lies between a person's ears – the experience and knowledge – regardless of the race, nationality or 'official-ness' of the degree. Can you deliver the goods expected of you? If the answer is 'yes', then you should have the job. If you search the right places for a job, you will discover that this indeed happens.
- ♦ Expert job counselors can help overcome the prejudices that are bandied about so freely by many in Canada and can help locate a career position of significance for most people.
- ♦ Canadians should not tolerate the senseless discrimination by guilds and trades who hide behind "protecting the public interest" when it is their very own interests they are protecting by keeping a closed shop. I include my own profession, engineering, in this group.

We all need to wake up to the power of individuals regardless of their origins, to cast off our ill-gained sense of elitism, our arrogance about our 'special-ness'. We Canadians are no better than any other peoples or races. People are people, everywhere in the world. Let each one stand on personal merit, not on country of origin. Let Canada benefit from these wonderful individuals who have chosen to join our country. They will make it a better place to live, but only if they are allowed to do so.

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