

# **No Canadian Experience?**

**By Anne McDonagh**

**One of the great Canadian scandals is how we lure skilled immigrants to Canada with the promise of a better life and then refuse them the opportunity of using their skills because they have “no Canadian experience.” Many end up in survival jobs, that is, delivering pizza or driving cabs; some become security guards, others, cleaning ladies. It is a Toronto cliché that we have the best-educated cab drivers in the world.**

**Apart from the sin of carelessly shattering people’s dreams, what a waste of human resources to Canada at this time of global competition, when we need all the smart and skilled people we can find!**

**The purpose of this article, though, is not to rail against the injustice of “no Canadian experience.” Instead, it is to suggest ways in which immigrants can deal with this difficult barrier. This is not to suggest that it is their problem alone. Those employers who are too uninformed to recognize the value of the person they are talking to and professional organizations which want to keep the competition out, are doing irreparable damage to our society. However, immigrants can do nothing about that side of the problem. Here is what they can do:**

**Immerse yourself in Canadian culture.**

**When employers hire, they want to feel comfortable with you and are concerned that you will get along with the rest of their employees. If you come from a different culture, they are especially concerned about this issue, so you must be able to assure employers that you will fit in.**

**How can you do that? Here are a few suggestions:**

**Make an immense effort to understand mainstream Canadian culture. Go shopping in the malls and wander through the streets. Read the local newspapers, listen to local and national radio stations. Watch the news on local and national TV stations. You will be amazed at the information you absorb. Then when you meet employers, you will feel comfortable talking about the weather, the news, the traffic, sports (especially the hometown teams) cars etc. This is “small talk,” and it’s an essential skill during the job search and in the workplace.**

**Understand and use non-verbal communication; for example, during introductions, shake hands firmly but briefly; keep the correct personal space between yourself and others; maintain eye contact with people you are talking to.**

#### **Get your credentials evaluated.**

**It costs less than \$100 and gives you a good idea about how your education stacks up against a comparable Canadian education. More important, when an employer tells you you have no Canadian experience, there is at least one thing you can say, “No, I don’t, but my training is considered to be equal to....” Information on how to get your credentials evaluated is available on the Federal government’s website for immigrants, [www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org). On the home page click on *Employment* and then on *Foreign-trained professionals and trades people*.**

#### **Learn the codes and standards of your profession in Canada.**

**Find out if you need a licence to practise your skills and how you go about getting the licence. Perhaps you need membership in a professional organization. Find out if you have the right professional and technical skills. Are there gaps you need to fill? Make sure you know how to use the equipment and tools used in Canada, including hardware and software. Learn the standards, laws and regulations governing your particular field, such as building codes for an architect or civil engineer. Do you have to take courses to qualify in Canada? Investigate employment standards in general.**

**Contact professional organizations and unions. One place to find the names of these organizations is in the Yellow Pages of the phone book and then, to find out more about them, phone them and/or look them up on the Internet. You can also gain a lot of information through research at Employment Resource Centres, The Toronto Reference Library and on websites like Human Resources Canada [www.hrdc.drhc.ca](http://www.hrdc.drhc.ca) or the Federal government’s website for newcomers, [www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org).**

#### **Research your occupation and Labour Market Information**

**How is your occupation practised here, what demand is there for it and where do you best fit in? What are the labour market trends that may affect the practice of your profession? What is the state of the economy currently? There is an abundance of information on the Internet to answer these questions.**

#### **Start networking.**

**Networking is about making connections with other people. Ideally, they will be in your field, and you can meet them through professional organizations and unions. You can also meet people through cold calling to an employer in your field and requesting an informational interview to discuss your situation and how your occupation is practised in Canada.**

**You need not limit yourself to fellow-professionals. As long as you are out there meeting people, there is a chance that someone will know of a suitable position; if they know you, you can use their name to make the connection. Because you are known, even if you don't have Canadian experience, you stand a better chance of being hired or of at least getting more information and a referral.**

**You can meet people by joining organizations and volunteering to do something, even stuffing envelopes. It could be your professional organization or any non-profit organization you have an interest in. The point is you have to be in the mainstream of society, meeting as many people as possible. And there are unexpected rewards to volunteering. You feel more positive about yourself. You are contributing to Canadian society and making yourself a part of it. Because being an immigrant and not working can be a real blow to your self-esteem, volunteering goes a long way towards restoring your sense of who you are. Besides, you can learn new skills and get some Canadian experience.**

### **Improve your communication skills**

**Of course, you know this. Mastering the English language is crucial to success in getting a job, although it does not mean speaking perfect English. Probably a large minority of employees in Toronto speaks English with an accent. It is necessary, though, to be understood easily. The way to develop that skill is to talk English with as many English speakers as possible. Don't spend all your free time in your own linguistic community. Remember volunteering? Practice speaking English is another bonus of volunteering.**

**A part-time job, even a low-paying job, in customer service will force you to improve your communication skills. It will also give you a taste of how Canadians interact in the workplace.**

**Taking a conversational English class will also help although there are not a lot of classes focusing solely on conversation. Taking any continuing education class relevant to your training or your interests can be helpful because it will mean that you are continuing to**

meet people. Your teacher or classmates may be able to help you get a job. They too will become part of your network.

Improving your communication skills is really about practicing your interpersonal skills, and the best way to do that is to meet as many people as possible, to speak in English as much as possible, to ask when you don't understand and to make friends.

### **Enroll in a work experience or mentoring program**

There are a number of work experience or co-op programs, designed especially for newcomers to Canada. They are free or charge only a nominal fee and provide you with job search skills and work experience in your field; consequently, you rid yourself of the "no Canadian experience" problem. The programs immerse you in the culture of the Canadian workplace before you go out to your placement so that you gain as much as possible from the placement. You also learn about Canadian attitudes towards job search and career planning.

### **Attend career fairs**

Every now and then, there are career fairs often for professionals. If you decide to attend a career fair, dress as you would for a job interview and go armed with many resumes and business cards. Try to speak directly to the representatives of the companies. It is usually a waste of time just to leave your resume without speaking to someone. Again, this is an opportunity to build your network.

### **Websites for occupation, job and labour market information:**

- [www.on.hrdc-drhc.ca/common/workplace](http://www.on.hrdc-drhc.ca/common/workplace)
- [www.worksearch.gc.ca](http://www.worksearch.gc.ca)
- [www.canada.gc.ca](http://www.canada.gc.ca)
- [www.workinfonet.ca](http://www.workinfonet.ca)
- [www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org)
- [www.monster.ca](http://www.monster.ca)
- [www.workopolis.ca](http://www.workopolis.ca)
- [www.skillsforchange.org](http://www.skillsforchange.org)

### **Some providers of mentoring opportunities, work placements and other immigrant services:**

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<b>Skills for Change</b>	<b>(416)</b>	<b>Scarborough Centre for</b>	<b>(416)</b>
791 St. Clair Avenue	658-	<b>Alternative Studies</b>	<b>396-</b>

..... <b>West,</b>	<b>3101</b>	<b>39 Progress Court</b>	<b>6921</b>
		<b>(SCAS)</b>	
<b>Yorkdale Adult Learning</b>	<b>(416)</b>	<b>Adult Day School</b>	<b>(416)</b>
<b>Centre</b>	<b>395-</b>	<b>1700 Keele Street</b>	<b>394-</b>
<b>38 Orfus Road</b>	<b>6505</b>		<b>2300</b>
<b>Overland Learning</b>	<b>(416)</b>	<b>Burnhamthorpe</b>	<b>(416)</b>
<b>Centre</b>	<b>395-</b>	<b>Collegiate</b>	<b>394-</b>
<b>55 Overland Drive</b>	<b>2889</b>	<b>500 East Mall</b>	<b>7145</b>
<b>NOW Program</b>	<b>(416)</b>	<b>YWCA Leap Internship</b>	<b>(416)</b>
<b>777 Bloor Street West</b>	<b>393-</b>	<b>(women only)</b>	<b>269-</b>
	<b>0350</b>	<b>3090 Kingston Road</b>	<b>0090</b>
<b>Seneca College Re-</b>	<b>(416)</b>		
<b>employment Centre for</b>	<b>299-</b>		
<b>International</b>	<b>6625</b>		
<b>Professionals</b>			
<b>10 Milner Business Court</b>			

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