

# Making foreign credentials familiar ones

Sandeep Tatla, Financial Post · Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2010

On a recent trip to South Africa for the World Cup, a management professional at a large five-star international hotel, Vincent, greeted my husband and I, as we enjoyed some appetizers in the hotel lounge. He came by to ask how we were doing and where we were from. Our conversation turned to how Vincent and his family were looking to immigrate to Canada. Sadly, one of the first things he shared with us was his concern about finding work in Canada. "I'm a black man from the Cameroon. I know it will be hard for me to find a job in Canada," he said.

His concerns were premised on the experiences of his friends and colleagues who recently had immigrated to Canada. Unfortunately, our response confirmed his feelings. It's no secret immigrants to Canada have a hard time finding work and it's even harder for those coming from less developed regions of the world. Vincent is fluent in English and French, holds an MBA and a management position at a very large reputable international hotel and we found him very professional. As well, the hotel entrusted him with the responsibility of ensuring private service to VIPs, such as the FIFA commissioners, Hollywood stars and business executives from around the world. So what do you do if you're in Vincent's shoes? Or as a manager, how do you get people like Vincent working with you?

In my experience a big hurdle preventing employers from hiring immigrants is confirming their foreign credentials and work experience; how do managers know whether Vincent's experience and education will translate in Canada? How do they know whether an educational institute in a far away country exists and/or has similar standards to Canadian universities?

While these are legitimate concerns, managers need to look at what it is they really need. It is important to identify and describe requirements of a position appropriately. I find most companies stick to very generic job postings and descriptions that don't reflect the nature of the work. These descriptions create barriers for both employers and potential hires because qualified candidates are weeded out based on qualifications irrelevant to the job.

For example, I cannot count how many times I see minimum educational requirements, such as "Bachelors degree required." When I ask why this requirement, I'm usually met with a long pause then, "to tell you the truth, I'm not sure." A deeper understanding of the employer needs may identify the specific tasks that are needed of an individual with

a degree, for example, "ability to draft reports and draft script for brochures, or demonstrated experience communicating with difficult customers or clients."

During the interview, questions should be asked to confirm the candidates experience such as: "What challenges have you faced writing annual reports?" A request can also be made for work samples. With this type of needs focused interview it will become clear whether the candidate has the requisite skills and experience to do the job and the foreign credentials become less foreign.

The same goes for immigrants looking for work. Instead of just listing off educational and work experiences, they should describe their experiences. Vincent, for example, could describe his experience in the context of having managed the hotel's food services, serving and communicating with clients and VIPs from across the world, all speaking different languages, and all with discrete tastes, customs and demands, during the World Cup — one of the world's most prestigious sporting events.

The challenge is to work a little harder to remove the barriers that prevent highly skilled people like Vincent from participating in Canada's workforce. One can imagine the insight, experience and skills Vincent would bring to an organization if given the opportunity. It is up to a skilled manager to identify his value and Vincent's responsibility to highlight his value. Good luck Vincent.

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