



DIVERSITY WORKS!

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IS HIRING CANADIAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE GOOD FOR BUSINESS?

Welcome to our summer/fall edition of Diversity Works! Since our first issue back in May, our subscriber list has grown substantially and across the continents! We would like to welcome our new subscribers from Alberta, British Columbia and Australia.



The headlines over the last few years have forecasted the current and looming shortage of workers all across Canada and internationally. We have read about the shortage of service workers, skilled labourers, technicians, medical personnel etc. Many foreign countries are posting great incentives to get their expatriates to return home to fill vacant positions. The Canadian government, along with many employment and immigrant serving agencies, say that these shortages could be alleviated by employing immigrants and increasing immigration to Canada. Although this is true, increasing immigration will not fill all of the existing gaps on its own. In Western society, we have also grown to accept the business case for attracting, hiring and retaining differently-abled workers, and older experienced workers. Despite increasing levels of

diversity in many workplaces, one group continues to be absent or dismally represented in the workplace ---Aboriginal Canadians.

With the exception of Australia, few nations are seriously considering the business case for hiring their indigenous peoples; even though it is widely understood that bringing employment to Aboriginal communities benefits everyone - not to mention the local economy. In the whole debate about how Canada is going to fill these labour gaps, there has been little discussion or attention given to Canadian Aboriginal employment. As I began to research the subject, I sought sound business arguments that could convince business

leaders to give Aboriginal employment more consideration and opportunity. There are so many socio-historical reasons why we should consider investing in Aboriginal employment, but the questions on most business leaders' minds will be:

Is hiring Canadian Aboriginal people good for business?

In this issue of Diversity Works! you will find convincing arguments for seeking out Aboriginal workers next time you are recruiting, as well as some practical advice from a director of an Aboriginal employment agency. Visit our Resources & Links page on our website for studies and

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“There needs to be a lot of work done to educate non-Aboriginal societies about Aboriginal peoples in Canada.”

INTERVIEW WITH DARLENE BELLEROSE EXECUTIVE MANAGER, NOKEE KWE OCCUPATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT INC.

In an interview conducted on July 9, 2007, Diversity @ Work in London presented Darlene with some of the questions subscribers submitted regarding Aboriginal employment.

D @ W: What needs to happen so that Aboriginal organizations and businesses can work together more efficiently to build an inclusive and productive workforce?

DB: Both sides need to communicate more. Nokee Kwe needs to do a better job of showing employers what Aboriginal workers have to offer, and employers need to let us know what their needs are. Unfortunately, it is often the case that employers don't talk to us unless we can offer a wage subsidy.

There needs to be a greater understanding and a greater willingness to explore and to breakdown the barriers that keep us from communicating.

There needs to be a lot of work done to educate non-Aboriginal societies about Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Aboriginal people are not a homogeneous group, but we are different nations, each with their own culture and traditions. In addition, there are differences in how the government recognizes Aboriginal peoples—there are Status or Registered Indians, non-Status Indians, the Metis, and the Inuit—and the government treats each of these groups differently.

D @ W: We have heard from employers that one of the concerns they have is that Aboriginal people often have problems with addictions or have a different concept of time. They are concerned that these issues can create conflict and loss of productivity in the workplace. What would you suggest to an employer who is hesitant to hire from the Aboriginal community because of these concerns?

DB: It is important that people understand that First Nations are not the only people that have problems with addictions or with reliability. Employers should look at each applicant as an individual and utilize the existing best practices for hiring employees such as conducting reference checks. With solid references, the employer would be able to determine whether they should hire the individual.

These concerns and stereotypes that persist in the workplace, indicate to me that diversity awareness training about Aboriginal people would be very beneficial. I have heard this idea about “Indian time” a lot and it's such a false notion. When you think about the “old days”, “If we did not do things when they were supposed to get done (plant, hunt, harvest etc.) we wouldn't have survived.” After all, we had to be very aware of our surroundings and very aware of timing in order for us to be self-sufficient. It's not any different in modern times. I have been told by Elders that

being late for appointments and meetings shows arrogance -- “I'm more important than the rest of you.” Contrary to the popular notion, within most Aboriginal communities, lateness is frowned upon. I would also point out that within any people—Anglo, Afro, Franco, Asian, European etc. there will be people who have issues with reliability and or substance abuse — these are not exclusive to the Aboriginal or any community. These stereotypes may have come about because there is a lack of understanding about some of the protocols in First Nations communities in regard to some meetings. For example, if there was an important community meeting and it was important that everyone be there, the meeting probably would be delayed until everyone who should be there was. This is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard. This is quite a different approach to the Western concept of time when the meeting starts punctually at a prescribed time, regardless as to whether the people who should be there are.

D @ W: Is there such a thing as an “Aboriginal work culture”, and if there is how would you describe it? How is it different from a “Western capitalist model of work”?

DB: Yes. I do believe there are differences. For instance,

INTERVIEW WITH DARLENE BELLEROSE,

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“Some Nations require a mourning period of 10 days, and accommodations should be made to recognize this.”

in healthy aboriginal organizations, there is time and opportunity for everyone to speak and feel heard. The belief is that we are all part of the whole, and that there is no job that is more important than others — each of us has a role to play and each role is important.

Our hearts and minds are interconnected in our work. We understand that productivity can never be achieved at the risk of hurting others. In healthy aboriginal organizations, this heart and mind connection is very strong and creates a balance between productivity and ensuring that everyone is healthy.

D @ W: How do you see Aboriginal youth in terms of preparing them for employment? Are there options available for them in terms of education and support? What has the local community done for them in terms of employment up to this point?

DB: The funding through the Aboriginal Human Resources Development agreements have been helpful here. A component of these dollars is used for Aboriginal youth to create programs for them that can give them the skills that they need to be successful in their communities. Aboriginal youth programs have been created to help with life skills etc. and of course we have regular programs that we offer here at NoKee Kwe like employment skills,

literacy, and help with career directions.

D @ W: In what ways can an employer ensure that his/her Aboriginal staff feel included? What sorts of workplace accommodations do you think are necessary for aboriginal people? Holiday times? Commemorative dates, etc.?

Aboriginal people like all people, need to know that their job is important and that their ideas are important. They like to see how their job contributes to the whole. On another note, many aboriginal people, working in the skilled trades or creative endeavours like the arts, perhaps more so than in other areas.

In regard to holiday times etc, some Aboriginal people, depending on how connected they are to their traditions, may have to participate from time to time in Longhouse or Medwewin ceremonies. All Native communities recognize the four seasons, and there are usually ceremonies associated with each season. These ceremonies are of tremendous spiritual value to the individual and they may desire time off to participate. This of course would depend on the individual.

Bereavement times vary across Nations. Conflict can sometimes lie in policies around bereavement leaves. Some Nations require a mourning period of 10 days, and accommodations should be made to recognize this.

As well with many businesses, bereavement leave is only granted for close family members. For some Aboriginal people, non-related community members may be just as important to them (i.e. teachers, Elders etc.). In these cases, exceptions could be made from the standard bereavement policies to recognize that non-related community members can sometimes be treated as “family members” for the purposes of administering bereavement leaves.

As for Christmas holidays, some Aboriginal individuals celebrate Christmas, while others do not. Some persons may ask for time off to go to a ceremony—but again, because many Aboriginal people have converted to Christianity, not everyone participates in these events. First Nations peoples have ceremonies to mark the seasons, and specific responsibilities such as planting and harvesting ceremonies—however, communities have adapted and many ceremonies are scheduled around work hours.

For more information about NoKee Kwe visit their website at:

www.nokeekwe.ca

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HIRING ABORIGINAL CANADIANS



Canada's Aboriginal population, the youngest and fastest growing population, represents a huge potential workforce.



1. Fill job vacancies, especially in the area of skilled trades.
2. The Aboriginal population on the whole is younger than the non-aboriginal population, and thus are a constant young source of labour to draw on.
3. Avoid the costs of recruiting overseas for labour, recruit Aboriginal people who are familiar with the local community.
4. Demonstrate corporate social responsibility by hiring Aboriginal employees. Consumers these days are choosing businesses that have good social and environmental records.

THE ABORIGINAL
WORKFORCE:
WHAT LIES AHEAD
BY FRANCOIS
LAMONTAGNE, SENIOR
RESEARCHER

- The Aboriginal workforce can provide part of the solution to meeting its skills and labour needs
- Increases in the number of Aboriginal people with high school diplomas and trade certificates
- In 2001, there was a higher percentage of aboriginal people with trade certificates than non-aboriginal people

“... at a national scale, a disconnect exists between the potential skills contribution to be made by an increasingly

educated and mobile Aboriginal workforce, and the perception of some business and labour leaders on this contribution. Such disconnect may also explain why the Aboriginal employment rate remains high despite measurable gains in education”.

ABORIGINAL LABOUR
MARKET STRATEGIES:
INCREASING RETURN AND
PRODUCTIVITY
DISCUSSION PAPER
8TH ANNUAL CHAMPIONS'
MEETING
ABORIGINAL HUMAN
RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL OF CANADA

Canada's Aboriginal population, the youngest and fastest growing population, represents a huge potential workforce. By 2020, over 400,000 young Aboriginal people will enter the workforce adding to the 652,000 who are already of working age.

An increasing number of employers are looking overseas for solutions to their short-term labour needs, rather than investing in the development of Canadian labour sources such as Aboriginal people.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR
CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY
SPEECH BY, JIM CARTER,
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
OPERATING OFFICER,
SYNCRUDE CANADA LTD.,
TO THE PROSPECTORS

AND DEVELOPERS
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
TORONTO, ONTARIO,
MARCH 11, 2003

By working to build community capacity, especially as it pertains to Aboriginal people, we have become regarded as a good neighbour. And that is something the regulators view as important. What's more, by holding fast to our principles— and working to instill them up and down the line — Syncrude has earned the respect and trust of our neighbours, which serves us well in good times and bad.

While governments are contributing to the fight against Aboriginal unemployment in a very substantial way, the drive for change really has to come from the private sector, because we're the ones who will benefit ... We need skilled workers. And until companies see Aboriginal people as a solution to their skills shortages, the fulcrum for Aboriginal employment will not work effectively to create opportunities for Aboriginal people.

As it stands today, there is a lot of reluctance among private sector companies to get involved in Aboriginal education and training. They don't have any objection to hiring Aboriginal people who are already qualified, but they feel it isn't their role to get involved in Aboriginal development. They feel that responsibility belongs to government.

ASK A CONSULTANT

ASK THE DIVERSITY CONSULTANT

With increasing diversity in the workplace, it is becoming really confusing about what we should order for our lunch meetings. I don't want to offend anyone, but I know I am going to offend someone. Do you have any guidelines as to what we should serve at our meetings at work?

Perplexed

Dear Perplexed:

This is a question that I frequently come across in my workshops. Businesses and organizations are becoming more aware of the cultural and religious differences and want to accommodate diverse dietary needs. That is a good thing. But before we discuss these accommodations, it is important that we all understand the meaning behind the dietary restrictions of many religious groups, such as: Jews, Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, Buddhists and Hindus, to name a few.

For many, placing restrictions and prohibitions on the types of food may seem absurd. Why would you want to restrict your choice of food? Why punish yourself? You may even ask yourself, aren't all foods created for us to enjoy?

In our hurried world, rampant with fast food joints, all-you-can-eat buffets, and mega deals, we can easily take for granted the bounty we have. For people whose religion places restrictions on their diet, they do not see these restrictions as

punitive or harsh. They would probably say that the fact that they must think about what they put into their mouth before eating makes the act in itself sacred.

Let's take "kosher" food, for example (foods that conform to Jewish religious dietary laws). An observant Jew would only eat certain foods that are labeled as kosher or foods that are prepared in a kosher kitchen, and would not mix, for instance, meat with dairy dishes etc. On the surface, this may seem as restrictive to those whose beliefs do not have these rules. Some may even see the extent to which observant Jews go to follow these laws as extreme and perhaps neurotic. Like many faiths, special foods and their preparation maintain a tradition that creates an integral and distinguishable community bond.

The act of eating is a sacred act for the Jew as well as for other religions that have dietary laws. The rituals, and the foods, make the act very holy. This is a sharp contrast to grabbing a burger or throwing something in the oven for dinner. Generally speaking, eating in our culture is an everyday, ordinary and necessary activity. However, for those whose faith dictates that they eat certain foods, eating becomes a connection with their god.

So don't feel bad that someone cannot eat a certain food because of their religion; there is a good chance that they don't feel that they are missing out on anything. Don't forget many of the



"prohibited foods" have been found to not be very healthy either! Chances are that if a person has a lot of foods that they cannot eat, or their preparation does not conform to their religious beliefs, or if they have severe food allergies, they will likely bring their own food with them or eat before or after the event.

When catering a meeting where there is a large percentage of Muslim or Jewish participants, it may be a good idea to seek a Jewish caterer, if possible. Kosher food can be consumed by both Muslims and Jews. However, observant Jews cannot eat food prepared by Hallal (Muslim dietary standards); although there are some similarities, Jewish dietary laws are more stringent. In the case of having a large percentage of Muslims and no Jews at the meeting, hiring a Muslim caterer is a good idea. You want to be able to create an environment where as many people as possible can feel comfortable eating at your event without singling anyone out for their faith.

"Like many faiths, special foods and their preparation maintain a tradition that creates an integral and distinguishable community bond."

ASK A CONSULTANT, CONTINUED FROM PG. 5



“It is always a good practice to label the ingredients whenever possible.”

Small communities may not have a Muslim or Jewish caterer and therefore these are not possibilities. Additionally, because of the extra labour and inspections that are involved to pass Hallal (Muslim) or Jewish (Kashrut) standards, your food costs could be higher, which may be out of reach for some organizations.

If you want to maximize your food dollars, and make the event as inclusive as you possibly can without hiring a kosher or hallal caterer, you can do the following:

- Omit pork (and beef) from your catering menu and shellfish. Several faith groups do not eat pork and shellfish. Additionally, many people have allergies to shellfish, so omitting it should not be a problem.

- Provide both meat and vegetarian dishes, however, please ensure that the meat and vegetable dishes are placed on separate plates. It is a good idea to treat “dietary restrictions” almost like an allergy. Therefore, individuals who cannot eat meat or can only eat meat that has been ritually slaughtered (Muslims and most Jews) should be able to eat a vegetarian sandwich that has not come in contact with meat.

- It is always a good practice to label the ingredients whenever possible. Aside from religious dietary restrictions, many people these days have lactose or gluten intolerance, peanut allergies etc., and this makes sure that the food is safe for all to consume.

It is important to know that although you may have gone through a lot of trouble with preparing what seems to be an inclusive catering menu, some people may still not be able to partake. For example, an Orthodox Jew might not be able to partake in the food. This has happened to me before when I was preparing for a function and after it happened the second time, I was less shocked. It is important not to single the person out. They are fine

brought a meal with them or will eat afterwards. They are used to making these accommodations and will not feel slighted that you have not been able to cater to their unique situation.

Similarly, some faith groups do not drink, such as Muslims, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists and so forth. Keep in mind that if the majority of your staff do not drink alcohol, it is probably a good idea to have alcohol free gatherings. Again, ensure that these individuals are not made to feel left out because they do not drink.

On a final note, it is a good idea to not schedule meetings with food during fasting times, such as Ramadan. A Diversity Calendar in your workplace or on your intranet can help keep you posted on upcoming cultural and religious events.

ASK AN ELOCUTION TEACHER

Dear Elocution Teacher,

I have been having some difficulties lately trying to get my employees to brush up on their grammar skills at work. As the head of a large marketing company, it is vital that there are no mistakes in terms of writing proposals and ideas for prospective clients. Unfortunately, this is happening a bit more often than not. I've tried getting my employees to brush up on their grammar and enforce the use of Spell Check before they have handed in a piece, but not even that is fool-proof.

ASK A CONSULTANT, *CONTINUED FROM PG. 6*

Any suggestions as to how to avoid such common grammar errors?

Thanks from F. Stevens

Dear F. Stevens,

I can sense your frustration, but know that you are not alone. Not even the most seasoned English writer is perfect. We all make mistakes, so this is unavoidable. What we do need to learn is how to fix them and once you have mastered that, things will get moving.

It is most likely that the same mistakes are being made over and over again. Make note of common errors that your employees have. Keep a log of each employees' writing errors for your own records. This will allow you to keep note of where they tend to make errors. Once you have established this, then you can begin to work on a solution with them together.

It is great that you enforce Spell Check, but you are correct in that it is not always fool-proof. For example, it cannot tell whether or not your writer means RIGHT or WRITE.

Most likely you edit their work, but have your employees edit one another's work once a week to keep them sharp. Have them keep an eye out for punctuation, tense, fragments, subject-verb agreement and pronoun reference.

Another great tip would be to enrol them in a class that offers them the opportunity to brush up on their writing and grammar skills. Often the two go hand in hand and practice outside of work can be less daunting.

Diversity @ Work offers Elocution lessons that specialize in perfecting one's grammar skills. Keep in

mind, however, that Elocution lessons differ from ESL lessons.

Elocution lessons are great for individuals whose first language is not English, but these lessons focus more on the communicative side of things, whereas ESL lessons tend to be more technical. Many students tend to feel nervous about attending classes where a lot of the emphasis is based on the technicality of grammar. Our emphasis at Diversity @ Work, is to motivate students to actively use their skills in class and build upon them through teamwork.

We wish you lots of luck in helping your employees achieve success.

Leah Straatsma



“Keep a log of each employees’ writing errors for your own records.”

TINA WARRINGTON: JOB WANTED

Hello, my name is Tina Warrington and I am a disabled individual looking for home-based employment that will allow me to work around the transportation barriers I face. I have extensive computer skills including Microsoft Word, Excel and web-based research. My eagerness to learn and

desire for employment fuel a quick adaptation to new software and enable me to multi-task in the office as I assist customers on the phone. Despite my mobility issues, I do not require the use of adaptive technology or software when using a computer. I am willing to go beyond what is required of me to

achieve results. I look forward to discussing mutual interests with any willing employer and can be reached directly via e-mail at:

t_m_warrington@hotmail.com or indirectly through Evelina Silveira through this newsletter.





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For more information, please contact:

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resources about the business case for hiring Aboriginal employment.

At Diversity @ Work in London we frequently receive calls, e-mails and requests for assistance in seeking employment from people with substantial employment barriers. Since our philosophy is Diversity = Competitive Advantage, we believe that many people with employment barriers can be assets to businesses and organizations because of the special expertise and insight they have into their particular target market. Furthermore, we know for instance that the employee retention rate among people with disabilities is higher than other workers. Consequently, we have added an "Employment Wanted" section to our newsletter. Please take a look at this section and see if your business, or someone you know, could use the skills that the job seeker is offering.

We would also like to extend a congratulations to our gay and lesbian readers on the 25th anniversary of the Pride Festival.

We hope you enjoy this issue and welcome your feedback.

Evelina Silveira
Proprietor and Editor
Diversity @ Work
in London

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DATES IN 2007

(Please contact us if you have any special dates you would like included)

September 2007

1	First Parkash	22	Yom Kippur
4	Sri Krishna Jayanti	25	Ananta Chaturdasi
13-14	Rosh Hoshanah	25	Mid-Autumn Festival
13–Oct 13	Ramadan	27-Oct 3	Sukkot
15	Ganesh Chaturthi	28	Confucius' Birthday
21	Mabbon (Fall Equinox)	30	Pavarana

October 2007

4	Shimini Atzeret	12-20	Navarati
5	Simchat Torah	20	Birth of the Báb
9	Lailat-ul-Qadr	21	Dassehra
12	Eid-al-Fitr		

November 2007

1	Samhain	15	Jnana Panchimi
5	Birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji	24	Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji
9	Diwali	26	Day of the Covenant
12	Birth of the Bahá'u'lláh	28	Ascension of Abdu'l-Bahá



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