



Teaching Highly Skilled Immigrants Job Searching Strategies – Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA)

In the last five years, Alberta first experienced high economic growth, and was then heavily impacted by the economic downturn. As a result of the subsequent dramatic slowdown in the oil and gas industry many skilled immigrants either lost their jobs or were unable to find employment despite their high level technical skills and experience.

In response to this situation, the Albertan government decided to fund a pilot project with the objective to help immigrants in technical professions look for jobs. APEGGA (Alberta Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists Association) and MultiCultural Business Solutions (MCB) were contracted to deliver the program.

Skilled immigrants have a very high level of technical skills; some have one or more post-graduate degrees. However, their lack of soft skills, by Canadian standards, often prevents them from finding or keeping professional work. When they seek help from regular settlement agencies, they receive advice that addresses the issue at the surface level, e.g. change the resume format or add “career objectives” to the subject line.

Neither they, nor the Canadians they work with, realize that a substantial share of the problems they encounter arise due to culturally-determined aspects of Canadian workplace culture. Canadian employers and colleagues attribute difficulties, including unexpected or atypical behaviours, to the individual immigrant’s attitude or personality, while newcomers, operating out of their own cultural norms and assumptions, often fail to understand the source or nature of the problems and may blame employers or the government for their situation.

MCB designed and facilitated a Job Search Strategy and Coaching Program consisting of a one-day workshop and three individually customized coaching sessions. The workshop focused on teaching skilled immigrants how Canadian organizations operate and the cultural adaptations that are required in order for them to find and keep professional work; helping them understand the root cause of their problem and teaching them tools and processes that they can implement on a continuous basis to find professional work and develop their career in Canada.

The three coaching sessions take the learning further to individual application in the following areas:

First: the main focus was to help the candidate define, in very clear terms, their own professional specialization, review material presented in the workshop, complete an Accomplishments Table, revise their resume and assign homework tasks such as reading of the first 6 chapters of “Recruiting and Promoting Culturally Different Employees”.

Second: the coach and the candidate reviewed the completed Accomplishment Tables and revised resumes, and discussed the book reading assignment and interview strategies. Further homework was assigned, a second revision of resumes based on the coaching session and the candidate was to prepare a Networking / Job Search plan.

Third: the focus was on finalizing resumes, reviewing networking approaches (including the use of social networking tools like LinkedIn.com), and other job search activities, such as identifying relevant professional associations, trade publications, events, recruitment firms, and in some cases, discussing difficult interview questions et al.

The participants had 2-3 weeks in between coaching sessions to complete the homework. 47 participants completed the 3-month program and rated the program 9 out of 10. Many of them found employment commensurate with their education and skills shortly after the program.