

Made in Canada: How to attract and retain top talent

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Marie Bountrogianni is dean of the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University and a former Ontario cabinet minister.

We are living in an employer's market. New university and college graduates are in strong competition with one another as they enter the job market. Enrolment numbers at Canada's postsecondary institutions are rising; in 2015, there were over two million students enrolled, compared to 800,000 in 1980. While this increase could be seen as an advantage to many employers, it also presents a considerable, often daunting challenge to organizational recruitment.

Meanwhile, the needs of the labour market are changing. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce recently held a roundtable discussion entitled "Skills for an Automated Future" where I participated as a panelist. The event was attended by senior-level representatives from both the private and public sector, as well as educators. The results of the discussion were resounding: Canadian businesses and postsecondary institutions need to work more closely than ever to train the highly skilled employees of tomorrow and retain top-tier talent.

Consider the following strategies to attract and recruit top-tier talent at your organization:

Increase opportunities for students

Expand co-op and internship opportunities. An employer survey conducted by Leger Marketing for Universities Canada indicates that 80 per cent of employers identified co-op and internship students as an ideal source for new talent. Moreover, students are keen to learn and eager to acquire on-the-job experience. The government of Ontario demonstrated a strong commitment to experiential learning when they allocated \$190-million over three years to securing workplace opportunities for students through the Career Kick-Start Strategy. Work with universities and colleges to find qualified, dedicated talent.

Start a mentorship or coaching program

Opportunities for mentorship and coaching within the workplace are a big draw for savvy professionals. These kinds of supports will not only help employees develop a different way of thinking, they will inevitably support business growth. I have heard from employers who fear they will lose employees to higher-paying opportunities after investing resources on them; I encourage these individuals to reconsider this perspective.

I know a young professional who is a champion for a bank he left upon being recruited for a data analyst position at a ministry with a higher salary and more direct-reports. Even if this talent does leave, they will be an ambassador for your organization.

Commit to digital literacy

It is no secret that technology is the fastest growing sector in Canada. In the near future, every working professional will be required to have a certain level of digital literacy or competency using digital devices. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) anticipates significant change in the labour market with impending technological innovation; 9 per cent of jobs may be at risk of elimination and 32 per cent may find their job duties changing. Offer workshops or seminars within your organization to help employees develop these skills and prepare themselves for the forthcoming knowledge economy.

Allow employees to grow

Technology is also making it easier to access and customize education. Design an incentive program that funds or subsidizes learning opportunities for your employees. Continuing education programs throughout Canada offer innovative programming that supports adult learners looking to upgrade a skill or learn a new one. Employees greatly appreciate when organizations are attuned to their professional growth. The Canadian Education & Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) recently funded the publication of a playbook for career management entitled *Retain and Gain*, which emphasizes the importance of supporting employee growth. The playbook asserts that highly engaged employees are three times more likely to do something good for their organization. Show employees their value to your organization.

Demonstrate engagement in community

Similar to how employers appreciate job candidates who show goodwill through volunteer experience, discerning professionals appreciate when an organization demonstrates a commitment to community. Sponsor events or programs organized by non-profits, if your organization can afford it. Alternatively, consider establishing a company-wide day of service where everyone contributes. The 2015 Millennial Report indicates that 70 per cent of millennials volunteered in the previous year and 69 per cent of millennial employees admitted that they would be inclined to make a donation if their organization offered to match part of it. In these times of sociopolitical unrest, there is a general increased appreciation for organizations and leaders who do good. Set a good example for prospective talent.

The strength and prosperity of our country depends on the talented professionals employed in our organizations. Canadian universities and colleges are committed to attracting the best students from both within Canada and from abroad. Let us work together to retain this talent.

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