

Leveraging diversity for success

With its culturally diverse population rich in talented professionals, Toronto is a gold mine for companies seeking a business edge.

SHARON ASCHAIK -- Special to the Toronto Sun



"A diverse workforce brings global business acumen, innovative thought and the ability to scout for new business opportunities," says Lisa Mattam of management consulting firm The Mattam Group.

NATIONAL SURVEY

Recently, Catalyst Canada revealed the results of the largest national survey ever conducted about career satisfaction and advancement of visible minorities. Called Career Advancements in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities, it found that visible minorities experience lower levels of career satisfaction than their white/Caucasian colleagues.

The report's highlights include:

- Just more than half (54%) of visible minority respondents reported feeling satisfied with their progress toward meeting career advancement goals, compared to more than two thirds (67%) of white/Caucasian respondents.
- Only 38% of all visible minority respondents said their organizations' talent identification practices were fair, as compared to 46% of their white/Caucasian colleagues.
- 47% of visible minority managers, professionals and executives reported feeling they were held to a higher standard of performance than their peers within organizations, compared to 34% of white/Caucasians who felt the same way.

The report estimated that by 2017, visible minorities will comprise close to half of Toronto's labour force. Mattam says it's also expected that by 2010, Canada will experience a labour shortage and it will be an employee's marketplace.

"Employers will be fighting for the best talent, and if they're not able to recruit, retain and engage a diverse workforce, then those talented professionals will find other places to be successful," says Mattam, who, with her three partners, consults for companies such as IBM, Coca Cola, Ontario Northland and RX Media (www.themattamgroup.com).

To diversify their workforces, Mattam says, employers must first examine their corporate identity and culture. Employees want to be part of organizations that embrace the same core values as them, she says.

They also lean toward organizations that offer flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, more time off, and benefits for their extended family, she says. Perks such as fitness facilities and on-site daycare, she says, are also a draw for employees.

OPPORTUNITY TO GROW

As well, Mattam says, many employees are seeking employers who will provide them with opportunities to grow professionally.

"Employees are looking to see if companies invest in their people's professional development, and if those investments are consistent with what they need," she says. "Organizations need to figure out the unique contributions of their employees, what motivates them, and how they want to be developed and rewarded."

Other diversity strategies Mattam suggests include: better training for managers, to enable them to hire the best people and maintain their loyalty; having a dedicated diversity manager on staff who executes a formalized diversity plan; and providing internationally trained professionals with orientation on employment in the Canadian context.

"Ernst & Young has succeeded in recruiting tons of new accountants from around world, because they teach them to manage in a Canadian work environment," she says.

Mattam says more and more businesses are recognizing the benefits of a diverse workforce, especially those in financial services, pharmaceuticals and packaged goods.

"If more firms become proactive and leverage Toronto's, and the country's, multicultural labour market, it will boost not only their businesses, but Canada's overall competitiveness, economic growth and productivity," she says.

"From the Canadian perspective we are well positioned for success, in that other companies internationally can't compete with our cultural mosaic and our ability to pool talent from so many different backgrounds," Mattam says.