

# Talent to win: A playbook for Canadian business leaders

Getting the edge by bringing  
newcomer talent off the bench

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**Institute**  
for **Canadian**  
**Citizenship**

**Institut** pour  
la **citoyenneté**  
**canadienne**

***Can you imagine the Toronto Raptors or Calgary Flames not picking star players because they hadn't played in Canada before?***

***We're leaving some of our best talent on the bench.***

# Introduction

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Can you imagine the Toronto Raptors or Calgary Flames not picking star players because they hadn't played in Canada before? No manager in their right mind would give rival teams such a significant competitive advantage.

Yet that's exactly what Canadian leaders in business, government and civil society do every day, by underutilizing the wealth of immigrant talent in Canada. Despite the increasingly competitive global marketplace where talent and innovation are so decisive, we're leaving some of our best talent on the bench.

Not only are we sidelining talent that is already in Canada and ready to play for our team, we are creating a revolving door in which that talent is increasingly leaving Canada for better opportunities elsewhere.

The Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) and Deloitte held conversations with dozens of employers across Canada to learn how companies are, or aren't, capitalizing on the talent of newcomers to our country.

As detailed in our October 2024 Report, **Talent to win**, employers who embrace newcomers have discovered a very real competitive advantage from doing so. Those businesses shared their insights on how more employers can reap the same bottom-line benefits by identifying and integrating immigrant talent. This playbook tells you how.

# Success stories from Canadian employers

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## Rethink “requirements” that may be unnecessary

It’s common sense that knowledge of English or French is a basic requirement of working in Canada.

But is that actually true?

A mid-sized construction company traditionally required employees to speak and read English fluently for safety reasons. As one company executive explained: *“When someone yells out that ‘a beam is about to fall on you’, it’s important*

*that every employee understand right away. There’s no time to check Google Translate.”* But this company discovered that crews can operate safely without speaking English, so long as everyone on the crew speaks the same language.

This insight allowed them to hire single language Ukrainian- and Hindi-speaking crews, utilizing underemployed labour already present in the area.

### RESULT

**A huge competitive advantage:** Labour supply grew, lead times plummeted, and growth soared.

## Building buy-in – Newcomers driving the lane of safety and productivity

*"[Hiring immigrants] is about executing a mind shift within the company,"* said the leader of a major natural resources firm.

A hiring manager in Western Canada challenged the company's own hiring policy and opened eyes around the company. *"We used to hire people who had experience driving in snow. But it turned out that people who had no experience in snow were more careful, and therefore had fewer accidents,"* said a company executive.

Along with the enhanced safety record, the new approach also addressed the trucking team's labour shortages. But the important part was sharing this lesson to other parts of the organization, so they could learn from it and adopt the practice more widely.

### RESULT

**Boosted safety record** that also addressed the trucking team's labour shortages.

# **More success stories** from Canadian employers

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## **Immigration centres of excellence**

One large financial services provider has created a dedicated centre of excellence for immigrant hiring, retention and success. This team includes HR leaders, business leaders, immigration lawyers, and an employee support group.

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## **Evolving hiring practices from credentials to skills**

An ongoing shift from credential-based hiring to skills-based hiring has benefitted newcomers in job applications.

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## **Holistic, full-family approach**

Some employers are training hiring managers to actively support newcomer employees' holistic wellbeing, including the wellbeing of their family. Others have forged relationships with civil society organizations like the YMCA.

# Hot tips from business leaders across Canada

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## Think local

A common misconception is that hiring immigrants means hiring from abroad and providing immigration support. But there are hundreds of thousands of immigrants who are already in Canada and working well beneath their skill level.

## Cluster hiring

Employers that use cluster hiring to diversify their workforces have found a competitive advantage. These cohorts help employees build confidence and networks and create efficient conditions for training, development, and the provision of targeted supports. This ensures that newcomer employees have a clear understanding of what's expected of them and provides them with a peer group to turn to for advice and support.

*Employers that use cluster hiring to diversify their workforces have found a **competitive advantage.***

# Opportunities for employers

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**01**

## Collect the data

Routine collection of data including country of origin and year of arrival better inform senior leaders and enable them to make changes that improve performance.

**02**

## Spread success

Proof-of-profit is a compelling argument, even for colleagues reluctant to change their hiring practices.

Share your successes.

**03**

## Cultivate ambition

A workplace characterized by a pervasive hunger to innovate and improve is one where immigrants will fit in best. Newcomers can be particularly valuable in supporting international expansion as “global navigators,” for example.

**04**

## Cultivate humility

Open your teams’ mindset to the reality that immigrants have plenty to teach us.



**05**

## **Create specialized immigrant hiring teams**

For large enterprises, it is very advantageous to create a specialized team responsible for recruitment, navigating the immigration and work permit systems, training hiring managers, and supporting immigrant employees across the enterprise.

**06**

## **Get creative**

The construction firm that broke its labour shortage by creating single-language teams blew past its competitors.

**07**

## **Remember the whole person**

Remember that an immigrant's ability to contribute often depends on personal factors like whether their spouse finds employment that fits their own skills, whether their kids are doing well, and whether the whole family is happy with life in their new community.

**08**

## **Advocate for immigration reform**

A more agile and nimble immigrant selection policy, which more closely aligns with and adjusts to real needs in the economy, will also prove highly beneficial to employers and immigrants alike.

*"[Hiring immigrants] is about  
**executing a mind shift** within  
the company."*

# Step up your company's competitiveness

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## Get more insight on how to step up your company's competitiveness:

To learn how to apply these lessons and others to your company, check out the following resources and get in touch below.

### Resources

- + Read the full **Talent to win** report: [inclusion.ca/talent\\_to\\_win](https://inclusion.ca/talent_to_win)
- + Learn about Canoo, Canada's largest national welcome network for newcomers: [canoo.ca](https://canoo.ca)
- + Find more insights from all of ICC's research: [inclusion.ca/research-ideas/our-research](https://inclusion.ca/research-ideas/our-research)
- + Contact us: [info@inclusion.ca](mailto:info@inclusion.ca)

## About the ICC

The ICC is a national charity that aspires to a Canada where immigrants don't just come, but stay, become citizens, and contribute to their fullest potential so that Canada can grow and succeed.

We are Canada's leading source of thought leadership on citizenship and immigration. Through our Canoo Access Pass, we give 750,000 newcomers free access to Canada's best culture, nature and sport experiences. We also host enhanced citizenship ceremonies across Canada.

## Ideas & Insights at the ICC

Ideas and Insights drives research and develops cutting edge insights on immigration and citizenship in the 21st century.

Ideas and Insights is led by George Carothers ([gcarothers@inclusion.ca](mailto:gcarothers@inclusion.ca)).



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