



Diversity! in the workplace

August, 2007



Coaches Thinking Globally

For much of the summer, I had the extraordinary privilege of connecting and collaborating with people from around the globe in a professional coaching program to launch the international certification process. It was an intensive course designed to grow our coaching abilities and master advanced learning systems at a rapid pace. The intensity was certainly balanced by the excitement of Vancouver and its breathtaking vistas of mountains and ocean at every turn.

My colleagues included people from Mexico, Brazil, Ukraine, Norway, Japan and Turkey, as well as the US and Canada. At break times, the conference room exploded into multiple languages and viewpoints – a global microcosm of thought, questions and humour that added immeasurably to the energy in the room.

As the weeks went by integrating each new piece into the whole took greater effort. Knowledge levels became more challenging and exhaustion nibbled around the edges of the group. However, and this was fascinating to see, the all-out efforts of the English speaking participants were small-scale compared to the challenges the international students tackled head-on.

You might think language would hold them back, but not only were they speaking, reading, writing in their second language, they were interacting with enthusiasm with some heavy weight material. They were confident enough to question the facilitators on new concepts and insightful enough to link them to previous ideas. Their commitment stood out.

It was inspiring to watch as my international colleagues forged through a new exercise, and humbling to find I had underestimated their abilities. They could often integrate and demonstrate the skills almost intuitively. Perhaps their success came from the intangibles that move beyond language – in the ability to focus, or read body language or in sheer determination. I can tell you that as the days progressed we truly became a team, each one working to support the other, succeeding and graduating together.

So how does this relate back to diversity? My key learning was that language may not be the barrier we think it is. People with English as a second language often understand more than we give them credit for and they are smart enough to analyze content effectively. Our own perceptions and the distraction of a heavy accent may actually be the more limiting barriers.

Supporting and hiring employees who have English as their second language can be as direct as:

- Providing thorough interactive hands-on training where questions are welcome
- Offering clear written materials with diagrams that can be taken home to study
- Appointing an accessible job orientation partner as a primary resource in the early weeks
- Monitoring for quality on a regular basis to offer reinforcement, reassurance and adjustment as needed
- Posting instructions in the right places where they can easily be referred to as needed
- Ensuring that your workplace has a logical, systematic, easy-to understand workflow
- Creating an on-going mentor who is a good role model and easy to approach
- Periodically offering refresher training and updating for the entire team
- Looking for new hires, in any language, who are positive, self-aware and motivated.

© Lynne O'Connor, CMF, President
 Advanced Career Coaching Inc.
www.advancedcareercoaching.com
lynne@advancedcareercoaching.com
 416.232-2545

Lynne is an internationally certified Career Management Fellow with 15 years of expertise in coaching individuals to realize their career potential. Through her association with top career transition firms in Toronto, she has worked with major corporations in restructuring and career centre initiatives. Her international coaching certification is in progress.

What new qualities will they bring to the existing team?

Reliability, work ethic, respect for authority, attendance, (and dare I say, loyalty) are some of the founding attributes of this generation of workers. On a 'best-fit' team the right older person can also act as a sounding board, resource person and mentor. In an ideal scenario past experience may enable them to become an informal right hand to an overscheduled manager.

Of course, the onus is not all on the company when it comes to hiring older workers. That 55+ job seeker is now hard at work upgrading his marketing points and presentations skills. His challenge is to articulate his value, especially on the points above, and to build enough momentum in his search to secure an offer. Landing that first offer will be good news especially since today's older workers are paving the way for the rest of us!

Lynne O'Connor© is the President of Advanced Career Coaching Inc.
<http://www.advancedcareercoaching.com>

and an internationally certified Career Management Fellow with 15 years of expertise in coaching individuals to realize their career potential. Through her association with top career transition firms in Toronto, she has worked with major corporations in restructuring and career centre initiatives.

She can be reached at 416.232.2545
or by email: lynne@advancedcareercoaching.com