

Increasing Productivity in an Increasingly Diverse Workplace

By Bonnie Gross



A recent Conference Board of Canada report states that immigrants account for 70 per cent of the growth in Canada's labour force. This statistic coupled with a Baby Boom generation at or approaching retirement age, is changing the face of the Canadian workplace and presenting new challenges for managers.

Good communication is the cornerstone of a positive and productive work environment. Organizations, regardless of size, succeed or suffer based on their ability to convey information clearly. No matter how bright and knowledgeable your team, they need to be able to communicate effectively or risk misunderstandings or missed opportunities.

TD Canada Trust has been able to improve overall intelligibility by 60 to 85 per cent by offering a professional speaking skills program for one of its call centre teams. Covering topics such as pronunciation, word stress, rhythm, pacing, and appropriate intonation for different situations, the program helped improve overall communication.

Pronunciation and intonation are perhaps the most common cause of communication issues because of the varying sounds, rhythms and tones used around the world and the different meanings they can convey.

If a message is unclear, the listener may lack direction, become confused and too embarrassed to say so, or left feeling uninspired. The speaker may end up locked out of opportunities for advancement and not understanding why. Managers or HR professionals may find it awkward — or even politically incorrect or rude — to have to tell an employee that they don't understand their accent. But not saying something can be an even more unfair for an employee who doesn't understand why they are consistently misunderstood and not succeeding in their role.

The goal of a professional speaking skills program should not to "neutralize" or "Canadianize" an accent. Instead, the objective should always be to help employees speak more clearly and confidently, so neither the speaker nor the listener has to struggle.

As the percentage of new Canadians within the workforce continues to grow, organizations are finding it pays to invest in helping employees enhance their speaking skills through proper coaching and training. The added benefit can be an increase in job satisfaction and loyalty to the organization. Many team members who have participated in speaking skills programs report a greater feeling of belonging within the work environment and appreciate that their employer has helped them gain greater confidence — which only further enhances workplace productivity.

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