

“Canadian experience” (both hard and soft skills) they require.

Up your communication

Mastering the national language is crucial to obtaining work in Canada — but it doesn't mean you need to speak perfect, accent-free English. Rather, your goal is to be easily understood. The best way to develop this soft skill is to speak English with as many people as possible, as much as possible. While it's easy to spend your free time conversing with family and friends in your native tongue, this won't help you develop the communication skills you need to land a job in Canada.

Other practical suggestions include watching local television programs, listening to the radio and reading publications in English. You may consider enrolling in a conversational English class or taking an educational course relevant to your training or interests (in English, of course). Finally, visit the library or do research online to learn the English “jargon” (special words and phrases) specific to your industry.

Connect with the culture

Employers want to ensure that new hires will “fit in” with their staff and their company's Canadian culture. Many will size up these skills during the interview process by evaluating things like: how good you are at making “small talk” (about the weather, local news, sports, etc.); whether you maintain eye contact when speaking to them; how firm your handshake is; and how much personal space you maintain between yourself and others.

A good way to prepare for this is to immerse yourself, as much as possible, in Canadian culture. Watch or listen to local news programs and read local newspapers; spend time exploring your new home and interacting with the people you meet. You'll be amazed how much information you can absorb about Canadian culture by doing these simple things daily.

Present well

Another critical piece of advice: put time and effort into creating an English-language resumé. Nothing will testify more to your “Canadian experience” than an error-free CV. Employment and immigrant-serving agencies across the country offer resumé-writing workshops and assistance to newcomers on expectations for interview skills, too.

Learn about your profession in Canada

While you're looking for work in your field, take some time to learn the codes, laws and standards that govern your industry locally. You may discover you need a licence or membership in a professional organization to practise here.

Volunteer for experience

The first job you take in Canada may not have anything to do with your true or desired career — and, if it's an internship or volunteer position, it may not pay. But that doesn't mean it can't help you get the Canadian experience you need to bring you one step closer to achieving your professional dreams in this country.

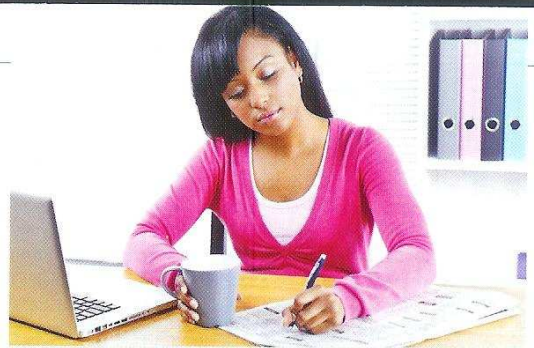
After having trouble finding work in Canada, Philippines-native Michael Batu, who immigrated to Ontario in 2007, decided to take a government internship in order to get his foot in the door. “I wasn't getting coffee or stuffing envelopes, this was a real job,” he explains. “I immediately saw the difference before the internship and after I got that elusive Canadian experience. It opened a lot of doors for me.”

Astarte Sands, who, in 2008, launched the Workplace Connections program at MOSAIC, an immigrant settlement agency in Vancouver, agrees in the value of interning or volunteering. “Volunteering is an opportunity to meet people, practise your English, improve your adaptability and [if you volunteer within your own field or for your own professional association] find out what it means to be a Canadian accountant or engineer, for example. It can really help you get a leg up.”

If earning some income is necessary to your immediate survival, you may consider taking a temporary or part-time job outside your area of expertise. Even a low-paying job in another field will help you improve your communication skills and get comfortable with how Canadians interact in the workplace.

Network, network, network

One of the best ways to learn about working in Canada is networking — making connections with other people. Many jobs are found through word of mouth, and if you're recommended for a job by someone who will vouch for you, the question of whether or not you have actual Canadian work experience may not even come up. 🍁



Will work as a temp for Canadian experience!

It's the number one catch-22 for newcomers. You need to find a job, but you don't have any Canadian work experience. In order to get experience, you need to find a job. Fortunately, there are a number of companies that offer temporary work, many of which don't require much experience aside from understandable English.

While these positions may not be lucrative, they can help you fill the Canadian experience requirement on your resumé and provide the fuel needed to get ahead in the Canadian labour market.

When Bernard Raghubeer arrived in Canada, he sought factory work with a temporary agency. “The agency was the quickest way to find employment in Toronto as most places that I had applied to wanted Canadian work experience,” he says.

While packing telephone books and making cardboard boxes was laborious and the pay minimum wage, the experience gave Raghubeer what he needed in order to succeed in the Canadian job market.

Temporary agencies can provide a number of benefits including networking opportunities and an inside look into the structure of the Canadian labour market. Alex Bickers, director of sales and marketing, at Nasco Staffing Solutions, says his agency's temporary staffing positions can provide individuals with invaluable networking opportunities in nearly every field of work.

Nasco, and other temp companies such as BBW International and Tigris Personnel, provide temporary staffing to companies who outsource small jobs at conferences, trade shows, fairs and concerts. “Given that we work with so many diverse clients and events, our employees have the opportunity to see the world from many different angles, whether they are registering some of the world's top cardiologists for a conference or hosting a pop-up block party, the opportunities to learn and meet new people are endless,” says Bickers.

For Raghubeer, working at the temporary agency not only provided him with a small income with which he put himself through post-secondary studies, but gave him invaluable insight into the Canadian employment system and the tools to integrate into Canadian culture.

“I gained valuable experiences with interviews, [learned] how the Canadian work environment was structured and how to access it. I networked with the people I met at the various factories and learned where to access information for more meaningful work,” he says. — Lisa Evans