

## **Skilled immigrants are the key to business success**

### ***If we want to be truly recovery-ready, now is the time to invest in innovation, creativity, diversity***

Gordon Nixon and Dominic D'Alessandro - From Friday's Globe and Mail  
Last updated on Saturday, Sep. 12, 2009 04:01AM EDT

With the end of the recession in sight, all of Canada's employers need to be thinking about their long-term talent strategies. A global, competitive marketplace means tapping into and investing in the strengths of all of the country's work force, including skilled immigrants, so that local economies can grow, compete and prosper.

Immigrants bring skills, including language and cultural abilities, knowledge and networks that can help us to reach out to emerging economic giants such as China and India, as well as emerging immigrant and "generation 1.5" markets at home – particularly at a time when the U.S. economy remains weak and we need to be looking to expand our trade and cultural relationships even more.

As business leaders, we know that our economic future is a case of "innovate or stagnate." Implicit in innovation is diversity – diversity of ideas, perspectives and backgrounds. If we want to be truly recovery-ready, now is the time to invest in innovation, in creativity, in diversity. One key element of a successful innovation strategy is clear: better recognize and leverage the skills and experience that skilled immigrants bring to Canada.

In July of this year, The Globe and Mail painted a stark picture of how the recession was affecting Canada's immigrants: According to Statistics Canada, immigrants are losing their jobs at more than three times the rate of Canadian-born workers. In the Toronto region, for example, almost 50 per cent of residents were born outside Canada, so what happens to them in this recession and in the much-anticipated recovery will have a significant bearing on overall productivity and prosperity.

RBC's own 2005 study, *The Diversity Advantage: A Case for Canada's 21st Century Economy*, estimated that if immigrants had the same likelihood of employment at the same average income as people born in Canada, personal incomes would be about \$13-billion higher. These higher incomes would have obvious multiplier effects in markets for housing and consumer spending, as well as savings and investment – all critical elements in kick-starting our economy out of recession.

The Canadian-born work force is shrinking and by 2011 all of our labour-force growth is predicted to come from immigration. Knowing the facts and figures, it becomes clear that Canada and Canadian employers can and must do a much better job of integrating skilled immigrants into our labour market.

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) and its partners have created more than 1,000 internships for professional newcomers, matched more than

4,000 recent skilled immigrants with established professionals in occupation-specific mentoring relationships, and engaged thousands of employers and human resources professionals through a website that identifies unbiased HR practices, tools and resources to better recruit, develop and retain skilled immigrants.

Employers need to be recovery-ready, and forward-looking companies are taking action now. At RBC, an employee resource group provides newcomers to Canada and members of visible minorities with mentoring and networking opportunities to help cultivate an inclusive work environment. Manulife sponsors TRIEC's Mentoring Partnership, providing funding and mentors to help build relationships and open networks for new immigrants.

There is much to learn from these best practices and others, particularly those initiated by smaller and mid-sized companies – the companies that drive the country's economy.

Nytric Limited, an innovation-consulting and venture-technology firm, is already ahead of the curve. With input from its skilled immigrant staff, Nytric enhances products to better reflect diverse cultures to increase marketing appeal both domestically and internationally. Employees fluent in different languages help the company negotiate with suppliers and manufacturers abroad.

Nytric is a strong example of the innovation, creativity and efficiency that could result from employing the skills and talents of new immigrants, generating annual revenue of about \$4-million and exporting 90 per cent of its products.

All Canadian companies must keep pace with developments around them. Consumer profiles and behaviour have changed drastically, and in order to serve the market, businesses must reflect the market.

What's more, we know that to benefit from the recovery tomorrow, we need to prepare today and ensure that we are using all the resources available to us. Skilled immigrants who have chosen to make Canada their home can and want to do more to make this country successful. It's up to all employers to seize that opportunity.

*Gordon Nixon is president and chief executive officer of RBC and the incoming chair of TRIEC. Dominic D'Alessandro recently retired as president and CEO of Manulife Financial and is stepping down as TRIEC chair after six years.*