

Immigration needs new perspective

Canada is usually referred to as a land of immigrants - then again, which country isn't?

The only difference is that immigration to Canada is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Is immigration as useful as it's often touted to be? Is the economy progressing because of immigration - or is it a burden to citizens?

Proponents of immigration seem to think it is a panacea for all economic ills. New numbers back up the business case for hiring skilled immigrants. A recent survey undertaken by EKOS on behalf of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) reveals that one in five employers has hired a skilled immigrant to help them expand globally and locally, and feels that employees with international education and experience are effective in helping them meet their business goals. Of that number, 93 per cent feel that hiring skilled immigrants has been effective in targeting local cultural communities for new business opportunities.

"This research confirms that hiring immigrants to expand into local and global markets can be an effective business strategy for employers," says Elizabeth McIsaac, TRIEC's executive director.

Phoenix Geophysics Limited, a geophysical manufacturing and contracting company, sells to over 80 countries in the world. Half of the company's business is in China and another 20 per cent is in Russia. Phoenix hires "market makers," skilled immigrants who can help the company open up new opportunities in their home countries. The company boasts 51 employees from 20 countries who speak 15 languages.

In Thales Canada's Toronto office, staff build "brains for trains" - technology that allows trains to run without operators. With 90 per cent of its business in the global marketplace, Thales systematically targets and cultivates internationally trained professionals to ensure its position as a leader in transportation systems worldwide. The company stands apart for its 95 per cent retention rate.

But is this the whole truth?

There are bound to be criminals and fraudsters among new immigrants, who prey on the immigrant community here, or who take advantage of government safety nets.

Canada is one of the largest destination countries for Asian immigration, and a personal visit by the minister responsible to those countries will help focus the energies of the source countries on fighting fraud.

But the trip is also needed because Canada

BIKRAM LAMBA

WORLD VIEW



needs to demonstrate resolve at home to stop immigration-related crimes. Current reforms, including the additional safe country designation as part of the refugee determination process, and pending changes to the immigration consultant and live-in caregiver regimes, go some way.

Immigration-related crime is a global problem, and to date, the criminals have proved much more nimble than national governments.

The temporary skilled workers program was developed seven years ago as a means to fill jobs shortages quickly. Initially billed as a way to provide workers quickly for the Alberta oil boom, the program grew to welcome over 100,000 workers in 2004. But now the program has become so much more. In 2008 alone, 193,000 temporary foreign workers came to Canada, almost equal to the number of permanent residents Canada accepted.

This increase has occurred in part because of changes to Canada's immigration legislation. In 2008, the government introduced a fast-track option for employers seeking temporary foreign workers. Employers seeking to hire temporary foreign workers must first apply for a Labour Market Opinion with Human Resources and Services Development Canada, which establishes that there are no Canadians available to fill those jobs.

This process usually takes five months, but under the new Expedited Labour Market Opinion program, it takes a mere five days. And once it is established that a need exists,

there is no need to reapply.

In order to make sure that Canadian workers are not pushed aside if their availability changes, changes should be made to this legislation.

While there has been a clear increase in temporary foreign workers, the number of immigrants and permanent residents has plateaued. The increase reveals a significant shift in focus of Canada's immigration program, from recruiting skilled workers who would become permanent residents, to focusing on temporary workers who come to Canada on short work visas and perform low-skill jobs.

This focus on filling temporary work is at best a stopgap measure, and reveals a deep problem in the way Canada welcomes newcomers and in how we build our country.

The danger lies in what happens after work visas expire - immigrants can return home and reapply for the program, or, if they do not qualify for immigration, they can disappear into the growing ranks of illegal immigrants within Canada.

In order to prevent this group from growing further, Canada needs to develop a different response. While a Canadian Experience Class has been introduced into immigration policy, allowing temporary foreign workers to apply for permanent residency without leaving Canada that "most low-skilled foreigners had little hope of meeting Canada's admission criteria. That meant they would either have to leave or attempt to stay illegally."

A May report by the Citizenship and Immigration committee of the House of Commons recommended some changes. First, it recommended the creation of a "path to permanent residency" accessible to all temporary foreign workers. For families of temporary foreign workers, the committee recommended they be eligible for an open work permit in Canada.

These recommendations would go a long way in changing how temporary foreign workers are welcomed into Canada. It would also go a long way towards building a sustainable employment force, rather than focusing on a stopgap option.

Illegal immigration has both negative and positive impacts on different parts of the economy. As noted above, wages for low-skilled workers go down. Since undocumented workers generally don't pay income taxes but do use schools and government services, they are seen as a drain on government spending.

Another major issue is the so called family

reunion clause. This is the most repulsive and misused clause. Immigrants come here and then start sponsoring parents, grandparents, uncles, grand uncles, cousins - in fact, even those relations in an extended family, whom they might never even have heard of back in their native countries. And these relations, once in, are a burden on the economy. They have not contributed a dime, but can use the over-burdened health system 90 days after landing.

At the risk of being called inhuman, I would categorically say that the family reunion class needs to be abolished and parents and grandparents barred. As a matter of fact, getting these old people here is an act of cruelty. They are often left alone and feel a sense of isolation in a strange land which can make them mentally sick, adding to the burden on society.

Their children have no time for them. The main purpose is to get the benefits, even at the cost of their mental health and peace of mind. The not-for-profit agencies tell me that the cases of elderly abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation are increasing. The expenditure on healthcare for seniors is a major one. Elderly immigrants suffer from being cut off from their roots and yearn to be back. Why torture them by bringing them here?

Another major expenditure is on providing interpreting services.

What the UK proposes to do seems an ideal solution. As part of continuing efforts to reduce migration from countries outside the European Union, the David Cameron government announced proposals that seek to prevent foreign professionals from settling here permanently.

Canada needs immigrants, but we have to be selective, and more restrictive. Skilled workers should be welcome on a temporary basis. Let's not forget that to conserve our resources and get maximum benefits we should permit temporary workers who would contribute and be paid and then go back. The family reunion class needs to be abolished, without any delay, and the immigration of anybody above the age of 55 banned. It will save huge amounts of money and can in fact be an act of mercy to forsaken and isolated old people. Do we dare?

Dr. Bikram Lamba, an international Management Consultant is Chairman & Managing Director of Tormacon Ltd. - a multi-disciplinary consultancy organization.

905 848 4205. Email: torconsult@rogers.com

Sheridan students weigh in at Innovator Idol III

C.S. Lewis once said that "experience is the most brutal of teachers. But you learn, my God do you learn." Though the quote may seem a bit harsh, it makes a point in that much of what we learn comes from life's experiences.

For those of us in the teaching profession whether academic or corporate, enhancing text book learning through integrated learning experiences, significantly improves the student's learning outcome.

So picture this, an experience in the making, 7:15 Wednesday morning June 15, a group of graduate students depart from Sheridan College's Oakville campus. Their destination, Mississauga Central Library's Noel Ryan Auditorium to attend and participate in Innovator Idol III, an event held each year by the Research Innovation and Commercialization (RIC) Centre.

Modeled after other 'Idol' competitions, the event featured four finalists who pitched their company's innovations to a panel of investment experts and a live audience. Their goal is to secure a share of \$40,000 in prize money.

This year's finalists offered a group of products, technologies and services to tempt any investor. The presentations showcased sophisticated solutions to a group of timely challenges and opportunities. If you've ever watched Dragons' Den, these would be the best-of-the-best.

Panel members challenged the presenters with questions that included: current and future competitors, potential threat from emerging technologies, patents, valuation, client base/market potential, sales, product differentiation, regulatory and compliance issues, and what panelist Benj Gallander referred to as "the company's DNA" -

IRYNA REIM

INNOVATION



strength of company management and their track record.

The four expert panelists included: Benj Gallander, president, Contra The Heard Investment Letter and columnist, Globe and Mail. The National Post describes Benj as 'an iconoclast for outperforming the pros and one of the stock market's greatest characters whose stock picks returned over 50 per cent last year'; Jan Holland, founding partner and managing director, Tricycle Asset Management, Canada's leading provider of alternative investment products with a focus on managed futures; Probal Lala, founding executive, About Communications, a regular on Business News Network (BNN) and a committed supporter of young entrepreneurs, he is a founding member of the Toronto based Maple Leaf Angels

organization and sits on the board of Youth-In-Motion. And last but not least, Paul Morgan, managing director, Mid-Market Corporate Finance for Royal Bank of Canada.

The Contenders

Each of the four presenters offered a unique solution to a complex problem. First up was Leo Blakely, president and CEO of Rivalries Corporation whose company's manufacturing process moulds unrecyclable plastic into new products, a potential solution to the 90 per cent of plastic waste that ends up in our landfills in comparison to only 10 per cent that is recyclable.

Next up was Induce Biologics' CEO Sean Peel who presented a compelling case for his organization's leading-edge technology for bone regeneration which ultimately eliminates current limitations with bone transplant and regeneration products and procedures.

Jean-Francois Alary of Isobarex Technologies presented a significantly smaller, less expensive and more efficient version of existing mass spectrometer technology. The value is in its ability to act as a screening tool for genotoxicity of drugs or other industrial chemicals.

Lastly Tomer Berliner, of Carmel Vision, presented their cost effective single application software that enables small and medium sized businesses to manage an overload of information from multiple sources.

The competition was stiff. The expert panel weighed in and then finally the audience. Induce Biologics' Sean Peel was announced the winner. The winning innovation was a bone regenerative process

invented at University of Toronto, that Peel says "is a significant improvement over currently available products".

Research Innovation and Commercialization (RIC) Centre

Recognized by the Ministry of Research and Innovation as the 'go-to place' for Innovation in the Peel Region, the centre's purpose is to build an 'innovative ecosystem' designed to support community prosperity in the region.

RIC provides support services to new and emerging businesses in advanced manufacturing, aerospace, life sciences and emerging technologies. Their purpose is to help in moving their ideas and businesses forward.

Committed to supporting entrepreneurship in Peel region, "Idol is just one example of how we use creative marketing to connect star innovators with motivated investors," said RIC executive director Pam Banks.

In addition to events such as Innovator Idol, the Centre provides support through business plan and presentation skills, networking support and opportunities, and assistance in navigating through government and the business world. For more information about RIC, go to <http://www.ricentre.com>

And finally what did the students say? Well, overall, the event exceeded their expectations, equally in the quality of the event itself, the sophistication and professionalism of the presenters and the overall opportunity to experience such an event in person.

Iryna Reim is an executive coach, consultant and teaches in several business schools. She can be reached at ireim@sympatico.ca