



Canadian Workplace Essentials

Ways to impress
job interviewers
and tourism-sector
employers



CANADIAN TOURISM
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discover
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A door of opportunity

Any tourism establishment's ability to meet customer expectations relies directly on the number of willing and able workers it employs. Predictably then, as the sector continues to grow and prosper, the demand for skilled employees is also increasing.

Meanwhile, the supply is diminishing. The impending departure of more than four million Canadians from the workforce has tourism operators across the country actively trying to tap into once-overlooked labour pools. As a result, the integration of new Canadians and foreign workers into the workforce has become a sector-wide priority.

Businesses across the country feel under pressure to protect customers from the effects of Canada's looming labour shortage. For their part, however, customers are little concerned with who books the tickets, cleans the rooms, mixes the drinks or cooks the food as long as these services are rendered diligently, swiftly and courteously.

Of course, customers—and in turn employers—expect tourism-sector workers to adhere to Canada's cultural norms, even though precisely what those norms are may sometimes be uncertain. While it is employers' responsibility to inform staff of what is and what is not appropriate, businesses tend to hire candidates who already demonstrate attitudes and skills that reflect an understanding of Canadian workplace practices.

It follows that new Canadians and foreign workers seeking employment in the tourism sector must work hard to first get their foot in the door. Beyond the language barriers, any hopeful job seeker must be able to adapt to subtle cultural differences to perform well in the sector. Immigrants succeed once they deduce and mimic the workplace practices which customers and employers deem 'appropriately Canadian.' Sadly, there are few mechanisms to guide new Canadians and help ease foreign workers into the labour market.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A door of opportunity	1
The key to unlock a brilliant future	3
How to make a great impression on employers	3
Non-verbal communication	3
A positive attitude	3
Personal space	3
Confidence	3
Initiative	4
Expressing personal opinions	4
Asking questions	4
Social skills	4
Oral communication	4
Networking	4
A healthy personal regimen	4
Punctuality	4
Adaptability and flexibility	4
Organizational structure	5
Safety	5
Canadian Workplace Essentials	5





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The key to unlock a brilliant future

In July 2007, the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) engaged tourism employers, immigrant serving agencies and new Canadians to articulate the specific skills, attitudes and behaviours that foreign-trained workers must demonstrate to secure entry-level positions in the tourism industry.

The product of the collaboration is a 70-page report titled *Defining Expectations: Canadian Workplace Experience*. The report outlines the nine basic skills and attitudes that more than 200,000 small and medium-sized tourism enterprises look for in new hires. The report recommends specific ways to recognize and integrate qualified new Canadians and internationally trained individuals into the workforce.

In the wake of the consultation, the CTHRC contends that a national training program tailored to the needs of new Canadians would not only enable the sector to accelerate the integration of immigrants into the labour market, but would also alleviate many of the frustrations foreign-trained professionals experience during the job hunt.

How to make a great impression on employers

While Canadian work experience does not determine success in the tourism sector, demonstration of Canadian customs and a familiarity with the country's work culture do. Whether this knowledge is acquired on-the-job, from close observation of Canadians at work, or through the completion of a training program is immaterial to sector employers.

Ultimately, experience is the best teacher. However, job seekers often find themselves wrestling with a common employment dilemma: they are both unable to get a job due to a lack of Canadian experience and incapable of garnering experience without regular employment.

Observant and diligent workers can acquire job-specific expertise through independent learning. This approach, however, presents a significant drawback to both job seekers and employers. Without professional guidance, independent learners typically take much longer to achieve entry-level competencies and an accurate assessment of progress is nonexistent.

Training and certification programs are the most effective means of resolving the employment dilemma many new Canadians experience. Not only do some programs attest that candidates have logged a specific number of hours in

a simulated work environment, but they also vouch for a job seeker's ability to apply knowledge and skills learned through focused study.

Whatever the structure or curriculum of these programs, they must educate students in the nine attitudes and skills that were identified in the *Defining Expectations* report as necessary to succeed in the tourism sector: non-verbal communication, confidence, initiative, an ability to express personal opinions, a willingness to ask questions, general social skills, punctuality, a healthy personal regimen, and an understanding of organizational structure.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication is pivotal in first impressions, including job interviews and initial interactions with customers. Eye contact and positive body language convey an employee's confidence and respect for others, as well as a host of other messages.

A positive attitude

Each interaction an employee has with a customer or colleague is an opportunity to animate the workplace. Every culture has its gestures, facial expressions, demeanour and mannerisms to express an upbeat, accommodating attitude. In Canada, a smile and cheery tone of voice projects energy, confidence and control. A handshake communicates respect, attentiveness and harmony. Workers in the tourism sector must recognize the significance of these signals in Canadian culture and learn to use them appropriately in day-to-day work situations.

Personal space

How close one should stand or sit to a colleague or customer is a matter of opinion. The idea of personal space is culturally relative. In Canada, one typically maintains about a two-foot distance from others. It is an employer's responsibility, however, to explain what is—and what is not—acceptable in the workplace.

Confidence

There is a close correlation between workers' self-esteem and their ability to provide exceptional customer service. What constitutes an appropriate display of confidence, however, depends on the culture one works in. Maintaining eye contact, for instance, is a show of attentiveness and respect in Canada, but is likely to give offense in some other cultures. Immigrants must learn to read and become comfortable using accepted Canadian gestures and speech to demonstrate confidence.



Initiative

To sell and promote a company's services, employees must initiate conversations with clientele and adopt the mentality that *the customer is always right*. Whether due to linguistic barriers or out of respect for the privacy of customers, many foreign-trained workers may be more hesitant than others to prompt personal interactions.

Expressing personal opinions

Many immigrants arrive in Canada from hierarchical societies where workers are not typically encouraged to express personal opinions. It is therefore important for new Canadians to understand that, in this country's tourism sector, employers value their suggestions and are sensitive to their concerns. In fact, an employer may mistake an employee's reluctance or inability to communicate opinions for a lack of interest.

Asking questions

Employers need workers who are eager to learn new skills and adapt to a quickly evolving work environment. With this attitude, all the knowledge required of employees can be acquired on the job. Asking questions of colleagues and immediate supervisors is one of the best ways a new employee can show his or her desire to develop professionally.

Social skills

New Canadians are encouraged to maintain their own cultures and, at the same time, explore Canada's unique customs. In the workplace, employees are expected to set aside prejudices and respect women and men of all ethnicities, ages and religions. Those who are able to develop friendly relationships with their coworkers integrate faster into the workplace than those who do not.

Oral communication

Immigrants to Canada must be able to speak in unbroken English or French, depending on the region. As a result, language is the principal barrier for new Canadians and foreign-trained workers who seek employment in the tourism industry. Even immigrants who are able to speak English or French fluently must adopt the vocabulary and manners of speech common in Canada.

Understandably, the first linguistic challenge is the job interview itself. Hiring decisions are frequently made within the first five minutes of an interview, and workers who are unable to comprehend questions posed to them or who struggle to represent their skills and interests adequately are at an early disadvantage.

Once a worker passes an interview, other challenges arise. Insufficient language proficiency contributes to an individual's isolation from others, poor performance in—or reluctance to attend—training activities, and the under-evaluation by an employer of a candidate's credentials.

Networking

Networking is an effective way to identify employment opportunities. In fact, most immigrants now working in the tourism sector were unaware of the sector's existence when they arrived in Canada. Meeting new people and exchanging ideas, however, can be difficult for new Canadians who are linguistically or culturally isolated.

A healthy personal regimen

Above all else, workers in the tourism sector must be respectful. In addition to non-verbal cues such as facial expression, tone of voice and the handshake, employees must demonstrate consideration for customers and colleagues by maintaining a particular personal grooming and hygiene regimen. Most notably, men are expected to keep facial hair neatly trimmed and women to wear minimal make-up. All employees must dress neatly and apply deodorant to control body odour.

Punctuality

Punctuality is a fundamental value of the Canadian workplace and is expected of new hires regardless of cultural origin or background. Supervisors and others kept waiting often feel disrespected or, worse, slighted by an employee's tardiness. In Canada, it is deemed common courtesy to come to work and other scheduled events on time. Employees who must dress for work on site or take over from outgoing shift workers may be expected to arrive with ample time to prepare.

Adaptability and flexibility

The nature of the tourism sector can be a barrier to workers. Unpredictable work hours, early-morning and late-night shifts, and remote locations demand that employees be able to secure flexible transportation and child care arrangements. An open dialogue about the issue of transportation should therefore be established between a new employee and his or her employer. New employees should be candid about their transportation arrangements so that, should accommodation for late arrival or early departure be required from time to time, the request will not come as a surprise to the employer.



Organizational structure

Ultimately, employers must trust the success of their companies to skilled workers. Moral integrity, honesty and reliability are therefore fundamental attributes that employers look for in new hires.

Safety

Canadians observe very high safety standards. While the onus is on employers to educate workers about company policies and procedures, employees are expected to observe safety rules and norms, be vigilant about security risks and use problem-solving and decision-making skills to help ensure the safety of all customers and colleagues. New employees should be confident to point out any risks to safety or security that they notice on the job.

Regardless of job seekers' cultural backgrounds, those who demonstrate all of nine of these attitudes and skills have precisely what it takes to succeed in Canada's tourism sector. Armed with this insight into employers' expectations of new workers and the unique characteristics of the Canadian workplace, immigrants can open the door to a world of opportunity in the tourism sector.

Canadian Workplace Essentials

Given the unanimous agreement among tourism stakeholders about the skills and attitudes required of entry-level workers in the tourism sector, CTHRC is now confident that a training program for new Canadians will help them enter into the Canadian workplace more effectively.

CTHRC's *Tourism Essentials* certification program already teaches participants the skills, attitudes and behaviours that tourism-sector employers expect from entry-level and frontline workers. Students who successfully demonstrate these competences and who are able to meet—or exceed—the minimum occupational standards for their profession are awarded nationally recognized credentials.

A new program called *Canadian Workplace Essentials (CWE)* could build on the successful *Tourism Essentials* program with modules that focus on the finer aspects of Canadian workplace culture. The customized program aims to give employers the confidence to source, recruit and retain foreign workers who do not have Canadian work experience, and enable businesses across the country to continue to contribute to the success of the tourism sector.

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Canada Funded by the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program.

This brochure summarizes the main findings of the final report: Defining Expectations: "Canadian Workplace Experience" November 2007.

The Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) works on behalf of the 164,000 businesses that make up Canada's vibrant tourism sector. Established in 1993, the CTHRC promotes professionalism throughout the sector and addresses key labour market issues. Collectively, Council members and the CTHRC bring together Canadian tourism businesses, labour unions, associations, educators and governments to co-ordinate human resource development activities and contribute to a sustainable, globally competitive tourism sector. The CTHRC is funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) to conduct research to investigate the development of a Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) system for non-regulated professions. Work around this project will improve labour mobility by helping new immigrants from non-regulated professions come to Canada more easily. It would also assist new immigrants to integrate into the Canadian labour force more quickly.

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