



Recruiters banking on the best and the brightest

Financial-services firms trying to reflect the communities they serve

BY DEREK SANKEY, FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE SEPTEMBER 24, 2009



(L to R) Michael Bach, director of diversity and Ruth Todd, associate partner, Southwestern Ontario Region, who takes part in an aboriginal mentorship program with KPMG, pose for photography at the firm's offices in Hamilton, Ontario.

Photograph by: Malcolm Taylor/Canwest, For Canwest News Service

Financial institutions are responding to the changing face of Canada's population by modernizing their recruitment practices.

Ruth Todd, for one, sees evidence of the country's increasing diversity every day in her role as an associate partner with accounting and professional services firm KPMG Enterprise in Hamilton. Part of her job is to motivate the next generation of business professionals to join the accounting profession.

"The recruits we're seeing now, compared to 20 years ago, include lots of diverse cultures coming off of the campuses," says Todd. "Even our cities ... weren't as diverse as they are today. Our offices are starting to look more like the communities they represent."

Todd understands there are bottom-line benefits to fostering a diverse workplace, but feels there are many other important reasons for pursuing diversity strategies in recruiting and retention programs.

Todd is taking part in a mentoring program set up through the Paul Martin Aboriginal Initiative where she mentors aboriginal high school students from the nearby Six Nations reserve on the merits of pursuing higher education related to financial services.

"It's time well spent," she says. "This is the fun stuff."

KPMG was selected as one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers in 2009 as ranked by Mediacorp. It joins a growing list of financial-services firms working hard to ensure their workforce mirrors the communities they serve.

Working with young students from many backgrounds is just one way KPMG strives to be a top diversity employer.

The company has several diversity networks.

There is a network for parents with special needs children, among several others, as well as emergency backup child care for employees. The organization also partners with local community agencies and encourages its employees to volunteer and make those connections.

These connections help KPMG reach out to community groups to attract and retain the best and brightest in the field.

"In an economic downturn, we need our people engaged -- not just 100-per-cent engaged, but 150-per-cent engaged -- in order for us to continue to maintain our work as a successful professional services firm," says Michael Bach, director of diversity, equity and inclusion for KPMG.

"We don't sell a product ... we just have thought leadership, so our people are our priority," he says. That means people need to feel comfortable and safe celebrating their diversity at work, which enhances employee engagement."

When you bring people from different backgrounds together, the result is greater creativity and innovation, he says.

"It's really about opening up doors and looking for other opportunities to get new business," says Bach. He cites one example where the company's U.K. office had an Islamic society network that led to a significant new contract. More than anything, he says, it's about the company's ability to attract and retain top talent as a competitive advantage -- and because it's just the "right thing to do."

Norma Tombari, director of global diversity for the Royal Bank of Canada, says diversity is just part of the new global reality.

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"Now everyone has access to global talent," she says. "You have people coming from various parts of the world. We like to say global is local."

If a company wants to grow and prosper in this environment, integrating diversity becomes especially important.

"It's also the way to build stronger communities, to build social cohesion and just to make vibrant communities," says Tombari. RBC's diversity leadership council helps ensure the company regularly meets its goals. The company's initiatives have earned it a place on the Best Diversity Employers list.

The progress has been tangible. In 1987, just one per cent of the company's executives were women, Today, that number has grown to 39 per cent, she says.

It's part of a long-term, ongoing effort to make sure diversity becomes ingrained into the culture of the organization, which includes pursuing partnerships with community agencies like the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), as well as internship programs for new immigrants and aboriginals.

It has to be a sustained effort. "It's easy to drop the ball or to think that ... once you reach a certain representation it will stay that way," says Tombari. "It's a long-term investment."

Bach agrees that it's a work in progress and now it's more important than ever to reinforce the importance of diversity in the workplace. "We can't take our foot off the pedal," he says.

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