hrreporter.com
Oct 11, 2011

It's never about the awards, but they sure look pretty

Why the Canadian HR Reporter Individual Achievement Award continues to motivate winner to do more

By Michael Bach

Now that it's officially October, it's much more challenging to recall that we did just have a summer. Most of us are back to busy and are fully ramped up for the fall quarter. Drinking on a patio is quickly becoming a distant memory and, before we know it, we'll be "drinking from the fire hose."

At the best of times, recognition isn't a strong suit for most people. That said, it's imperative that we take a moment to acknowledge our successes, if only to remind ourselves that our work matters and inspire us to work harder.

In 2009, I was lucky enough to receive some very special recognition that has had a significant impact on my job, my career and my life.

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) recognized me with an Immigrant Success (IS) Award, when I received the *Canadian HR Reporter* Individual Achievement Award as part of TRIEC's fourth annual awards. This award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated leadership and innovation in HR practice specifically in integrating skilled immigrants in the workplace.

Most people know I am passionate about my work in diversity and inclusion, and moving from the concept to the reality that we should bring our whole selves to work. Many know I have a particular passion around the experiences of newcomers to our country. Anyone who willingly moves to Canada — a place I affectionately refer to as the "icebox" — fully aware of what November through April will be like, deserves to be here and deserves our support. Skilled immigrants are the future of our country and we must ensure they are able to contribute to their fullest potential.

At KPMG, we understand the importance of skilled immigrants to our success, thanks to a strong leadership that understands that as Canadians (with deference to my First Nations and Aboriginal brothers and sisters) we are all ultimately immigrants. We actively reach out to immigrant communities to identify potential candidates through a variety of means. We have worked closely with our recruiters and hiring managers to ensure KPMG has a truly open recruiting process. We provide a variety of supports to ensure newcomers are able to acclimatize to the Canadian business culture. We work hard to ensure all our people understand culture and how to embrace difference.

Today, I am proud to say almost 15 per cent of KPMG's GTA workforce received post-secondary education outside Canada, and nearly 40 per cent were born outside of Canada.

All that said, as hard as it may be to imagine, I recognize KPMG is not the only organization doing good work when it comes to furthering the skilled immigrant integration agenda in Canada. As an avid story teller, I know there are a multitude of reasons to tell the stories of those companies and individuals that are committed to change and I believe the IS Awards are the perfect way to share those stories.

What the Immigrant Success Award means to me

It may come as a surprise to learn most HR people don't get the credit they deserve, regardless of how hard they work, or the amazing work they produce. Winning an IS Award was a huge pat on the back for the work I do when, traditionally, the diversity portfolio can be a bit of a thankless job. It may seem frivolous, but a simple acknowledgement goes a long way to putting the wind back in your sails.

The win has also provided real credibility to my work. It should go without saying the TRIEC name carries a lot of weight at KPMG, in the Toronto Region, across the country and around the world. The work TRIEC does is well

respected by my leadership. KPMG was thrilled with the recognition and media coverage. Ultimately, having TRIEC salute our work means that KPMG is enhancing its brand as an employer of choice for skilled immigrant talent. The IS Awards are well-respected at KPMG, and in the broader business community, so there's no doubt that my department and my role are viewed in a higher regard.

The award also elevated my external profile a great deal. I still regularly receive congratulations for being an IS Award recipient, even though it's been nearly two years. Winning the award has added to my reputation, and subsequently, I'm often invited to speak at events, in the media and participate in other exciting opportunities both locally and nationally.

Going back to the motivation, the award has me thinking beyond the "nine to five." The recognition inspires me to do more and continue to push the envelope when it comes to the inclusion and integration of skilled immigrants.

As you can probably tell by now, I'm a passionate individual when it comes to this area. I always work hard day-to-day, but sometimes even I need a little push to take things to the next level.

Call to action

I'm certain that most people can think of an individual within their organization or their professional circle that is exceptionally committed to supporting skilled immigrants in the workplace. The IS Award is a fantastic way to acknowledge their hard work. You can nominate yourself, or a colleague who is too humble, shy or just too darn busy. Applying for the IS Awards is very simple. Visit www.isawards.ca to complete an online application in minutes.

The deadline for submission is Dec. 1. And before you think, "December is months away," recall the distant memory of that summer patio, and get your nomination in today.

Michael Bach is the Toronto-based national director of diversity at KPMG Canada.