

Morley Gunderson.

## ▶ THE BLOGS

"Encouraging civility in the workplace promotes a low-stress work environment and improved employee morale. It also helps to mitigate employee dissatisfaction that often results in such things as civil rights complaints and lawsuits. The economic impact related to litigation, turnover, productivity and customer dissatisfaction can be devastating to an organization."

By Danita Johnson  
Hughes on the website  
workplaceviolencenews.com

## ▶ THEY SAID

"It's a little disappointing that all the famous female aviators mentioned are American (including the WASPs). What about Marion Orr, WW2 ATA ferry pilot; first Canadian woman to open a flying school and recipient of the Order of Canada? Dee Brasseur, one of the first two female CF-18 pilots and also a recipient of the Order of Canada? The list is long and illustrious."

Posted by jjohnson to Darah Hansen's workplace blog in response to a story on Snowbirds pilot L. Col. Maryse Carmichael. www.vancouver.sun.com/workplace

# HUMAN RESOURCES | Local employers grapple with global economy

A new initiative aims to help both newcomers and their potential bosses make easier transitions

BY DARAH HANSEN  
VANCOUVER SUN

Camille McMillan-Rambharat may just be the perfect example of diversity in British Columbia.

That hyphenated last name, pulling together Scotland and India. The accent an engaging blend of contemporary Caribbean and colonial England.

"And I'm black," she said, speaking to *The Sun* over the phone from her Surrey home.

The combination has certainly proved a curiosity to many Canadians since McMillan-Rambharat's arrival in Metro Vancouver with her husband and three children in December 2009 from the West Indies nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

During her initial eight-month search to land a job in her new home, many a prospective employer was prompted to ponder aloud how all the cultural pieces fit together.

"I've never been offended by it. It's a good icebreaker," McMillan-Rambharat said.

But there have been other questions from those looking to hire that didn't sit quite so well with her.

Queries such as "Where is Trinidad?" and "What's your first language?" took her by surprise and left her wondering just how qualified some provincial employers really were to welcome a growing global workforce.

In one interview, McMillan-Rambharat, whose professional experience is in marketing and public relations, was asked how she expected to find her way around the city without getting lost.

She couldn't help but think the real question had more to do with assessing her level of "Western sophistication."

"When you are living outside of Canada, you see it as being global and accepting. So to come and be questioned on little things that you would think an employer would be more aware of was surprising," she said.

McMillan-Rambharat's hiring experience — and the subtle forms of discrimination she encountered — is not unique, according to the researchers behind a new employment project launched this past week by the Surrey-based immigrant services organization, DIVERSEcity Community Resources.

Indeed, as B.C. looks to attract more and more skilled immigrants within its borders in order to address a looming labour shortage, many employers agree they are ill-prepared to tap into the new talent pool.

"What I hear a lot more of is 'I want to do this. We know we need to do this, but I just don't know how,'" said Ian Cook of the B.C. Human Resources Management Association, one of various local interest groups that participated in the 18-month-long project.

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CAMILLE  
MCMILLAN-RAMBHARAT  
SURREY RESIDENT WHO CAME FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO IN 2009

Cook said the issue is particularly evident among small and medium-sized businesses which have yet to develop diversity policies that have become necessary in today's evolving global economy.

At the same time, newcomers, too, face a steep learning curve when entering the Canadian workforce, where career success is based on more than just the ability to do the job, but also a person's ability to integrate into office culture.

"Important information here isn't just shared at meetings or in orientations or through formal updates.

"A lot of it is informal, having coffee together [with co-workers] or maybe going for beer after work. Often a new

immigrant is not aware of the importance of those connections or don't have those habits," said Jody Johnson, project consultant with Peers Employment and Education Resources in Burnaby.

Johnson said the goal of the new Embracing Cultural Diversity in the BC Workplace project is to break down these barriers through information and education.

As of Jan. 20, both employers and potential employees can now access the latest tips, strategies and research at [www.getintheknow.ca](http://www.getintheknow.ca).

As well, a new workplace guidebook has been published to help companies draft future diversity policies, and a series of training sessions is scheduled throughout the metro region to provide training to both employers and immigrant job seekers.

"There are all kinds of information and tools here that employers have never had before," said Cook.

Johnson said the strategies offered through the project go beyond recruitment issues to focus on retention and integration strategies, rather than recruitment.

In the post-recession economy, employers are eager to learn what they can, and should be doing better to keep workers productive and engaged, she said.

Among the many recommendations, employers are encouraged to develop bias-free

interview questions, inform themselves on how foreign work credentials fit into Canada's own standards and use plain language when offering a job to a potential employees in order to avoid communication problems.

Cook said he knows of one local case where a man was offered a job but told in his hiring letter he would be working the "graveyard shift." He didn't show up to work.

"It just didn't translate," he said of the phrase.

Developing policies that recognize, celebrate and acknowledge workforce benefits of diversity; training managers, supervisors and workers to be more culturally competent; and helping newcomers learn English are also suggested.

McMillan-Rambharat said she applauds any measures that ease the way for immigrant job-seekers to connect with Canadian employers, and vice versa.

Success depends on both parties sharing responsibility.

"The newcomer has to adopt to the Canadian way and the employer has to embrace and be open to diversity," she said.

As for that interview question that almost stumped her in those early months of her arrival?

"I Google everything," was her reply.

She got the job.

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