

# Onboarding Syrian Refugees: A Toolkit For Employers



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# Onboarding Syrian Refugees: A Toolkit For Employers

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# Introduction

**The purpose of this Toolkit is to assist employers in BC to more effectively recruit, hire, onboard and retain a diverse workforce that includes Syrian refugees. Employers who use the Toolkit will increase their knowledge of culturally sensitive hiring and retention practices and will boost their ability to create more inclusive workplaces.**

Individuals who have lived and worked all, or most, of their lives in varying workplaces in Canada have naturally adopted and generally understand established Canadian workplace practices and norms. However, newcomers to BC, and even more so refugees, do not have that background and need assistance from their employer to integrate into the workplace and become a productive member of the workforce and, ultimately, their community.

To effectively create a welcoming and inclusive workplace and successfully integrate new employees, who can contribute to productivity, employers need to take a planned approach that follows practical steps.

This Toolkit provides clear information, guidelines and best practices and tips for implementing successful onboarding practices in multiple workplace environments, including construction

and hospitality, which have unique needs and practices unlike typical office environments. As well, background information about Syrian refugees is provided at the end of this document.

Throughout this document, the terms newcomers and immigrants are used interchangeably and include both immigrants and refugees. It is important to note that the focus of this Toolkit is on Syrian refugees; however, many of the practices and resources could be applied to any newcomer group.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Since Fall 2015**, Canada has welcomed over 27,000 refugees from Syria. Canadians across the country have provided support to help these newcomers settle. Resettling refugees is a proud and important part of Canada's humanitarian tradition. Employers are also taking an active interest in welcoming Syrian refugees, as some of these newcomers represent an untapped source of potential workers.

**Find out more** about the steps the Government of Canada is taking to welcome Syrian refugees: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/index.asp>

# The Business Case for Hiring Syrian Refugees

**Fact:** BC businesses will not have the labour required to meet their workforce needs. An aging workforce, relatively low birth rates and a growing economy in particular sectors means there will not be enough new entrants to the workforce to fill job openings. As a result, employers will need to look at other talent pools, including immigrants, to meet their workforce needs.

## Immigrants are a critical part of the solution to BC's skill and labour shortages.

It is common knowledge that businesses, which are able to attract, integrate and retain a diverse talent pool benefit from an expanded knowledge and skills base. We know that there is a direct correlation between diverse workforces and innovation and global market expansion. Most of the practices and actions that an employer can take to attract, hire and retain immigrant talent are also just good business practices.

Businesses that continue to thrive and grow understand the business imperative of adopting hiring practices and policies that will increase their ability to hire and retain newcomer employees and to create more inclusive workplaces. These practices may include reaching out to immigrant talent pools through expanded recruitment methods, connecting with immigrant job seekers through community organizations, and facilitating workplace integration through onsite programs.

Construction Sector Growth: 15,000 construction jobs will remain unfilled due to labour shortages over the next several years. This shortage during a period of high demand will require that many employers seek non-traditional workers, including Syrian refugees, many of whom already have a construction background.

—2016 BC CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SURVEY, BC CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION

### EMPLOYER EXAMPLE:

**AMPCO Manufacturers:** Having realized that its sales and customer-service departments were too homogenous, AMPCO viewed hiring newcomers as a business opportunity. The company made a commitment to change hiring practices in order to reflect its customer base better. By identifying the critical skills needed within the company, AMPCO began to focus on what newcomers could bring to the team, rather than on their perceived deficits. They invested in the development of their immigrant employees, for example, by offering them English-language training. As well, they provided training to Canadian-born staff members to help them better communicate with colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

—2016 IEC-BC EMPLOYER FORUM:  
UNLOCK BIAS, LEVERAGE GLOBAL TALENT

### Relevant Resources:

**Canada-British Columbia Job Grant**  
<https://www.workbc.ca/Employer-Resources/Canada-BC-Job-Grant/What-is-the-Canada-B-C-Job-Grant.aspx>

# Preparing Your Workforce to Welcome Refugees

## Don't just assume your workforce is ready to accept refugees as workers.

Managers and supervisors, who have a responsibility for leading teams, need all kinds of support to be effective in their role. This includes clear expectations and training for managers and peers on how to work with teams from diverse backgrounds effectively.

Before a supervisor is tasked with managing workers, who are refugees, they should be provided with information about potential cultural differences. This information also needs to be shared with existing employees. It is recommended that all managers, who will be supervising Syrian refugees, be provided with access to this Toolkit.

## Give support to everyone in your workplace.

To get the maximum return on investment by hiring diverse talent, employers need to ensure that their current employees, as well as the new immigrant hires, achieve a level of comfort that allows them to be productive, supports their professional development, and encourages them to make a long-term commitment to the organization. There are a few simple steps that employers can take to ensure that the new employee will succeed and contribute to the organization's goals.

Employers can develop a more inclusive workplace that embraces refugees as employees:

**Host** monthly company luncheons and holiday events, enabling employees to practise their English and build relationships with their peers.

**Train** all employees in cultural competency and in ways to communicate in a culturally diverse workplace.

**Implement** team-building activities for new employees and managers that allow them to learn from each other. This includes a buddy system where longer-term employees are linked with new workers to provide guidance on a range of issues in the workplace and language skills development.



Employees across the organization should be encouraged to ask questions and have open lines of communication. Many issues often stem from not understanding the culture. Again, identifying a peer leader to act as the refugee's buddy will not just benefit the newcomer, but it can also provide the existing employee with an important relationship.

### EMPLOYER EXAMPLE:

**After visiting a refugee camp** in Lebanon, Mohamad Fakih, CEO of Paramount Fine Foods in Ontario, made a commitment that each of his stores would hire three to five refugees by the end of this year. Fakih is the first to admit it'll be a challenge, but one, he says, that is worth it.

It will require 10-15 per cent more training than [training] a Canadian employee but our team is excited because they feel like they're doing something good," he said. "They come with a lot of knowledge, education and experience. If we really take our time to communicate with them, I'm sure a lot of Canadians can learn from the Syrians... Now they're in Canada and we need to support that. The bottom line is get these people on their feet."

—BRIAN JOHNSON, HUFFINGTON POST CANADA, MARCH 23, 2016



# Effective Onboarding: Create a Welcoming and Safe Environment

## Effective onboarding leads to retention.

There are a few important components of any new employee's first few weeks or months on the job. These include orientation, training and development, setting expectations, and onsite support. Regardless of skill level, occupation or previous experience, new immigrants will have some differences that require an adjustment for themselves, for their managers and for other employees. These differences can stem from cultural backgrounds, understanding of workplace behaviours and practices, or communication styles. Newcomers can face challenges integrating into the workforce because of cultural differences in workplace interactions.

## Address workplace culture.

It is useful to recognize examples of cultural differences in the workplace to avoid taking things personally and improve relationship with co-workers. Many of your daily misunderstandings at work are nothing more than clear examples of cultural differences in the workplace. What are the norms of behaviour, communication and dress? And what is the breaks, social conversation, or meeting etiquette? These are the critical success factors to cover in orientation. Cultures vary widely in their approaches to verbal and non-verbal communication, personal space, hierarchy, teamwork, initiative, formality, punctuality and privacy.

### WHY ONBOARDING MATTERS TO SMALL BUSINESS?

For small businesses with limited resources, a good onboarding program is a wise investment for three reasons:

- **It boosts productivity.** Studies show that a strong onboarding program can boost new hire productivity by **70%**.
- **It helps you retain more employees.** Organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by **82%**.
- **It builds culture.** Cultivating a strong culture in your workplace takes time. If you can't retain employees, that process takes even longer. With a structured onboarding program, employees are **58%** more likely to be with your company after three years.

—ZENEFITS BLOG, MAY 5, 2016

### "TO SHARE OR NOT TO SHARE?"

Many of the examples of cultural differences have to do with how much people share about themselves and their families with their co-workers. How much is too much? It really depends on whom you ask.

In some cultures, people tend not only to share a lot about themselves but also to ask about other people's families. They can often surprise a colleague with a question like, "How's your aunt Margie doing?" when the colleague no longer remembers that her aunt had an operation a month earlier. They ask because they care and they expect others to care about them as well. So when nobody asks people from these cultures about their sick child or their cousin, who got married, they tend to feel isolated and disengaged. If you use these cultural differences at work as an opportunity to learn from each other, you can make it a much better workplace.

## Why introductions make sense.

Many immigrants come from countries where relationships must be developed before work can get done. Facilitating introductions with peers will help them start on the right foot. Employers often encourage new hires to make themselves comfortable in their new workspace, and to ask questions when needed, but the newcomer may not know whom to ask, or may be hesitant to approach colleagues, who are very busy. Orientation for refugees should also include basic introductions to common workplace norms and practices.

## Make health and safety paramount.

As employers will be recruiting workers, who are new to Canada and may have very different understanding of workplace health and safety, it is very important to provide an extensive health and safety program, including skills training, to minimize safety-related worksite issues.

Employers need to keep in mind that some immigrants experienced less regulated working conditions in their home country. In order to maintain a high-performance workforce, employers must ensure an in-depth orientation to health and safety training before new workers enter the workplace.

As English will be a second language for refugees, the health and safety orientation needs to be simple but comprehensive. It is useful to provide visual aids and information in second languages. Some employers have engaged employees, who are fluent in the newcomer's language, to assist with explaining the most important concepts.

It is important for employers to understand that refugees may end up working in industries that differ from their previous experiences, in a job that they are not accustomed to doing, or using tools or machines that they have never used before.

Newcomers need to know that they have the right to know about health and safety hazards on the job. While these may be common-sense for existing workers, they can be a fairly new concept for refugee workers. It is also important for refugee workers to understand that they have a right to refuse unsafe work, and that it is completely legal and appropriate to refuse to do work that they think might hurt them or another worker.

### EMPLOYER EXAMPLE:

A BC windows manufacturing company that has hired many newcomers, including refugees, recognizes there are different learning styles and levels of English language proficiency. Its approach to training newcomers on health and safety standards includes:

- Setting up “pods” of newcomers from the same country or who speak the same language with a bilingual employee assigned to be the interpreter and translator for the pod.
- Designing training modules focused on specific tasks with more visual aids to reinforce learning.
- Providing the critical information first, followed by less “risky” content, so as not to overwhelm the newcomer employee.

### Relevant Resources:

#### Onboarding Skilled Immigrants

<http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/2013/01/09/tips-for-onboarding-skilled-immigrants/>

#### Retaining Talent

<http://iecbc.ca/employer-resources/retain-talent/provide-support>

Newcomers to Canada may need to be informed of very basic occupational health and safety standards, including, but not limited, to the following:

- Using safety equipment—both personal protective equipment and safety equipment on tools and machines—that the employer requires.
- Requirement to tell the employer if they see any broken equipment or spot any safety problems.
- Ensure they understand their right not to use any equipment or machinery that could harm them or another worker.
- Act responsibly in the workplace.
- Report any health and safety violations to the employer.



# Supporting Syrian Refugees in the Workplace

## It is imperative to create a welcoming environment.

Before the new hire arrives, managers and employees of the organization should familiarize themselves with potential cultural differences, to help ease the newcomer's orientation and better prepare the organization for success.

## Leverage your current workforce.

**Assign a buddy.** Internal mentor-buddy programs are excellent ways to help a new hire integrate, and to allow the mentor to develop cross-cultural coaching skills. A mentor or a buddy is a colleague who shows the new employee around, makes introductions and informs the new employee about the often unspoken nuances of the workplace culture. He/she also provides feedback. This responsibility should be part of the mentor or buddy's job description, and not a task that is piled on top of an already full workload.

Companies that leverage their existing workforce to welcome new employees are more likely to create a welcoming environment.

## Support beyond the workplace.

Look for ways to extend the mentor-buddy relationship beyond the workplace and into the community. Some firms actively engage mentors as cultural informants, helping their mentees overcome settlement challenges outside of the workplace and learn more about life in the community. Over time, many mentoring relationships can grow into personal friendships, and what more powerful way to retain new immigrant talent than through an empowered friendship?

As a less formal program, consider having family-friendly work social events, where all family is welcome. Be mindful not to confine the idea of family to "bring your kids", but extend the invitation to the senior generation as well. This will allow the family members to make connections with their peers so they can be better supported, and alleviate some of the familial pressure the worker may feel, allowing them to be a better worker.

Keep in mind that some Syrian refugees may be reluctant to take part in social gatherings that celebrate religious holidays of other faiths, or where alcohol is served, so keep these gatherings simple and available to all.

## Learn more tips on how to retain Immigrant Talent:

<http://www.iecbc.ca/employer-resources/retain-talent>

# Reasonable Accommodation Measures

**Why it matters:** Employers have a positive “duty,” under the law, to accommodate an employee’s religious observances, where doing so would not cause the employer undue hardship.

Religion is a protected ground under BC Human Rights Law, as well as under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Therefore, employers are required to reasonably accommodate religious practices. What is deemed to be reasonable differs from workplace to workplace.

Most workplaces in British Columbia provide statutory holidays. Employers can include some basic accommodations to make up for this when employing an individual, who is Muslim. For example, in the Muslim faith, Friday is the holy day, as opposed to Sunday. For employees working shifts, possible accommodations could include scheduling the employee for an evening shift on Friday, after the midday prayer, or scheduling the employee on Saturdays or Sundays instead of Fridays.

## The majority of Syrian refugees are practising Muslims.

For an organization with a Monday to Friday workweek, scheduling in such a way would be outside of the bounds of reasonable accommodation. It would not be reasonable for an organization to change its operating hours to accommodate an employee. However, allowing for an extended Friday lunch break for the employee to attend Friday

prayer service could be a possible alternative. If it is not possible to alter the working hours, then the employee would not participate in the Friday prayers.

## Prayers can be accommodated in any workplace.

Another important aspect of the Muslim faith is the Salah prayers, which occur five times a day. These are based on the time of day, and so shift accordingly. One prayer occurs before sunrise, a second one in the early afternoon, a third one in the early evening, and then two more occur at night. In a typical work day, there would be one or two Salah prayers. Prayers take approximately 10 minutes to complete, including the pre-prayer washing of the feet. Because the prayer times follow the trajectory of the sun, the daily prayer times shift throughout the calendar year.

In most work environments, Muslim employees will be able to pray during their typical break times. In an organization where breaks are flexible, the Salah prayers can be fairly simple to accommodate by allowing the employee to take their breaks at prayer times, and providing a space for them to pray in, such as a private quiet room.

In companies that are more rigid in their break schedules, such as a factory or a construction setting, it is reasonable for Muslim employees to expect that prayers are to be done only on scheduled break times. It would not be reasonable to require a pause in the assembly line or shift schedules for the entire work group to meet specific prayer times. Instead,

## Reasonable Accommodation Measures

CONTINUED

the employee would conduct the prayer at a later, more suitable, time and location, even if that means waiting until he or she has gone home after work.

### Location is flexible.

It is ideal for the prayer to take place in a private space, where the employee is able to wash prior to the commencement of the prayer. Sometimes this can be done in a private room on the work site, or even in the First-Aid room on construction sites. If washing is not an option, the prayer can still take place.

### Safety first.

During the prayer, the employee may not respond to verbal discussions. However, prayer can and should be interrupted in the event of an emergency.

### What is the Ramadan holiday?

Muslims also celebrate Ramadan, which requires fasting during daylight hours, as well as the festival of Eid-ul-Adha, also known as the festival of sacrifice. The day is observed at the end of the hajj or yearly pilgrimage to Mecca, approximately two months and ten days after the end of Ramadan. The day is celebrated by all Muslims, not only those performing the ritual of the hajj.

### EXAMPLE: PUTTING REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION INTO PRACTICE IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR.

**Situation:** you have just hired a new employee, who is a practising Muslim, as a construction labourer. He has asked if it is possible to participate in daily prayers at the work site. He will be responsible for general clean-up of the project site, which is working on the open upper floors of a high-rise tower. Breaks are scheduled for each crew based on the workflow for the day. When there is a scheduled down time, everyone takes a short break. The crew eats lunch together at the site, and there is a portable washroom for everyone to use on the floor. Access to and from the work site is by the elevator, which is used during the day by several work crews. There is not sufficient time for someone to take the elevator to the ground during a break. The site does not have any private space available.

#### What you need to consider:

“Reasonable accommodation” means meeting the employee’s request without causing undue hardship to the employer. In this case, it would not be considered reasonable to provide a private space at the work site. Instead, you should acknowledge the employee’s request and indicate that it will not be possible to provide the private space for prayers at the work location.

**Result:** The employee would instead conduct the prayer at a later, more suitable, time and location, even if that means waiting until he has gone home after work.

**Find out more:**

**BC Muslim Association**

<http://www.thebcma.com>

**Manager's Guide to  
Reasonable Accommodation**

[http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/for-hiring-managers/resources-for-hiring-managers/a\\_managers\\_guide\\_to\\_reasonable\\_accommodation\\_2016.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/for-hiring-managers/resources-for-hiring-managers/a_managers_guide_to_reasonable_accommodation_2016.pdf)

**Employer's Guide to Islamic  
Religious Practices**

<http://www.nccm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/NCCM-Employer-GUIDE-PF.pdf>



# Providing Language Support

## **Fact: the primary language spoken by 90% of Syrian refugees is Arabic.**

As part of their settlement activities, Syrian refugees are likely to obtain basic language instruction from the Government of Canada or through various settlement organizations. The Resettlement Assistance Program, sponsored by the Government of Canada, provides language training to refugees. Courses ranging from beginner (no English) to advanced lessons, and workplace specific skills such as resume writing, are being offered to newcomers. However, there are long wait lists, so some of the refugees may not have attended language training classes or have attended informal language classes offered through other community or cultural organizations. Yet, they are eager to enter the workforce.

Some refugees will have obtained a reasonable level of proficiency in written and oral English, suitable for the work environment. However, employers should be prepared to provide ongoing language training and support, as described further in this Toolkit.

## **Perfect English is not needed to perform every role.**

Employers have a general obligation to provide their employees with adequate training, to help employees obtain the required knowledge, skills and abilities to perform their current and future roles. This may include literacy skills such as oral communication, reading and writing.

### **EMPLOYER EXAMPLE:**

**Breadsource**, a wholesale bakery in Toronto, has hired Syrian workers through an immigrant employment service. There, language isn't always a barrier to employment – depending on the job.

“We may need them to understand some English because safety is involved, although we have many other employees who speak different languages who can translate,” said Caroline Babakhanian, the bakery's office administrator. “But if worse comes to worse, we'll put them in an area where safety is not a major issue – where they're packaging by hand and wearing gloves – while supporting them to improve their English skills.”

—GLOBE AND MAIL, MAY 6, 2016

If stronger business English is required, employers can use several resources to locate the right service or tool to help assess and develop the language skills of Syrian workers. Employers can provide sector-specific English language training or subsidize the cost of language training outside the workplace. Employers with a large enough employee base may wish to consider providing or subsidizing customized, in-house, workplace-specific language training.

## Use the CLB Benchmark.

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks offers a free e-learning portal for HR professionals, employers and assessors: <https://www.language.ca/>.

The CLB benchmarks help you understand the level of language proficiency that is required for a particular job. Once you know exactly what you're looking for in a job applicant's language skills, you can refer any applicant for a CLB assessment to assess his or her language skills against your requirements.

**As any other employee, a refugee will have personal and professional ambitions to grow and develop with the organization. By providing various career paths and training opportunities, employers can increase employee satisfaction leading to long-term retention. Employers are encouraged to provide on-the-job training, as well as to promote and support apprenticeships and other skills-based development for refugees.**

—GLOBE AND MAIL, MAY 6, 2016



## HOW-TO:

# CONDUCT A CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE INTERVIEW

Interviewing across cultures requires awareness of cultural differences and norms. Employers, who are conscious of how culture influences body language, values and interests, work ethic, habits, and self-expression, will be better equipped to evaluate an immigrant's job skills and qualifications fairly. As an employer, it is important to recognize that some newcomer job-seekers have never been in a job interview before.

Interviewing may be a language minefield for the interviewee. Consider the difficulties you might have trying to understand questions in such a stressful environment, using a language that is not your mother tongue. Culture can also have a strong influence on the way someone responds to an interview question. Some of the information that interviewees are typically asked to provide may be considered inappropriate in certain cultures. For example, identifying personality traits or promoting oneself may be seen as impolite, or even perceived as bragging by people, who are Muslim. Likewise, identifying a weakness could be seen as losing face.

### INTERVIEW TIPS

**Do some research.** Since you do not want to make assumptions and generalizations, it is useful to get some understanding of the newcomer's cultural background before the interview.

**Start the interview right.** At the beginning of the interview, take some time to explain the process. Tell the candidate that you are going to ask some questions, take some notes, and mention to the candidate

that he/she will also have an opportunity to ask questions. You want to provide thorough information about the scope of the interview.

**Avoid using slang.** As English is not the primary, or in some cases, secondary language of the newcomer, miscommunications are common and should be anticipated. Avoid slang, jargon, acronyms and unnecessarily technical language, and be alert to the pace of the conversation, as well as the body language and expression. If small talk is atypical, don't let this cloud your judgement. This can be particularly important in the early phase of an interview process when engaging in small talk is common.

**Always use language that is immigrant-friendly and allow for differences in communication styles.**

**Respect personal space.** Be aware that definitions of personal space differ between cultures. Different cultures have varying comfort levels regarding personal space. For Syrian refugees, the typical personal space may be larger than what is generally accepted by most Canadians. Some Muslims refrain from all physical contact with unrelated persons of the opposite gender, which could include hand-shaking. If unsure, it is completely appropriate to ask someone if they shake hands before engaging in the practice. What seems rude or forward to you, or reticent and retiring, may have an entirely different meaning to someone else.

**Use practice-based assessment.** If language is a barrier to accurate assessment, use practice-based ways of determining a candidate's ability, which is a very valuable approach for all candidates. Focus on asking for examples and specifics or enable the candidate to demonstrate their skills. This is a common way to evaluate new workers in skilled trades in Canada, and it can be extended to other industries, where appropriate. Ask what experience the candidate has that is relevant and valuable in Canada, instead of asking about their specific Canadian experience.

**The most impactful element of communication is the non-verbal component, closely followed by the tone of voice. Body language and modulation vary greatly from person to person and often result in miscommunication.**

**Invite questions.** Typically, we end interviews by asking a candidate, "Do you have any questions for me?" Some newcomers are not used to being asked this question, which in the Syrian culture may be associated with challenging authority. Assure the candidate they can ask any question about either the job or the process of selection. For example, you can say, "Now that we have discussed your knowledge and skills, you must have some questions about the job or about what it is like to work at our company. You can ask me any question that you have."

Consider this... Many companies conduct "behavioural-based" job interviews, so that cultural differences and the applicants' lack of Canadian work experience don't undercut their chances of being hired.

How questions are framed is also very important. "Good interview questions, regardless of whom you are interviewing, should be framed behaviourally," says Ian Cameron, managing director of The McQuaig Institute.

"Ask for stories that will exemplify the skills you require in the role you are filling by starting with 'tell me about a time when, for example, you had to collaborate with a number of others on a project or you had to act on a problem with very little direction.' Culturally, their story may be very different than a story you would have experienced. Make the context of the story secondary to the explicit description of the skills you are seeking and listen for good examples of those skills being used and producing results."

—CAREERS, FINANCIAL POST, MAY 3, 2013

### Relevant Resources:

#### How to Conduct a Culturally-Sensitive Interview?

<http://iecbc.ca/employer-resources/hire-talent/conduct-culturally-savvy-interviews>

#### Resources for How to Hire Immigrant Talent

<http://www.iecbc.ca/employer-resources/hire-talent>

#### Hiring Immigrant Talent Webinar Series

<http://courses.hrma.ca/courses/hiring-immigrant-talent>

## HOW-TO:

# ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS

One of the most important steps that employers can take with new employees is to establish mutual, clearly understood expectations. A new country, a new organization, a new work environment - it is a lot for any new employee, regardless of where that person is from. To alleviate misunderstanding, the manager and new employee need to share mutual expectations early in the relationship. The focus is not just on what you expect from the employee, but also what he or she can expect from you as their manager, or from the company.

**Talk about expectations.** Not just what you expect from the employee, but also what they can expect from you. Employers can use a simple process to establish mutual expectations with new employees. Simply take a piece of paper and create two columns. Label one column, “Manager”, and the other column, “Employee”. Or better yet, label one column with your name and the other column with the new employee’s name. Then in the column under the manager’s name, begin to list what the new employee can expect from you, their manager.

**Share your management style.** Use statements such as, “you can expect me to provide you with support to do your job,” or “you can expect me to provide you with feedback on how you are doing in your new role”. Try to avoid jargon that we may understand but that would be unusual to a newcomer. Instead of saying, “I have an open-door policy,” you can state, “please come to

see me anytime if you have questions. I will try to make myself available to answer any questions you may have.”

**Set clear expectations.** After discussing and listing several items that the new employee can expect from you, begin to create a list in the column under the Employee’s name. It is important to explain key requirements of the job, key performance issues, and goals of the work team and/or organization. Expectations need to be clear, concrete and timely. Here is where you will continue to use plain and simple language to indicate the key success factors required in their role. You can include anything that is critical to the job.

Again, instead of saying, “Shifts start at 8 AM”, use language, which directly reflects your expectations, such as, “You start your work shift by 8 AM”. Also include behaviour expectations, such as, “I expect you to come talk to me if you have any concerns or questions”.

**The process of establishing mutual expectations with any new employee is a powerful tool to develop a positive relationship.**

## HOW-TO:

### ESTABLISH A BUDDY SYSTEM

A mentorship or a buddy system is a highly effective way to address or prevent many of the onboarding issues previously described. Many organizations have internal mentorship programs that are excellent ways to help a new hire to integrate, and to allow the mentor or buddy to grow professionally as well.

**A buddy system is a simple yet effective way to align current employees with newcomers, with both receiving benefits for participating.**

A buddy arrangement is essentially assigning an existing employee to act as the primary contact person for the newcomer employee for a specific period of time during the orientation and onboarding period. It is preferable to have someone who is a peer at a similar level and job function. It is imperative to identify and assign the function of a peer buddy to individuals, who take the role seriously, and who are encouraged and supported by the company to take on the role. The buddy may or may not be from the same cultural background. It is more important to identify existing employees, who share a positive passion for the company and are excellent ambassadors for new employees.

#### What can a buddy do?

- Welcome the employee on their first day and provide an orientation to the workplace.
- Take breaks together so the employee has someone they know and is not left alone during non-work times and activities.
- Help the newcomer understand the typical language used in the workplace and profession.
- Invite the newcomer to become involved in social activities with co-workers.
- Explain the workplace culture and, in particular, its unspoken aspects.

#### Designing a Buddy Program:

[http://www.hr.com/en/communities/training\\_and\\_development/designing-a-buddy-program\\_eacwm5gu.html](http://www.hr.com/en/communities/training_and_development/designing-a-buddy-program_eacwm5gu.html)

**Expand mentoring beyond your company.** Mentoring and Networking don't just have to be internal. Consider an external mentor, outside of your workforce. You can introduce your employees to IEC-BC's **MentorConnect** and **Connector** programs. These programs provide excellent opportunities to learn best practices and industry information and build local professional networks, and they are a great way to advance mentoring beyond the workplace.

## HOW-TO:

### COMMUNICATE AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Managers who set clear, understandable expectations with a new employee will have established a clear means to provide effective direction and feedback. Employers need to create opportunities to provide frank direction as well as constructive feedback in the first weeks and months. Sometimes, we, as Canadians, are too polite, and couch criticism in a way that is not clear.

A newcomer might not hear criticism that is too subtly expressed. He or she wants to perform well, get along with colleagues and contribute to the team, but needs the information to do so. Hence, an ongoing discussion about expectations, from job responsibilities, duties and office culture to performance monitoring and talent development, is the best way to begin the relationship with a new employee. Coaching them to grow in their new position and to reach their goals will benefit the newcomer employee as well as your organization.

#### **Ask for input and provide feedback.**

Many immigrants may be more familiar with hierarchical leadership styles where authority is not questioned, so their input may have to be directly requested. When it is time to provide feedback, managers sometimes “sandwich” negative feedback between pieces of positive feedback. However, some immigrants may appreciate specific direction to focus on key areas of improvement. Speak frankly, give praise as due, and solicit discussion.

Going back to the expectation model discussed earlier, inform the employee that their input is actually welcome and expected.

**Manage conflicts.** Established team members may deal with other team members directly, but some immigrants may be accustomed to asking supervisors to deal with issues with other team members. It is important to facilitate and coach immigrant employees on how to be a team member by raising and discussing issues directly with others.

**Delegate tasks.** Supervisors typically delegate and expect their staff to take initiative on projects. However, immigrants from some cultures may expect firm direction from the boss. Finding the right balance between providing direction and encouraging a newcomer employee to take initiative and make decisions on their own takes time and encouragement.

#### **Related Resources:**

##### **Top 10 Tips for Communicating With Anyone in the World**

<http://dfaintercultural.com/top-10-tips-for-communicating-with-anyone-in-the-world>

##### **Use Good Communication Skills**

<http://work.chron.com/use-good-communication-skills-crosscultural-diversity-8317.html>

## BACKGROUND:

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SYRIAN REFUGEES?

A refugee is a person who has left their home country because they have well-founded grounds for fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. They are unable to obtain sanctuary in or protection from their home country, so they move somewhere where they will be safe.

Resettling refugees is an important part of Canada's humanitarian tradition. It demonstrates to the world that we have a shared responsibility to help people who are displaced and persecuted. Canada is accepting refugees for resettlement to give them a chance to establish their lives and give their children better opportunities.

#### POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Syrian refugees are Syrians who have fled from their home country as a result of the Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011. Syria has been under the rule of President Bashar al-Assad since 2000, when he was elected in an uncontested election after his father's 30-year rule. Dissent began to build and culminated in the Arab Spring, a wave of revolts in countries across the Middle East. This quickly turned a once peaceful country into a war-torn land, as various rebel groups formed along religious lines to try and overthrow the current government.

Because the civil war had broken out along religious lines, this has made the war even more dangerous for Syrians. There are a variety of religions in Syria, and people are only safe while groups, who hold the same beliefs, are in power.

The conflict has since caused widespread displacement. Since 2011, Syrians' lives have been disrupted, and they have been living in a state of constant fear and uncertainty. Refugees have been displaced for many years now, often living in refugee camps where it is difficult to find work, conditions are poor and children are unlikely to have access to schools.

As of July 2015, an estimated 4 million Syrians had fled to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq, with over half of that number being women and children.

Before the conflict, Syria had a growing economy based on agriculture, oil, industry and services. Since 2011, its economy has contracted by more than 50 percent.

#### EDUCATION

President al-Assad had made a number of reforms to the education system to increase access to public schools throughout the country. Pre-war Syria had an 86 percent literacy rate and almost one quarter were enrolled in higher education.

While many Syrians have had their education interrupted, there are also many who have completed post-secondary education. A large number of Syrians had been in school for Information Technology, which was a growth industry before the civil war. It is known that Syrian refugees come from all education and socio-economic backgrounds; however, currently, comprehensive data on their education and skills is not available. This is, in part, due to the fact that many refugees flee their countries without anything other than bare necessities, which does not include educational certificates or related documents.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SYRIAN REFUGEES?

CONTINUED

### AGE

Nearly half of the resettled refugees in Canada are of working age, between 25 and 64. Another 21 percent are 15-24 years old, and are just entering the workforce. Over 50 percent of the refugees are under the age of 19.

### FAMILY UNITS

Syria has a largely patriarchal society, in which a man, usually the oldest, is the head of household. Families are often large, extended family units – with two parents, three or more children, as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins.

#### **Learn more:**

##### **Syrian Refugees in Canada, Population Profile**

<http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Cultural/EN%20Syrian%20Population%20Profile.pdf>





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