

CREATING OPPORTUNITY

The employment potential of the aboriginal community

By Sean Moon

With fewer young workers entering the foodservice labour market than ever before, Canadian restaurateurs find themselves with an increasingly challenging dilemma: Where will they find the workers necessary to fill the expected 35,000 job vacancies by 2015? What kinds of strategies will be required to find and recruit those workers and how can business owners best prepare themselves to bring aboard these new recruits?

As Jon Kiely of the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council reported in the July/August issue of CRFN, it has become apparent that foodservice operators will need to look at non-traditional labour pools if the industry is to see any sustainable growth. High employee turnover, seasonal employment and an aging Canadian workforce are often cited as major



Kelly J Lendsay reasons for the projected shortage of foodservice workers, so employers will need to explore several untapped markets to fill the jobs that will help to serve their restaurant customers.

BENEFITS COMMUNITY

In addition to new Canadians, temporary foreign workers and older employees transitioning into or out of retirement, it appears the Canadian aboriginal community may offer one of the best opportunities for restaurant owners to solve their hiring problem. According to Kelly J. Lendsay, president and CEO of the Aboriginal Human Resource Council, recruiting and hiring aboriginal Canadians is turning out to be the perfect solution for a growing number of foodservice employers, not only for their industry or business challenges but for the aboriginal community as a whole.

“Business owners historically don’t react unless there are pressure points. But now that a skilled labour shortage has come to the forefront, they’re looking for answers,” says Lendsay.

“With aboriginal Canadians, we have a workforce solution that is right in

front of employers. In addition, there are economic development opportunities for new businesses in aboriginal communities. The restaurant sector collectively can accelerate Aboriginal Peoples’ success in the workforce by helping them acquire skills that will help them throughout their lives, regardless of the career path they settle on.”

PROVIDES EDUCATION

Formed in 1998, the Aboriginal Human Resource Council (AHRC) is a national not-for-profit organization that advocates the full participation of aboriginal people in Canada’s labour market on a national level. Through its advisory services, AHRC designs programs that help Canadian employers bring aboriginal people into the Canadian workforce. The council’s charity, Kocihta, helps members of the aboriginal community,





including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, to overcome challenges to reach their dreams and career potential.

Lendsay says that while there is still a long way to go for full inclusion of aboriginal people, business awareness and public perception about aboriginal workers have been moving in the right direction for several years.

“Ten years ago, you could walk into a McDonald’s or a Tim Horton’s and you would see aboriginal people buying stuff but you wouldn’t see them working there. You wouldn’t see aboriginal managers,” says Lendsay. “Today, in a place like Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, where one third of the population is aboriginal, at every Tim Horton’s I see aboriginal people working. I see managers. This is the real economic change I see across Canada.

“Companies like McDonald’s and Tim Horton’s are starting to realize that they can do more than just supply employment to management opportunities. They’re actually helping to change public attitudes.”

ASSESSES NEEDS

Through their programs, the AHRC works with employers in three main areas: advisory services, diagnostics and training and recruitment. It is a systems process that not only helps businesses fill their employment needs, but also helps create a positive, inclusive atmosphere by educating their entire workforce.

“Companies improve performance when they adopt a learning and training attitude,” says Lendsay. “We provide a strong set of learning tools and knowledge for employers and also go in-house to do advisory work and training. It is really important for us to listen to companies to see where they are at. Many companies are at the very beginning stages of the Inclusion Continuum roadmap where they need some knowledge and guidance on how to build relationships with Indigenous people and communities and become inclusive employers-of-choice for Indigenous talent.”

AHRC corporate partners such as McDonald’s, Tim Horton’s and Aramark Remote Workplace Services are turning to AHRC in growing numbers to design and implement strategies and practices to improve their businesses, as well as strengthen their relationship with the aboriginal community.

PROVIDES INSIGHTS

“The AHRC program has provided us with great insights on inclusion and diversity that we, along with our employees, can benefit from,” says Len

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COMMUNITY

Jillard, chief people officer at McDonald's Canada. "For example, the council led a Mastering Aboriginal Inclusion Workshop we held in Edmonton this year, to educate our people on inclusion and diversity and how we can better attract and retain aboriginal people.

"The partnership with AHRC has proven to be of great value in a very short time," says Jillard. "Today, we have a stronger and more informed appreciation for the programs that help build an inclusive workplace. There are



not only great opportunities to work directly with the council, but also to network with, and learn from, AHRC's corporate Leadership Circle partners in our sector about best practices that may be applicable within our organization."

Aramark is another foodservice business that became involved with the

program in early 2012. Jamil Kara, Aramark's director of human resources, says the intention for joining the program was to develop an aboriginal inclusion strategy that would have a positive effect throughout their operations.

SHARE EXPERIENCES

"The biggest benefit to us as a company has been the ability to learn from and network with other companies," says Kara. "The networking within the AHRC has proven to be invaluable, as it provides us with a sounding board for internal programs, and an avenue to share best practices. We have used this network to strengthen our internal strategies, and help guide our future projects.

"Foodservice providers can choose to enroll in the program and attend events but more specifically become committed to the concepts of the AHRC and having strong aboriginal relations programs within their companies."

EVERYONE WINS

Lindsay says that while foodservice businesses can reap huge benefits from AHRC programs in terms of finding excellent employees to fill their job vacancies, the other big winners are obviously the prospective employees themselves. He adds that aboriginal workers have the same goals and dreams as most Canadians, something Lindsay calls the four "E's": Education, Employment, Economic Opportunity and (self) Esteem.

"About 70 per cent of Canadians work in the retail or foodservice sector before they eventually find their full-time career. Seven out of 10 aboriginal people don't. I want to change that.

"Aboriginal people have always had a proud tradition of work. Young aboriginal people want skills. They want jobs. Many are saving for college or university and need exactly the same thing as any other 16-24 year-old. They need the type of shaping and experience that the restaurant industry can provide."

Marks

half island