

# Tapping into the global mindset

BY AMINA ABU-BAKARE

**I**MMIGRANTS and newcomers to our country have historically made tremendous contributions to their communities. You might think that the first wave of immigration has subsided but the statistics tell a different story.

Between 1991 and 2001, 71 per cent of the growth in the Canadian labour force was attributed to immigration. By 2011 the growth was estimated to have risen to 100 per cent. Ontario usually receives over 100,000 immigrants which is approximately 60 per cent of all immigrants to Canada. The majority of these immigrants are skilled professionals who are not only university graduates but most have master's degrees and PhDs.

You might ask what has this got to do with Thunder Bay? Well here is the connection. Thunder Bay is home to two higher-education institutions that have both decided to focus on attracting international students and international trained professionals, be they physicians, or professors to other graduate professionals.

This gives Thunder Bay the opportunity to compete in the knowledge economy. Its ability to tackle the new global environment in all its complexity is essential if it is to make its mark in the global market.

Who can better drive this transformation than the knowledge workers with a global mindset? Yet how open is the community to these professionals? I have watched the



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city lose doctors and other well-trained professionals to other cities, not because they are paid any better but because they and their families feel more welcome and accepted in these communities.

What would it take for our community to realize the loss this is costing Thunder Bay? These calibre of immigrants are not only well-trained, they are global trotters who have so much to offer the city. Thunder Bay, by embracing this set of workers and their families, will not only benefit from their expertise but will also make a mark in the global market. Being global is now crucial for leaders in business and government and this has given rise to cross-border collaboration among businesses located in different parts of the globe.

Thunder Bay's businesses should be looking at how they can transcend culture by investing in culturally diverse individuals to create value for their organizations.

As service industries and information continue to drive economic growth, the need for knowledge-based occupations such as managerial, professional and related

knowledge occupations becomes important for business sustainability. Thunder Bay businesses can tap into these global mindsets.

How can this be done you may ask? First do what Thunder Bay is best known for — welcome them to the community. Second — be ready to stay the course. Cultural shock sets in about six months into their stay and that is when these families need a friendly face and sometimes a shoulder to cry on. Unlike refugees, this set of immigrants has the money and the means to take care of their families but what they really need is someone to be a friend or an extended family with an understanding for what they are going through. This should also be extended to the spouses and children. Most professionals are married to spouses who are professionals too. The family dynamics is key to the success of their mission here. Most will leave town if the spouse is not happy and cannot find fulfillment. Employers should endeavour to know their employees; after all they are the part of your investments. So, Thunder Bay, what is it going to be?

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