



The Changing Face of the Immigrant Workforce

By: Kari Heistad, Culture Coach International

Over one hundred years ago, Mr. Carlson emigrated from a rural town in Sweden to Worcester, MA. Uneducated, he found work as a janitor and he married a Swedish immigrant who had come over to work as a domestic servant. They were the classic immigrant story, drawn by what America offered: unprecedented freedom, unlimited growth, and no established social classes to hinder their progress. Fast-forward a hundred years and this story is still playing itself out, this time with immigrants from China, Mexico or Haiti. What makes the Carlson's story special is that this couple, on the lower edge of the bottom rung of the economic ladder, would change an Ivy League school.

While the Carlson's were the typical immigrants 100 years ago, they would not be par for the course today. While today's immigrants arrive for the same reasons, a chance to pursue their American Dream, they often bring with them or obtain here the knowledge, skills and degrees that American companies are seeking in their increasing reliance on the knowledge economy.

According to the 2000 US Census, 51% of immigrants have started some form of higher education. And they are more likely to obtain a graduate or professional degree than the native population (see statistics). These new, educated immigrants are skipping the

bottom of the ladder and instead landing right in the middle of corporate America. They are helping to shape the American marketplace as we move into an increasingly global economy.

Hafiz Adamjee is a true global citizen. Carrying British citizenship, he was born in East Africa, and raised in Pakistan. He came to the US eighteen years ago to attend Brown University. With an MBA from MIT's Sloan School of Management, he rose quickly to become a partner at Mercer Management Consulting, where he helped to privatize the South African railway system. Now he is the Senior Controller for Novartis' global research operations. He says that companies are relying more and more upon educated immigrants like him to fill their management positions. *"We bring valuable skills and a seasoned, diverse point of view which helps to give companies a competitive edge in an increasingly multinational marketplace."*

According to a report by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, 100% of the growth in the Massachusetts workforce over the past decade has come from immigrants. At the same time, nationwide, according to the US Dept. of Labor, over 50% of the US workforce, has come from immigrants. This inflow of new workers served as the foundation during the recent boom years when immigrants filled the corporate hallways from Boston's financial district to the technology labs of Rt. 128. And this is a trend that will continue as according to the US Census Bureau. 75% of the US population growth is coming from immigrants or the children of immigrants in the next decade.

If companies are going to compete effectively to hire and retain these new immigrants they must first recognize that these employees bring not only valuable skills to the workplace, but also cultural backgrounds that need to be interwoven into the work environment. Too often it is easier to hire these workers than it is to keep them when they face co-workers who lack cultural knowledge and sensitivity to their backgrounds. Progressive companies are training their management teams in cross cultural issues and communication skills so

Immigrant Education Levels vs. Native Population Levels

Less than HS:	30.3% (8%)
High School:	24.9% (32%)
Some College:	16.7% (30%)
Bachelors:	17.7% (20%)
Grad or Professional:	10.4% (9.8%)

Source: Center for Immigrant Studies/US Govt. Current Population Survey 3/02

that they can capitalize on the strengths that these new immigrant workers bring to the table.

I know the story of Mr. and Mrs. Carlson because they were my great grandparents. Their son made the most of his American opportunity. He attended Clark University on a scholarship, received his PhD in Geography and founded the Geography Dept. at Dartmouth College. Albert S. Carlson is known

today as, "The Father of Dartmouth Geography."

In the past it was an immigrant's children or grandchildren who added to America's competitive advantage by graduating from college. Today, the college-educated immigrant does that herself. America is a better nation because of it.

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