



## Ask a consultant | BY EVELINA SILVEIRA

*Dear Diversity@Work:*

I am a Human Resources Manager, and of late I have noticed that many of our prospective employees have problems with being understood. Their intonation sometimes makes it really hard to grasp for example, how they are feeling. I don't want to sound picky, however, our company's image is really important to us. At the same time, we really need the skills that the immigrants bring.

*Help*

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*Dear Help:*

Thank you for your letter. I appreciate you coming forward to discuss these concerns that you have. I have found that in some work environments these questions are never asked and thus many immigrants do not get to reach their potential in the workplace, and consequently companies miss out on productivity. I have asked our Diversity At Work Elocution Instructor, Leah Straatsma to answer your question. She specializes in teaching immigrants elocution, pronunciation and grammar skills. Below you will find her response.

**Leah:** We applaud the fact that you are committed to hiring employees of all backgrounds. The fact that you have come to us with your question shows your desire to want the best for your company. Investing in good employees has many benefits, regardless of their backgrounds or language barriers. However, we understand your concern. You are right: Canada is a multicultural society and the fact is that many Canadians first language is not English. Many new Canadians often enter the country without having to take specific tests to prove their language skills, especially if they are sponsored through family. This can create a variety of problems, more so for companies who are looking to hire qualified employees. Remember that your employees or prospective employees are very skilled at what they do; this is why you have hired them and/or why you are considering hiring them. Their past employment record is their foundation. Of course, their communicative skills, especially if your employee's jobs require them to be on the phone a lot, have meetings, or be out into the field, are also of great importance.

Should you feel that your current employees are lacking such skills, it may be an option to offer them elocution or language development classes. Do not be afraid to confront your current employees regarding this; remember that you are willing to support them in their professional development. Be supportive in your approach. Remind them of how important that they are to your company.

Perhaps it may be wise to pinpoint one or two achievements that they have done to convey that. Let them know that their presence is a great asset for the company and you would be willing to help them enhance that through developmental classes. Ask your employees what they feel are their weaknesses and strengths in their current position. Through your diagnosis, you may be able to determine whether or not they convey this to you in an effective way. Let them know that you value them as an employee and that you would like to help them develop their skills. Most employees will welcome this idea as they too appreciate investing in themselves. Some employees may take offense; they may feel that they are getting along just fine and don't need any extra help at all. In these instances, sensitivity is key. You don't necessarily need to agree with them, but reiterate their statements to confirm that you have heard them. For example:

**Employee:** I just don't feel that I need any more education. I've lived here for so long and have gotten along just fine without it. Why all of the sudden should I change that?

**You:** So what you're saying is that you feel that you are comfortable with here you are at right now and that you don't feel the need to change that?

Typically they will answer with a YES. Your next approach could play out like this:

**You:** Well, that is great that you feel so comfortable. How about adding to that? We like to see our employees, like you, get ahead in the marketplace. We want to ensure that you are getting the best support and in doing so, we also feel that it will be a great investment for the company as a whole. If our clients see that we believe in ourselves by helping our current employees such as you get ahead and grow, it may just be that they will take another look to see what we can offer them, as well.

Most employees would not want to turn down such an offer. Today's society is such that we all want to be the best that we can be and improve upon ourselves, especially if someone else is helping us get there! Of course, you may also want to consider having your entire team brush up on their skills. This way it is less intrusive and your whole team can experience this together. This not only will help increase everyone's productivity, but it also serves as a middle-ground where everyone is an equal and can be a great teambuilding experience.

There are a variety of options. You may want to consider taking



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some courses that pertain to pronunciation and grammar with some role-playing. You may want to consider taking some classes that practice giving presentations in English. Many of these classes are a wonderful option, especially for large groups as everyone can serve in giving feedback. Classes like these can be great fun as they act as a practice ground that can guarantee results. They tend to be stress-free, so students are apt to participating more. Mistakes are welcome and students should be willing to make them without feeling like a failure. Such classes embrace this and help remove that fear-of-failure by providing a safe-haven in which they can develop their skills more effectively through feedback and by meeting their personal goals. While hiring, ask your prospects if they would be willing to participate in developmental classes to increase their productivity. A great candidate would be someone who is willing to invest their time, not only for themselves but for the company as well. This will also help you filter out prospects who may not be so willing to help the company grow and expand in a positive manner.

To conclude, this should be a team effort supported by your CEO or managers. Once they see the benefits, your company can begin to proceed exploring their options in terms of personal development through elocution and pronunciation lessons. Never be afraid to take the step forward in personal and professional development; your willingness to help your company get ahead is just the first of many. Congratulations!

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*If you have a question for Ask a Consultant, email it to [evelina@diversityatworkinlondon.com](mailto:evelina@diversityatworkinlondon.com).*

*Evelina Silveira is the founder of Diversity@Work in London, [www.diversityatworkinlondon.com](http://www.diversityatworkinlondon.com), a business dedicated to diversity management training and consulting.*

