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Creating Meaningful Diversity in Your Workplace Can Lead to Better Business

The Canadian tech industry is doing exceptionally well and is attracting attention from national and international talent. Shopify, for example, has become a multibillion-dollar company, while Slack boasts over 10-million daily active users. Despite their successes, many tech companies, big and small, are experiencing one persistent issue. While they may be getting interest from diverse and qualified candidates, tech businesses aren't hiring many of these prospects. As such, most companies are composed predominately of folks who appear to fit the typical tech mould: CIS male and white.

A Change Worth Making

This is the way things have always been, and all companies - not just tech companies - often feel change is dangerous,

which is part of the reason why the status quo has stayed intact for so long. This could be the year that companies really start taking active steps to improve diversity in the workplace, but change won't happen on its own. We went through this change ourselves, and we can confidently tell you that it's a change worth making.

Condo Control Central is a small SaaS company that serves the condo management industry. I started the business by myself over ten years ago. When I got to the point where I could hire employees, I was excited; I had been working alone on the project for almost six months after leaving CIBC. The goal at the time was to find the most cost-effective way to bring on staff and grow the business, so we made heavy use of the co-op program at Ryerson University. The government offered a

significant subsidy for each co-op student we employed, so this hiring strategy allowed our finances to go further.

We had hired three or four students, and they had all been men. We quickly recognized that our team was lacking diversity, so my partner and I both agreed that the next hire had to be a woman. We knew that without different voices, skills, and opinions, our company's growth would ultimately be stunted. The challenge was that those particular co-op programs we were hiring from were heavily weighted towards men, so when we were looking for a new team member, five out of six candidates were men. Furthermore, the male candidates we spoke with often came into the interviews with more experience or past co-op jobs, so they were more prepared. It's a Catch-22 for women. No



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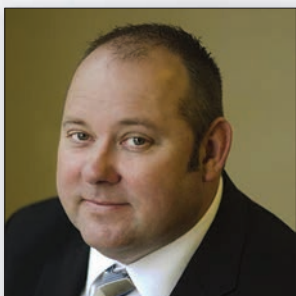
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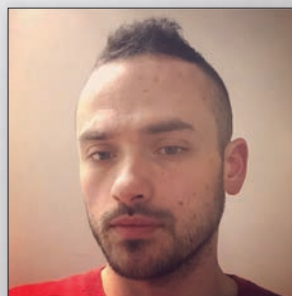
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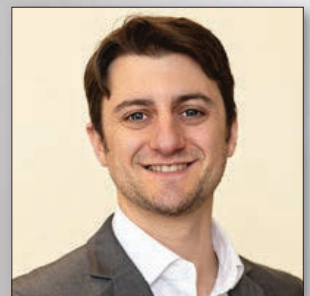
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experience; no job. But they can't get the experience they need without a job. We had to make a deliberate and conscious effort to stop this cycle.

Disrupting the Statue Quo

Here's what we did to disrupt the status quo. In the beginning, during the resume screening phase, we specifically made sure to include all viable female candidates in the "next step" phase, even if they didn't have quite as much experience. We still do this today. When it comes to finding the right fit for our sales or product development roles, the candidate pool is still very unbalanced and made up primarily of men. There are always far more candidates than we have time to interview – but we make a substantial effort to talk to every qualified woman who applies for these roles.

We take additional steps as well to ensure we carry out a genuinely fair hiring process. We have multiple interviewers on every call or interview to ensure one person's inherent biases don't influence the process. We use a standardized set of questions for each interview (whether it is over the phone, Zoom or in-person) to ensure that we are doing our best to compare different candidates for the same role objectively.

We don't give any weight to the country where the person is from, what they look like, or how they identify themselves. So long as they have great communication skills and some previous Canadian experience, we know they have an excellent chance to be successful on the team.

Today, we are a company of 24 from over 13 different counties, and we've managed to balance the gender ratio of our team better.

Benefits of a Diverse Team

The benefits of building a diverse team are clear. First, skilled candidates see that we are inclusive. When a

connect over shared experiences, and identify different problems that our competitors may not have thought of. Not everyone has these unique qualities, which is what makes them so valuable.

Since we started operations, we have come across extremely qualified women, gender-diverse folks, and people of colour. Their voices and perspectives have

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candidate shows up and sees a diverse workforce, they understand that we hire from all backgrounds, and I think it gives them confidence that we're hiring based on skill, not on a particular profile or background.

Second, it drives us away from "group think" or the "echo chamber." We all like it when our ideas are supported or validated, but sometimes, you need someone on your team who will say "no," or bring forth a different approach. By having folks who have different experiences and backgrounds, it ensures a variety of perspectives are discussed and considered. This is particularly important for us on the sales and marketing side because our customers are from diverse backgrounds too. We can communicate in multiple languages,

brought great success and diversity to our team. The change will almost always be met with resistance because it can feel like a loss of control. But, as the world becomes a global home, our business practices and products need to reflect this.

Embracing diversity on our teams has helped our products and practices to evolve. Canadian companies can't wait any longer to take action. If they fail to start making changes to incorporate meaningful diversity in their workplaces, they will be left behind. ■

Brian Bosscher is the president and founder of Condo Control Central, a leading software company that provides web-based communication, management, and security solutions for condos and HOAs of all sizes.



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