

How an Inclusive Culture is Helping CIBC Build a Relationship-focused Bank for a Modern World

Financial institutions have to earn the trust of their clients everyday, and one way to do this is by building an inclusive work environment and a diverse talent pool.

CIBC is actively working to embed inclusion and diversity into its workplace culture. The bank has a public goal to hire 500 persons with disabilities annually and it is on track to exceed that goal for the third year in a row. Roughly six per cent of the company's Canadian workforce currently self-identify as persons with disabilities.

Emily is one such employee. She does not have mobility of her arms and legs. Emily works on CIBC's Risk Management team and appreciated that when she first talked to people at CIBC,, they focused on her capabilities. "They were more interested in what I could bring to the table rather than any of my physical limitations," says Emily. Thanks to flexible work hours and the option to work remotely, Emily can keep a consistent schedule for the nurses and support workers that help her roughly six hours a day. "The nice thing is that everybody on my team is equipped to work remotely—I don't stand out in that way," says Emily. "But I do stand out in the value I add. Disability is not synonymous with inability."

Strong partners help attract and support employees with disabilities

CIBC clearly recognizes this as it continues to build it a culture of inclusion across its offices and 44,000 employees globally. To help attract new talent and give ongoing support to its employees with disabilities, CIBC partners with organizations such as Magnet, Lime Connect and Specialisterne. These groups are known for connecting employers to individuals with disabilities.

Specialisterne, for example, assesses job candidates through a process that is more inclusive for people on the autism spectrum.

The result is that candidates who may have not had the opportunity to join firms through traditional methods are hired and their positive experience in those roles has kept them as this system has a retention rate of 88 per cent.

Shawn is a CIBC employee on the autism spectrum. He had a job coach for six months, as well as a peer mentor, as he learned his role as an information security consultant. His manager and most of his colleagues know he's autistic. Talking on the phone, answering open-ended questions and sharing ideas are tough for Shawn; he does better one-on-one or in small groups. When left on this own, Shawn is very focused and can ignore background noise and distractions.

Shawn's senior manager, Mihai, is impressed by the volume and quality of Shawn's work. Shawn's attention to detail and problem-solving skills help him spot issues and potential solutions. In fact, he's had two promotions at the company. Plus, Mihai says the whole group has benefitted since Shawn has joined it.

For his part, Shawn enjoys being part of CIBC's team. "My manager 'gets' me," he says. "I'm happy right here and, in five years, I hope to still be here."

Other steps towards making CIBC more inclusive

In addition to job coaching and peer mentoring services, CIBC takes other steps to make itself more inclusive for all employees. The bank encourages staff to join its People Networks – ten groups focused on promoting belonging and deepening community connections. The WorkAbility People Network, for example, helps employees with disabilities with their personal and professional development through mentorship and support.

The bank has also embedded inclusion into its physical workplaces as part of its global transformation. CIBC Square, the bank's new headquarters opening in Toronto in 2020, is designed to be inclusive from the ground up for nearly 14,000 employees. In developing the strategy, nearly 6,000 team members, including the CIBC Square Employee Advisory Team on Accessibility, provided input through online surveys, focus groups and interviews with senior leadership. In addition, CIBC Square was built with the support of a firm that specializes in universal design.

By removing barriers to employment and in its environment, CIBC is setting up its team members for success and using inclusion to reflect the clients it serves.

As well, One for Change, CIBC's global community investment initiative, includes persons with disabilities as a strategic area of focus and is part of the bank's overall strategy of removing barriers to employment for underrepresented groups to promote accessible and inclusive workplaces for all.

Numbers you need to know: financial services sector

The financial services sector in Ontario is facing labour shortages. According to Government of Ontario labour market and information statistics, there are significant financial services sector job openings projected for 2017 to 2021. For example, there are up to 15,000 financial auditor and accounting job openings, as well as up to 15,000 customer and information services representatives job openings. Plus, there are up to 10,000 financial officer job openings projected for financial institutions across Ontario.