

FOCUS ON HUMAN RESOURCES

in ITALics Talent: The Vital Ingredient

By Lynda Leonard, Senior Vice-President, ITAC

ICT companies run on human brainpower.

There is no synthetic substitute for our principle means of production. So, not surprisingly, recruiting and retaining top talent is a critical pursuit for all companies in our industry from the smallest startup to the largest multinational. And talent is a central priority for our association.

Our focus on talent is manifested in a variety of forms. Our long-standing HR Forum, for example, is one of the most widely attended and robust best-practice forums at ITAC. Based on the principle that generous exchange of best-practice information among companies builds a stronger talent management competency for the whole industry, the HR Forum is a great place to learn from peers, benchmark company performance, and acquire sound guidance on performance improvement.

The two co-chairs of this important ITAC group outline their purpose and vision in the story below.

Another key thrust for ITAC is taking steps to ensure that our ongoing quest for talent fully engages the 51 percent of the population that is female. ITAC conducts a Diversity Advisory Group to set targets for the participation of women in all dimensions of ICT, including the entrepreneurial track. We are delighted in this issue to report on a major new initiative in this area.

And of course, talent policy – ensuring that Canadian companies can access the global talent they need to grow their businesses – is an important element of ITAC government relations and advocacy. Our close association with CCICT allows us to contribute to that organization's work on changing the conversation with the next generation of ICT workers about the nature and the value of work in technology and to build a more diverse and vibrant workforce for the future.

ITAC spurs startup diversity in league with innovative women's resource community



Vanessa Dawson

Vanessa Dawson got tired of seeing so few women when she looked around. After moving to New York City in 2011 to work in private equity, the Vancouver native quickly transitioned to a digital development agency called Dom & Tom, where she was excited to get more exposure to the startup culture that was taking off in the city.

"Private equity is still a male-dominated world," she says. "I moved into the startup space to look for wider inspiration and perspective only to find another male-dominated industry with limited scope."

At the same time, she was attempting to get her social planning platform, Evry, off the ground with a round of seed funding. The VC world, she discovered, was again a male-dominated space with even tighter circles. Those holding the purse strings were looking for a certain type of pitch—one that did not play to the strengths of most women.

While some people might try to play the game and fit the mold, last fall Dawson decided to change the game by creating Girls Raising, a resource community for female founders and funders. Six months later, Girls Raising was regularly showcasing seed-stage founders at events in New York, San Francisco, Vancouver, and Toronto—with ITAC and Ryerson University onboard as co-sponsors in the latter location.

"These events give women entrepreneurs a great opportunity to pitch their ideas," says Tracie Wagman, Publisher and CEO of Help We've Got Kids, who leads the ITAC working group that is collaborating with Girls Raising. "A lot of women have a lack of confidence and experience when it comes to presenting to potential funders, and these sessions help them move beyond that."

Lally Rementilla, an ITAC Board Member and Co-Chair of the organization's Gender Diversity Committee, adds: "ITAC is an organization that champions gender diversity because we believe that there are immediate financial and operational gains that the tech ecosystem could achieve through higher representation of women in all levels – as employees, CEO's, founders and investors. This partnership absolutely aligns with our focus and has been a truly collaborative endeavour."

Vanessa says the events, which each give a half-dozen entrepreneurs the opportunity to make two-minute pitches to a panel of four women—two funders and a pair of experienced founders—have generated tremendous word of mouth, as well as a number of solid funding offers.

"We're focusing on quality over quantity, as well as on actionable advice and conversation," she says. "No one else is adding this type of value and feeding this particular high growth niche."

She says she jumped at the chance to collaborate with ITAC. "ITAC really gives Girls Raising credibility, and it's clear that we're working together for a greater cause."

"The more people who are focused on the same goal of increasing diversity in the ICT sector, the better," says Tracie. "ITAC and Girls Raising are talking to the same people, and it's great to partner with someone like Vanessa, who is so focused and ambitious."

Vanessa says her ambitions reach well beyond bringing women together to pitch ideas and network. Phase 2 of Girls Raising is an online platform where vetted community members can barter skills to further their startups, and the organization will also fund new ventures itself, drawing on an initial \$5-million seed fund currently being raised. Beyond that, her goal is nothing less than a new model of the system for startup founding and funding.

"There is so much opportunity for change that I believe we can create a new version of the accelerator/incubator that works better for women than current systems do."



ITAC and Ryerson University partner with Girls Raising in Toronto

ITAC HR Forum: Meet the Co-Chairs



Bruce Markowitz
HR Director for Unisys Canada

ITAC HR Forum Co-Chair Bruce Markowitz is HR Director for Unisys Canada, where he is accountable for the strategic implementation and delivery of all HR activities. He also provides Senior Generalist support to Unisys' North American Enterprise Compute division. We asked him to share his perspective on some of the key issues facing HR professionals in Canada's ICT sector.

ITAC Online: What is the most important thing you've learned as an HR practitioner?

Bruce Markowitz: I have learned how critical the process of "due diligence" is. In all aspects of the HR field, it is most important to uncover as many angles that each situation presents in order to give educated and objective advice.

What are the biggest challenges you face in recruiting/retaining the skilled people you need?

The challenge in sourcing labour is the number one challenge in our industry. We have not been great at developing our young people to be attracted to IT and we are now looking at bringing on more new immigrants that in the past.

What is your perspective on whether Canada has enough people with the skill set needed to fill technology jobs?

As noted, we are not prepared for what the future holds with respect to an imminent labour shortage.

Is access to temporary foreign workers an issue for your company?

As the nature of our business is long-term contracts that require the support of experienced workers, the temporary foreign worker model does not fit for us.

As you consider the future of recruitment and retention, training, etc., in the context of Canada's ICT sector, are you optimistic or concerned? Why?

I am concerned that the fight for experienced talent will be a tough one.

What has your experience with ITAC HR Forum been like?

It has been a very rewarding experience to partake in the ITAC HR Forum for the past eight years. I have learned much from my colleagues in the industry, and from subject matter experts who share their knowledge with us several times a year.

What are the key things you feel that people gain from participating in it?

Keeping up on the trends in our profession and industry specific challenges, knowledge sharing, and networking.



Sheryl Helsdon-Baker
Senior Director, Human Resources, Oracle Canada

Sheryl Helsdon-Baker, ITAC HR Forum Co-Chair, has been with Oracle Canada for more than 18 years. She currently holds the post of Senior Director, Human Resources. Prior to assuming responsibility for the company's HR team in Canada, she spent 11 years leading Oracle's Compensation and Benefits team and serving as a member of the global team that implemented the total rewards management systems for Oracle Canada. She provided her perspective on some of the key issues facing HR professionals in Canada's ICT sector.

ITAC Online: What is the most important thing you've learned as an HR practitioner?

Sheryl Helsdon-Baker: My biggest lesson is that you never stop learning. To be effective, you really need to be in tune with the business and with what is going on outside the business. You need to be able to quickly adapt and apply what you've learned to the unique culture of your company.

What are the biggest challenges you face in recruiting/retaining the skilled people you need?

At Oracle, recruiting is the responsibility of another part of the HR organization, but in general I can say that I've seen the market open up tremendously over the past decade. The world is much more borderless, and the top talent you need could be anywhere in the world. There is definitely more competition for the best people.

What is your perspective on whether Canada has enough people with the skill set needed to fill technology jobs?

I think we are in pretty good shape, although there are always certain skills that are hard to find in the labour market. I don't see this changing, because our industry evolves so quickly, it takes time for people to gain expertise in new technologies, and we are now competing globally for talent.

As you consider the future of recruitment and retention, training, etc., in the context of Canada's ICT sector, are you optimistic or concerned? Why?

I'm optimistic. Canada is very fortunate to have an excellent education system, and our population is among the most highly educated in the world. When new grads enter the workforce, effective leadership and a corporate culture of continuous development are key for employees to adapt and apply their knowledge to the workplace, continue to grow, and maximize their contributions to the business.

What has your experience with ITAC HR Forum been like?

For me, it has really been a fantastic experience. I've had the good fortune of meeting some incredibly smart HR professionals, and it has allowed me to stay more informed about the latest trends and business practices in our industry.

What are the key things you feel that people gain from participating in it?

Having a strong professional network is critically important to our business, and the Forum offers an excellent opportunity for HR professionals in the IT industry to come together, build our networks and learn from each other. We share best practices in a confidential environment, which helps us all be more effective at our jobs. If you have never attended a meeting, I strongly encourage you to come out to an event and see how you can benefit from it.

ITAC EVENTS

Federal Public Sector Business Committee Meeting – April 29, Ottawa

ITAC Board of Governors Dinner featuring Nitin Kawale, President, Cisco Canada – May 1, Toronto

Executive Briefing with Dave Adamson and Panel of CIOs – May 6, Ottawa

Ontario Public Sector Business Committee (ON PSBC) – May 28, Toronto

Federal Public Sector Business Committee – May 28, Ottawa

21st Annual ITAC "IT Challenge" Golf Tournament and Luncheon – September 17, Toronto area

ITAC NEWS

EDC Launches 'Let's Talk Exports' Tour

Export Development Canada (EDC) is setting out on a 17-city, cross-Canada tour (along with an online webinar) to examine the current growth cycle of exports and what it might mean for Canadian business.

Nulogy Promotes Women in Technology at National Labour Forum

"In the technology sector, females are definitely the minority." That's the message that Lally Rementilla, Vice-President of Finance and Administration at Nulogy and an ITAC board member, took to *Building Canada's Economy: Best Practices for Supporting Women in Non-Traditional Sectors*—a forum presented by Status of Women Canada in Ottawa.

EY Seeking Entrepreneurial Women

Applications and nominations are now being accepted for EY's Entrepreneurial Winning Women program, an annual competition and executive leadership program that identifies a select group of high-potential women entrepreneurs.

OTHER EVENTS

Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation Event – April 30, Toronto

Conference Board of Canada – Shared Services and Beyond: Emerging Strategies for Effectiveness and Agility – May 15, Toronto

The Art of Leadership for Women Conference – May 29, Toronto

e-Medication Management Conference – May 29, Toronto

To submit articles/news items/comments or to subscribe/unsubscribe please send an email to Lynda Leonard, Senior Vice-President at leonard@itac.ca