

What's on Your Resume?

What are Edmonton employers really looking for? As Edmonton's workplaces continue to evolve, so do our hiring preferences.

BY NERISSA MCNAUGHTON

Daeco HR considers themselves to be “the black sheep of human resources,” citing “we don’t like human resources either;” but after poking a bit of fun at themselves, the company admits to be passionate about what they do, including recruiting for other companies. When it comes to the many resumes they see on a daily basis, they don’t immediately look for where, or if, the applicant went to school.

“Generally speaking, unless the position requires a specific diploma or degree, we look at past experience to make sure [the applicant] has transitional qualities,” says Genevieve Primus, Daeco managing partner.

“A lot of the work we do with our clients is to ensure there is a good cultural fit,” adds Daeco’s founder, Elizabeth Disman. “We want to hire people for the long term. Often times it’s not about the education they have. Certainly that’s important, but what’s even more important is how they fit in with the organization.”

Disman has noticed a key training aspect emerging in pre and post-secondary institutions. “One of the things



GENEVIEVE PRIMUS, MANAGING PARTNER, DAECO

I see happening is there is more of an effort for students to be taught skills like communication and teamwork, and to learn to verbalize their ideas. A lot of those qualities are crucial in the workplace. I think, organizations think that overall it’s important for their employees have an education, but it is even more important that those employees are well rounded and can work in a team environment, communicate properly and problem solve.”

According to Primus, “Some of the schools are preparing our workforce to communicate better and have proper grammar skills, but it’s not enough. We often can see this in the quality of the resumes we receive.”

Disman agrees, “We see so many poorly done resumes.” She notes, though, that the mistakes on the resumes, which include typos, missing words, grammatical errors and incorrect word tenses, are not the result of laziness. Basic grammar isn’t being taught enough. Both ladies also mention that texting is an increasingly common form of work communication; a course or two on how to text properly wouldn’t be out of place in today’s marketplace.

MACEWAN UNIVERSITY MAIN CAMPUS.





ELIZABETH DISMAN, FOUNDER, DAECO

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From Daeco's perspective, what are Edmonton's employers looking for? Daeco sums it up as the ability to communicate verbally and in written form, the ability to work in a team environment and have excellent problem solving abilities. Primus and Disman say that: "The smarter businesses are realizing that if they can hire for fit and they have someone with those qualities, they can train and teach those technical skills by doing some on the job or online training."

Chris Massie has worked at About Staffing for 10 years, and he started there while completing his post-secondary education. "I have a perspective on how employers value work experience," he laughs, pointing to himself as an example.

"The bar has been raised for the sheer assets that people have," Massie says. "For a lot of employers, education is just a starting point for consideration. Some organizations will not consider people that do not have a post-secondary education, but some they are more flexible. What I've found is that there is a preference towards experience."

He notes that it's not just the employer's perspective that must be realistic. It's the candidates too. He sees many that expect a high salary and access to plenty of job opportunities as soon as they graduate, but "experience is more valuable than anything."

Massie sees that larger corporations tend to have policies requiring post-secondary education as a hiring or promotion requirement, while small to medium sized businesses are more flexible. Where you get your education matters too.

"Education through reputable institutions such as the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) is more valued," Massie points out. "Clients view online degrees [from non-recognizable institutions] as suspect, but it's the name, not the platform." Meaning, a diploma from NAIT is

valued whether it comes from a NAIT classroom or NAIT online platform, but that degree from Dr. Bob's Online School of Great Things isn't going to get you very far.

Alberta's public post-secondary school system consists of 26 major institutions that service approximately 270,000 students at any given time. That means a lot of competition for anyone looking for a job. Massie has guidance on how to stand out. "My advice for anyone going through the post-secondary program is to consider opportunity to develop outside of the institution. Part time jobs, exposure to community groups and societies within the university; anything you can do above and beyond the minimum is important for competition and consideration. Over time, it's becoming more and more important for people to invest as much time as they can to compete against other candidates."

He discusses an interesting trend. "I've noticed some of our clients have specific software considerations for specific industries." This software is only taught on the job and the issue is very noticeable in the oil and gas industry. Massie hopes post-secondary institutions will be quick to pick up on emerging software requirements in order to avoid a forced supply/demand gap.

Post-secondary training is a key component of personal and professional development and experience is playing a larger and larger role in Edmonton's hiring and promotion process. There is a way to get education and experience simultaneously: go online.

"Flexibility is one reason [students choose online over classroom delivery]," says Elsie Elford, dean of MacEwan University's School of Business. "Many students take a combination of classroom and online delivery to accommodate their schedule, especially students that are working part time. Another reason is that some students choose



CHRIS MASSIE

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to work full time and are completing credentials online for those programs that have all program course requirements online.

“The School of Business is seeing an increase in the number of students choosing online courses as a part of their studies in place of traditional in-class learning. The Bachelor of Commerce program, the largest program in the School of Business, sees online enrollments from 7 to 11 per cent.”

Massie had pointed out that the institution on the diploma or degree is what matters, not whether the student learned in a classroom or online. Elford agrees noting that the MacEwan’s hiring partners have not expressed a preference for classroom or online-trained students.

“Each delivery mode has its advantages and disadvantages,” she continues. “It depends on the outcomes that are expected from completing a course. Whether online or in class, the instructor must possess the appropriate skills to be an effective teacher and manage the learning environment. An online course can be set as ‘self-paced’ and therefore students may complete it faster, or take more time, depending on their situation.

What are Edmonton’s employers looking for? Education, experience, common sense, specialized skills, team players and great communicators; and thanks to today’s technology and the entrepreneur-driven industries in Edmonton, there is a place in the workforce for everyone. 

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