

A person wearing a grey suit and black shoes with buckles is sitting on a chair. Their hands are clasped together in their lap. The background is a plain white wall. The floor is a light-colored carpet with a small dot pattern. A brown bag is visible on the floor to the right of the person.

International Work Experience The New Must-Have Résumé Trend

The world is going through a massive change in attitude. Through online worldwide communities, cheap flights, and the increased focus upon business internationalization, the social order has moved to a more global mindset which we could not have imagined just a generation ago. Keeping up with the times has become easier through instant communication, but this remains no substitute for being able to be at the right place at the right time.

Moving abroad for your career or to study is an option which has become increasingly popular for Canadian students in recent years; and why not? With a strong basic education, high quality universities and colleges, and English fluency behind them, Canadian students possess a wealth of potential for international companies looking for flexible and willing new talent.

The opportunity to spend time abroad is recognised by companies as being an important learning experience for young people new to the working world. Indeed, it is becoming quite the résumé fashion must-have. As a result, attitudes have changed and chances to take this step have become more and more common.

So if you are hoping to take the plunge, let's look at what a student can do in order to increase their prospects of successfully organizing such an experience.

Are you able to fit the bill for an international career? To gain some understanding, Archie Pollock and Nannette Ripmeester of Expertise in Labour Mobility look at the needs and expectations of both employers and employees, and highlight how students and recent graduates can find their way into the global labour marketplace.

What are employers looking for in the current global graduate market?

Loyalty, punctuality and basic competency will always be valued highly by companies and managers. But these days, employers' values have shifted slightly from the more traditional aspects of employment that we are all used to. Aspects such as flexibility, adaptability and other soft skills have become paramount to success in landing the ideal position, and when these skills can be showcased in combination, this creates a strong résumé for any potential candidate.

The reason for this is that companies are fully aware of the ever-intensifying international workplace, and how crucial it is to their business development. They are also aware that in order to compete, they must take on people willing to undergo lifelong learning and keen to achieve. Despite the fact that the conventional 'job for life' at one company is becoming a

thing of the past, large companies know that talent these days is interchangeable and lies in adaptability and motivation, rather than loyalty and 'keeping your head down' for your working life.

In some instances, taking on roles abroad will take you out of your comfort zone. Take language for example: It is becoming one of the most prominent and necessary skills in the search for the ideal job candidate. Leaving North America and heading to another continent may well result in the need for proficiency in (at least) one foreign language. Thus, it is important to brush up on these skills before leaving. After all, it is quite different to ask in Italian where the Colosseum is when wandering around the streets of Rome, than to discuss which business structure you believe the company would be best suited to! Of course, being keen to learn is the most important part of mastering any language, so it is important to emphasize your willingness to improve if you are unable to properly converse in the initial stages.

Another highly-prized factor is the flexibility of new candidates. This should always be taken into consideration when thinking about going abroad. Are you able to drop everything and leave for new pastures, or do you have roles and responsibilities at home which would prevent you from doing so?



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Employers are looking for people that can move across boundaries in order to work in different cultures. In this sense, open-mindedness and patience become important aspects in a prospective international worker, and a degree of cultural sensitivity is definitely sought after. It can pay off to read up on business practices in foreign countries or in areas such as the Far East, areas that often conduct business in ways different to what you would be used to at home. Do not be mistaken by thinking that if you land a position with a large multinational corporation, your English language skills and Western customs will see you through each and every situation.

Large companies such as the South Korean giant Samsung run many of

their offices in the typically Korean fashion: planning meetings well in advance; exchanging business gifts (at first politely refusing the gift before eventually accepting); business groups entering into a room in order of seniority. Even handing over your business card has a certain etiquette, whereby you hold the card with both hands when passing it over to the recipient and receive one in return by the same manner. So bear in mind that developing your mindset through tolerance and learning is a step that you will undoubtedly have to take if you wish to succeed internationally.

Tailoring your résumé for the international labour market is highly recommended in the competitive

graduate market. Despite the opinions of some, it is not always the 2% higher grade average than your peers which will land you the position: It can be other skills and personal experiences that set you apart. This is even more the case if you are able to set up an interview and are given the chance to present yourself in person. Be prepared to highlight your soft skills such as presenting, experience with computer software, languages, teamwork, adaptability, writing and reading, and time management. In other words, come across as adaptable and useful to the company as someone that can be placed in challenging situations and come out on top.

WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN EXPECT FROM AN INTERNATIONAL CAREER

What can you as an employee expect from an international career?

Going to a foreign country can be a daunting and stressful period in one's life, no matter how well organized and prepared you may feel. This is especially the case if you are not going for a fixed period of study or an internship.

The best way to address this is for you to do your homework. Take time to study the culture of your destination, its people, its history, and its food and language. Preparing yourself in this way reduces the risk of unpleasant surprises after you have arrived, and minimizes the chance of becoming disoriented and confused in a foreign land.

Often, when considering their options abroad, people ask themselves, "Do I have the correct mentality for adventure and new experiences, or am I happier being close to home with my friends and family around me?" The fact is that despite the attraction and excitement associated with travelling and working, some individuals are simply not naturally inclined towards long periods away from their roots and are happier in their home environment. For those who may feel this way, a good idea is to begin with a short stay abroad in order to appreciate how a longer spell may feel and whether it suits your personality.



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For those enthusiastic about it, the opportunity can open many doors for their career prospects. Expect to be challenged from the outset. The level of competition ensures that if you are chosen, you will be expected to perform well. This can be a little too much pressure for some to handle, but ultimately can prove extremely rewarding if all goes well. This is where the motivation and adaptability come into play.

While living abroad you will meet a wide variety of people with different outlooks on life and alternative methods of achieving goals. Some individuals may find your directness and target-reaching attitude unnerving, or feel offended if you question them in the presence of colleagues. Others may ask you very insightful questions about your personal life that you may be surprised or shocked about, something not uncommon in many other cultures as an inoffensive way of getting to know someone well. There will also be people whose dealings you may find rude or blunt but again, can be simply a matter of personality and cultural upbringing and is something you will learn from and improve upon as you gain more experience.

Whatever path your international career follows, be prepared to be challenged both culturally and vocationally. No matter how well you prepare, there will be unexpected obstacles and trials that you will have to overcome. But in the end, the experience can prove to be extremely valuable to both your personal and professional development.

Through correct emphasis of your extra skills and appearing motivated and flexible, you will give yourself the best possible chance of impressing the employers and landing yourself the international career you've been dreaming of! 📧

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