

ENGINEERS CANADA
A Personal Experience towards Professional Recognition
By Ed Nicolas, P.Eng, AScT

Internationally trained professionals (ITP) often face different challenges after becoming landed immigrant. Many left behind relatives, friends, and established careers to provide a better future for their family; only to become frustrated when they can't practice or get a job based on his or her chosen profession. We heard many stories of engineers, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals who were forced to work as drivers, cleaners, or operators for two main reasons: lack of Canadian experience and unrecognized foreign credentials. Although there is dignity in manual labour, the effects are detrimental not only to the professional but to our society as well. I want to share my experience and provide an inspiration to struggling professionals who are facing the same difficulties in getting such professional recognition.

My Story

I became a landed immigrant on July, 2007 and after staying for one week, I went back home to my home country, the Philippines. It was only after four months that my entire family settled down in Vancouver for good. Just like any other new immigrant, I experienced the same difficulties and challenges during the start-up period. Two weeks after we arrived, I got a job from an established high technology electronics manufacturing company to manage the Process Engineering group of two manufacturing facilities and supervise a number of engineers, specialists, and technicians. I received my professional designation as a Provisional Applied Science Technologist (AScT) in Applied Science Technologist and Technicians of British Columbia (ASTTBC) within a year and became a full member a year after that. I received my certificate of registration from the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (APEGBC) as a Professional Engineer and as an Electrical - Field Safety Representative (FSR) Class B from British Columbia Safety Authority (BCSA). I recently completed my night studies in British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) to meet the academic and work experience requirements prior becoming a Certified House Inspector. While working full time as an employee, I managed to establish a part-time business offering technical services based on the certifications received. In less than three years I was able to get the certifications needed; started a business; and re-established my career to become a more effective and responsible professional.



Professional Recognition

Like any other professions in Canada, Engineering is a regulated profession backed by provincial law. It aims to hold paramount the safety, health and welfare of the public and the environment. Although steps are being taken by the government and other regulating agencies to fast track the recognition of foreign trained professionals; still, it is important to know some practical tips to mitigate risks. Seven items an Internationally Trained Professional should know are as follows:

1. **Be prepared and do your homework.** As a professional, we were trained to calculate, analyze, and reduce risks: the same should also apply when we became an immigrant. Be prepared and know as much as possible the challenges the lies ahead. The more you are prepared, the better for you to adjust in a shorter period of time. You should have a clear understanding on:
 - a. The profession if it is regulated or not.
 - b. The current market, labour conditions, and growth prospects of the profession and the industry.
 - c. The job description and requirements of the employer against your current skills to identify the areas you should further improve.
 - d. The supply and demand of the profession you may want to pursue.
 - e. Providing a good resume.
 - f. Knowing the techniques of having a successful interview.
 - g. Providing the required and other supporting documents to prove your education and work experience.

Conduct a thorough analysis on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for yourself and the industry to enable you to be more prepared and equipped in re-establishing your career and your professional recognition.

2. **Get the certification from the professional association.** Most of the professions are regulated by law and a certification/registration is needed before you can provide any service. Many people will feel uncomfortable if the professional who builds your home, the doctor who prescribes the medicines or the accountant who manages your finances are not certified or qualified. Having a certification enable you to show that your credentials are within Canadian standards and will open different opportunities both professionally and personally.
3. **Understand and follow the certification process.** Throughout the years, many new developments and policies were created to provide faster professional recognition. Professional associations understand the plight of Internationally Trained Professionals and started to offer provisional status. This status enables the applicant who meets the academic requirements but still don't have the minimum one year Canadian experience to have provisional status prior to full recognition. It is unfortunate that some professionals didn't even know that new rules exist since it was not done in the past. Relying on information based on the experiences of acquaintances, friends, or relatives who migrated before may no longer be accurate. Coordinate with the appropriate government agencies and regulating bodies on the proper procedure towards your professional recognition.

4. **Improve your soft skills.** New immigrants who are professionals have a high technical knowledge and expertise but may lack the soft skills to back it up. We devote most of our time acquiring technical skills but fall short in developing our communication skills; that is, how to sell our ideas to others. When I conduct interviews, I see applicants having a well written resumes but failed to effectively express his or her opinion on certain subject matters. Writing an impressive resume is not enough; selling yourself to your prospected employer during an interview is even more critical. Interview is the time when you will be assessed both on the technical competency and soft skills to check if you are a fit to the organization. Develop ways to improve your interpersonal and communication skills.



5. **Get a mentor.** To be registered, you may need to provide references coming from a licensed professional. Get a professional you knew who can mentor, direct, and guide you during the entire certification process. By doing so, valuable advice will be given and you will have a better knowledge about the profession under the Canadian environment. Don't be hesitant to ask for help.
6. **Strive for continuous personal development.** Upgrade your knowledge and skills if necessary. To acquire professional recognition, you may be required to upgrade your academic qualifications or may need to conduct confirmatory examinations. Studying is an opportunity to re-invent yourself, learn a new profession that are more in demand, or follow the desire you may want to specialize in the past. Some professionals are hesitant to go back to school thinking they don't have the time and luxury to study at night to pursue their dreams; thus, limiting the possibility of meeting the academic requirements prior the certification. Upgrading your skills through formal study should always be considered as a long term investment.
7. **Work hard, be persistent, and don't lose hope.** Others feel too frustrated or already victimized with the current situation that no action was made to re-establish their lost profession. Provide a working plan that will keep you back on track on a career or a profession you passionately want to pursue. Work hard to follow it and don't lose hope. Pursue your dreams despite the obstacles for you will never know the power of the human spirit. At the end of the day, it is you who will decide what will be the best and how you can be a better person.