

HIO Case Study

Pythian seeks top talent to support a rapidly growing global business

Case Study at a Glance

Pythian
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Pythian strives to hire the best available talent in support of a rapidly growing global high-tech business. To achieve this, Pythian's hiring processes focus on an individual's talent, irrespective of where experience and expertise may have been gained. Pythian takes pride in being an employer of new Canadians, "setting the bar high" and taking an interest in that individual's career. In Ottawa, Pythian undertakes a range of practices designed to recruit and integrate internationally trained professionals:

- Increases access to an internationally trained talent pool through engagement with community organizations such as Hire Immigrants Ottawa, Ottawa Job Match Network, Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, and the Ottawa Chinese Community Services Centre.
- Notifies immigrant serving organizations about employment opportunities.
- Does not require Canadian experience or credentials in the hiring and selection process.
- Supports cross-cultural competency training for managers.
- Comprehensive on-boarding process for all new hires, including presentations with all functional departments, "coffee with the CEO", and a new hire mentor program.
- Uses clear and transparent communications to foster inclusiveness and ensure everyone feels "on the same page". Uses "all hands meetings" where everyone around the world joins in.
- Strong leadership commitment to being an employer of choice for everyone. Acts as champion of diversity and immigrant talent.

ABOUT HIO CASE STUDIES

Hire Immigrants Ottawa is pleased to profile the innovative and best workplace practices of Ottawa-based businesses and organizations as they pertain to recruitment, integration and retention of new immigrants within the workplace. The case studies describe the types of initiatives being undertaken by local employers, the motivations for introducing the initiatives and their impacts on individual, team, and workplace performance.

By sharing successful recruitment and integration practices more broadly within the management and human resource communities of Ottawa-based organizations, HIO seeks to inform and encourage other workplaces to undertake their own recruitment and integration efforts. The case studies are based on interviews held with company representatives who are actively engaged with the implementation of recruitment and integration initiatives in the Ottawa area.

Pythian seeks top talent to support a rapidly growing global business

Pythian is a remote database management and consulting company, headquartered in Ottawa, with offices in the United States, Australia, India and the United Kingdom. Started in 1997, the company has grown to 250 employees in 22 countries worldwide and 100 employees in Ottawa. To learn more about Pythian's initiatives to recruit and integrate immigrants into its Ottawa workforce, Hire Immigrants Ottawa interviewed Heidi Hauver, HR Director, local diversity champion, and member of HIO's IT sector working group.

Pythian seeks top talent to support a rapidly growing high tech business

The Pythian story began in 1997, when Paul Vallée started the company in the basement of his friend and co-founder. Since that time, the Ottawa-based database management company has experienced an incredible journey of development and growth. When Heidi Hauver joined the company as Director of Human Resources in 2010, the company had already grown to 90 employees, and Pythian had decided to make its HR function much more strategic, a task that Hauver suggests meant "building HR from the ground up". Today, Pythian employs 250, and is still growing.

It's easy to understand why Pythian's focus is on finding top talent: this talent has been and remains a central pillar supporting their success. It is the reason Hauver and her team of nine strives to create positive, innovative and progressive HR programs that attract, retain and engage highly skilled employees. It also explains the way Pythian approaches the recruitment of internationally trained workers, whether they are immigrants located in Ottawa, or skilled workers living abroad. "We are a global organization, we're diverse, we're open, and we're not fixated on where people may have gained their experience and expertise. We focus on an individual's talent and how we can use that talent".

For many immigrant job seekers, lack of Canadian work experience or education can be a significant barrier. But not at Pythian. "None of our employees involved in the hiring process ask about Canadian experience or education", says Hauver, "it's just not something that we do. It's not on our radar at all. We're focused on the talent and the expertise itself, people's skills and passion for what they do, on their leadership skills and their client service skills. It would be disappointing if we as a company weeded people out because they

didn't have the education or they didn't have the Canadian work experience. We would miss out on a lot of awesome talent."

In a similar way, Pythian does not view differences in employees' background or culture as impediments to an inclusive workplace. With employees operating in dozens of countries around the globe, and speaking more than 20 languages, Hauver suggests that being diverse and inclusive is "who we are as a company. We're diverse all over the map, at all levels of the organization. When you're sitting in a room with your team and you have representation from around the world, I don't have to stand up in front of the employee base and talk about diversity and inclusion, because it's engrained in our day-to-day practices, policies and procedures. It is part of our philosophy".

Connecting with Community Organizations to find talent

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Pythian ensures that it has access to Ottawa's pool of internationally trained immigrants by developing strong relationships with local immigrant agencies. Hauver credits Hire Immigrants Ottawa for helping facilitate contacts with organizations such as the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO), the Ottawa Job Match Network (OJMN), and the Ottawa

Chinese Community Service Centre. "It's really a team effort as far as I'm concerned. My recruitment team is in contact with each organization, and when we have employment opportunities, we try to make sure that we send them to these organizations, so that they can keep an eye out for talent. We were very excited when we hired someone through the Ottawa Job Match Network, and we obviously want to continue to have that kind of success. For Pythian, it's another amazing avenue to expand our reach to groups of professionals that we previously had not connected to" says Hauver.

As a result of these contacts, Pythian has also been able to take advantage of the resources and programs that have contributed to professional development of Pythian staff. Several members of Hauver's HR team have taken cross cultural competency training provided by HIO, something she would like to extend to the company's team leads and hiring managers. Hauver herself has also been a long time volunteer participant with OCISO's mentoring program for new Canadians, an experience that has provided her with first hand knowledge of the challenges that confront immigrants as they search for skills appropriate employment. "I mentor internationally trained

professionals partly because I recognize the challenge they face. I have had some great experiences. I often feel I learn as much from them as they do from me” says Hauver.

On-Boarding

At Pythian, employee retention begins with a comprehensive on-boarding program designed to ensure that all new hires understand the business and activities, roles and responsibilities of every functional department within the company, from sales and marketing to finance and IT. The on-boarding, which Hauver says is continuously updated based on employee feedback and the need to be current, includes presentations, schedules, guides and an on-boarding checklist, covering all of the areas new employees need to understand Pythian’s business and to be set up for success.

But to be truly supportive of employee success, Hauver says the on-boarding process also “pays attention to the human side. It is a lot of information to absorb, and it can be overwhelming, and intimidating. We’re sensitive to the fact that new employees may be visiting Ottawa for the first time, or may be entering their first Canadian workplace. All of these things we keep in the back of our mind, and I think we’re very supportive”. Pythian’s on-boarding includes personal touches that extend to all new hires, including a “coffee with the CEO” session, a tech talk with the CTO, and a new hire mentor program.

Pythian places great emphasis on effective communications with employees, starting with the on-boarding process, and extending throughout their careers. According to Hauver, “It’s hugely important. It has to be. With a company of over 250 people, a company in over 22 countries, we need to always make sure that we’re as clear and as transparent as possible, so that everyone feels that they’re on the same page”.

Opportunities for Career Growth

Pythian understands that opportunities for professional and personal growth are important factors affecting their ability to attract and retain highly skilled workers. To this end, the company offers many [programs and benefits](#) that have helped make it an employer of choice. In 2013, the company was recognized as one of the National Capital Region’s Top Employers, a distinction given to employers who lead their industries in offering exceptional places to work.

To provide more opportunities for career growth, Hauver explains how Pythian recently “remodeled” their organizational structure to

include more tiers on their technical and managerial stream: “as people stayed on at Pythian, we wanted them to have opportunities to gain skills and experience and move up the career ladder, and we wanted them to be able to do that at Pythian”.

A notable example of career progression within Pythian is its current Vice-president of Infrastructure & Development, Raj Thukral. According to Hauver, “he’s probably been in every role in service delivery, from an independent DBA working on a team, to a team lead to a service delivery manager, to managing our Pythian consulting group. Seeing that success and working with him as a member of the leadership team; you know, that’s exciting”. Pythian promotes all of their positions internally to provide all employees opportunities for career advancement.

Given her mentoring experiences with skilled immigrants, Hauver is well aware of the challenges that newcomers to Canada can face in the labour market, not only in finding employment, but in finding employment that provides clear opportunities for career growth.

Hauver admits that “at Pythian, we love being the first employer for someone who has relocated to Canada. People who have chosen to have the rest of their lives here, who have chosen Canada as their home, where they are going to educate their children. We love being

able to set the bar really high. And that’s what we’re doing. We do genuinely take an interest in that individual’s career”.

Impacts – A Diverse and Inclusive Employer of Choice Attracts Top Talent

Pythian’s unwavering focus on top talent is reflected in its hiring practices and in its progressive workplace policies. The company ensures that it has access to the widest possible pool of candidates by focusing on individuals’ skills, and avoiding what it sees as unnecessary requirements for Canadian experience or education. At the same time, its workplace practices and policies lead to challenging and rewarding work, which helps retain the talent they have worked so hard to find.

All of this contributes to Pythian’s character as a diverse and inclusive employer of choice. It is an attribute that serves the company well as it continues to seek out the very best experts in the world, expand its business, and enhance its position as an industry leader and innovator. According to Hauver, the Pythian approach greatly enhances their ability to attract top talent, whether right here in Ottawa, or elsewhere in the world: “the greatest form of flattery is when an employee will refer a new employee to you, be it a past

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colleague, a friend, a family member. It shows that that employee believes in the company and what we're doing, and is passionate about working for the organization. For us that is the ultimate form of flattery".

Pythian's diverse workforce also enhances their ability to service a rapidly expanding worldwide clientele that already includes brands such as National Geographic, Toyota, and Western Union. "We love that our people come from diverse backgrounds, have worked with different size companies in different parts of the world, gaining experience in different countries. We benefit from that. How you approach a client in Japan is certainly very different than how you approach a client in the U.K. or New Zealand. We benefit all the time from the diversity of our employee base".

Lessons Learned

Looking to the future, Hauver says that an important objective for her HR team will be to formally document the practices and philosophy that have successfully guided the company through its remarkable growth. "We're currently in the process of creating a recruitment guide, because as we continue to grow, we want to make sure that our philosophy, processes and procedures are formally captured, as a best practice for all of our hiring managers".

Hauver believes that employers in Canada have much to gain by re-examining their hiring practices to ensure they are taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by skilled immigrants. "I am often quite perplexed by the fact that organizations can be so close minded when they look at a resume", says Hauver. "I have mentored people who are professionals with great education and experience and terrific resumes, and they are screened out automatically because they don't have Canadian work experience, so they apply for lower level jobs and are told they are over-qualified! As an HR professional, I find that frustrating. I don't look at where they have gained their experience. I'm excited about what they can teach us, how we can benefit from their worldliness. But a lot of companies still don't look at it this way".

Hauver suggests it's really a matter of "thinking outside the box", and taking advantage of the resources and supports in Ottawa that help employers to recruit and manage a diverse workforce. "Some organizations", says Hauver, "especially smaller ones, may feel overwhelmed and think they can't really put any effort or resources there because it's going to be a lot of work. But organizations like HIO exist, to make it easy, to help you make those connections. You just need to make the effort. Make that one call and see the benefits. It doesn't cost organizations anything. That's the best kept secret.

People think it's going to cost them a lot of money, but it doesn't. If you've never worked with an organization like OJMN, what about sending one of your requirements over there, what about coming to a HIO information session to understand what we're all talking about?"

Hauver is also quick to remind employers that "labour shortages in Canada are only going to get more challenging; are only going to be bigger puzzles for companies to solve". She suggests that it is important to act sooner rather than later: "Being an employer of choice now is going to help all organizations in the future. By waiting for another 5, 10, 15 years..., to all of a sudden shift your philosophy on excelling, engaging and energizing with internationally trained talent, it may be too late. At some point our internationally trained immigrants are going to be the ones who are selecting who they want to work with versus employers deciding who they want to work with. That will flip. You have to be energized as an organization; you need to brand yourself to be an employer of choice for all talent including internationally trained talent."

Leadership

According to Hauver, Pythian's passion for recruiting top talent has always been part of the philosophy of founder, Paul Vallée. For this reason, Pythian's approach to recruitment and retention generally, and her active involvement with internationally trained professions more specifically, seems to be an almost "natural" outcome. "Paul still has that philosophy, and having support from the top is critical, that's really where the buy-in has to come from. In other organizations HR is often trying to bring forth new programs and ideas, but unless the folks at the top appreciate and understand the value of what you want to do, it can be pretty challenging".

Pythian's leadership is also demonstrated in the community at large. Both Hauver and Vallée act as spokespersons around the importance of integrating skilled immigrants into the labour force. Hauver herself represents Pythian by actively participating in HIO's IT sector working group and is also involved with the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership.

When asked what motivates Pythian to champion this issue, Hauver responds: "Pythian has had a lot of success; we've seen the benefits of working with these organizations, and we see the benefits of being able to engage internationally trained talent that is already here in Ottawa. This is to the benefit of Canada. We definitely feel we are an employer champion on diversity and inclusion. If we can encourage other employers to at least open their eyes a bit and consider looking at an individual who they may not have considered before – that's a win".