

Persistence Pays Off



Nine and a half years ago, Javier Bernal and his wife Astrid set their sights on Canada. The Colombian-born couple began their family in Ecuador, but their dream was to provide their young children with a better life by immigrating to a developed country.

A hard-working man, Javier started his first career in his father's restaurant at the age of 12. In Ecuador, he completed a master's degree in business and took over the family operation at age 21. He was proud of his accomplishments, but in Canada, he was labeled as overqualified and lacking Canadian work experience.

With minimal English language proficiency and no knowledge of local support systems, Javier had a steep learning curve. He had to acquaint himself with the community without a driver's license. In all weather, Javier transported his children to school by bike before passing out over 200 resumes around Essex County. After connecting with a local small business owner, Javier secured his first Canadian work experience by

swallowing his pride and taking the position of a dishwasher.

After connecting with local supports and making new contacts at a church in Tecumseh, Javier learned about a better paying job, as a general assembler in a local factory. During this time, he would work midnights six days a week at the factory, while attending St. Clair College accrediting his business education.

Sleep was not an option for Javier and he spent the rest of his time studying for his license in financial advising. In 2007, he left his factory job and became a financial advisor with Sun Life Financial. His ultimate goal was to achieve a management position.

Applying his hard work ethic, experiencing a great deal of personal sacrifice and with the love and support of his wife and children, Javier achieved his goal and became a sales manager for Sun Life Financial on Anchor Drive in 2009. Javier leveraged the contacts he made to open the doors of opportunity and his determination and positive attitude helped him earn the position.

As a result of his own experience, Javier feels that networking is essential to succeed in the workplace.

"The definition of good luck is when opportunity meets preparation. You have to be ready all the time because the opportunity is going to come. It is not luck; it is just preparation for the opportunity to come together. *My advice to get ready is if you network and always prepare yourself, I think the opportunities will come,*" said Javier.

Networking To Success

Why did you choose to locate in Windsor/Essex?



When I first came to Canada, I came to Windsor. My husband was working here when I arrived and I didn't know what Windsor would be like. After six years, I just love it. I love the people here and everyone has been very nice. I love the organizations, schools, the hospitals that helped me a lot with my two young children. We love the nature and recreation, enjoying life through parks, playgrounds, and riverfront. The mild weather is just perfect for me. Windsor is now my home and we will never move.

Did you access any type of settlement services? If so, please tell us how/ if they assisted you in securing employment.

On top of the English language classes at YMCA I took to improve my language skills, I also received Language Training (ELT) for Finance and Accounting at Women's Enterprise Skills Training of Windsor Inc. In March 2010, I attended the Conference for Internationally Trained Professionals to use my soft skills and network with local employers. It was there that I met Donna Marentette, the Executive Director of Workforce WindsorEssex, she offered me the opportunity to be a member of the team. It was a turning point in my life.

Lijuan's Experience.....



What advice would you give to immigrants looking for work in Windsor-Essex?

Be patient and prepared for the opportunity: Learn English, learn how to communicate efficiently and effectively.

Be accepting of any suggestions: Employability skills are very important. Learning how to highlight your skills to an employer is key.

Trust people, trust our community: try to attend more events so that you can build your network to find your future job.

Never give up, learn more to prepare yourself, such as: get Canadian certificate, understand the Canadian culture.



Was there any key person who helped you in this process? How did they make an impact/difference?

I still remember when Donna called me to have the interview, I couldn't believe my ears, before the conference I sent a bunch of resumes and didn't receive any replies; I was totally lost and upset. The first few weeks of my job at Workforce WindsorEssex, Donna's patience and knowledge helped me to get through learning the new tasks. Whenever I made a mistake, she never blamed me; instead she gave me some hints to figure out where the problems were and how to get them under control. Donna's support has carried into my personal life; she suggested that I get my driver licence and helped me with my lessons and practice. This led me to purchasing my first car and motivated me to get a Canadian diploma so that I can go farther in my future. All in all, I give my heartfelt thanks to Donna Marentette because of her I gained my confidence back.