

ESTHER PETERS: MY PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY IN CANADA



Can you share your journey as an immigrant professional in Canada, including any challenges you faced and how you overcame them?

When I first arrived in Canada as a wide-eyed international student in 2016, I had no idea what to expect. Little did I know, my journey to becoming a professional in this great country would be filled with more plot twists than a telenovela!

My first "Canadian work experience" was at the KFC, where I spent four months taking orders and mopping floors. Talk about a humbling start!

My next opportunity was at the Vancouver Island University Alumni Call center where I worked 20hrs/week calling alumni, updating their contact information and collecting donations. That job gave me the contact center and customer service experience I needed to land my big break at TD Bank in September 2017!

As a customer account specialist at TD, I got a front-row seat to people's financial struggles. I listened to angry customers talk about their late auto loans, unemployed people surrendering their vehicles and this built my empathy skills and my ability to

have difficult conversations with grace and kindness. This prepared me for my next role as a Transitional Team Leader, in March 2022

In this position, I got to be the TD brand ambassador, training newbies and making sure they felt like they belonged. Talk about a dream job for an immigrant like me! I loved connecting with people who were in the same shoes I once wore, and helping them realize their full potential.

Of course, it hasn't all been smooth sailing. The dreaded imposter syndrome has reared its ugly head more times than I can count. But I've learned to silence that little voice of self-doubt by reaching out to my mentors and leaning on my supportive managers.

I transitioned to a co-op intern on the BOSS team in August 2022, I've been able to expand my portfolio and truly thrive. Now, I'm a Business Management Analyst, supporting the business, using my Masters degree and past experience and using AI to train my colleagues. Who would have thought the graduate student flipping burgers at KFC would end up here?

My journey to becoming a professional in Canada has been anything but linear. But through it all, I've learned to embrace

the twists and turns, and to never underestimate the power of a positive attitude and a willingness to learn.

If there's one thing I've taken away from this experience, it's that the Canadian dream is alive and well. With hard work, resilience, and a little bit of humor, anything is possible. So to all my fellow immigrant professionals out there, keep pushing forward - your moment is coming!

What resources or support networks did you find most helpful when settling into your professional life in Canada?

One of my most powerful tools was the humble coffee chat. At TD Bank, we take this ritual very seriously. It's like a secret handshake that opens doors to professional knowledge, lifelong friendships, and career-changing insights.

I've lost count of the number of times a casual coffee chat has led to an "aha!" moment that propelled me forward!

Another key to my success was learning to embrace feedback. In the beginning, it felt like a punch in the gut every time my

manager pointed out an area for improvement. But then I realized - this is gold! Pure, unadulterated, career-boosting gold. You see, feedback is like a crystal ball into your own blind spots. It shows you the things you didn't even know you didn't know. And in the Canadian workplace, that knowledge is power. So, I started leaning into it, using it as fuel to level up my skills and impress my colleagues.

Lastly, I couldn't have done it without the support of my mentors. It's like having a personal cheerleading squad, but with way better advice.

My mentors have been there for me through thick and thin - celebrating my wins, commiserating over my losses, and always pushing me to reach for the stars. They've opened doors, shared insider tips, and even helped me navigate the dreaded "Canadian experience" conundrum.

So there you have it - my secret weapons for navigating the Canadian professional jungle. Coffee chats, feedback, and mentorship. It's a simple formula, but it works like a charm.

To all my fellow immigrants out there, remember - you've got this! With a little help from your friends (and a lot of coffee), you can conquer any challenge that comes your way.

How did you navigate the Canadian job market and what strategies did you find effective in securing employment in your field?

My network has been the greatest source of help when transitioning! I made it clear to my manager, peers and mentors when I was looking to transition, there were times I felt ready to transition and having Career Development conversations with my managers helped me point out some misaligned aspirations e.g When I wanted to be a financial planner and she also called out areas I may need extra work to be the best candidates for the role.

Were there any surprises or unexpected aspects of working in Canada compared to your home country?

Coming from Nigeria, the whole "reward and recognition" thing was a real eye-opener.

Back home, it was like pulling teeth to get a simple "good job" from the higher-ups. But here, it's like they've got a secret stash

of trophies and incentives just waiting to be handed out! Turns out, they actually mean it when they say they value hard work and dedication.

Don't even get me started on the maternity leave situation. The option to choose between twelve to Eighteen months?! I thought they were pulling my leg. Back home, you're lucky if you get four months before they start calling to see when you're coming back. But here, they practically insist you take the full time off to bond with your little one. And the best part? Your job is waiting for you when you return, no questions asked. Talk about a game-changer!

So if you're like me and you're used to the whole "work yourself to the bone and get a pat on the back if you're lucky" routine, get ready for a pleasant surprise. In Canada, they actually seem to care about their employees and want to see them succeed.

Can you share any tips or advice for other immigrant professionals who are just starting their journey in Canada?

- Nothing comes easy. There will be sacrifices to be made to reach the pinnacle.
- Update your Professional profile. Use your professional picture and background to bring people over to your page and sell yourself on the work you've done, skills you've accomplished and your potential.
- Attend as many networking events as possible. Every opportunity you get, let people know what you do and what you are looking for - A closed mouth doesn't get fed!

How important do you think networking is for immigrant professionals, and what strategies have you used to expand your professional network in Canada?

As an immigrant professional, networking is like the secret sauce to your career success! I've used some pretty nifty strategies to expand my professional network in Canada. One of my favorites is the "I know a guy" approach. Imagine you're chatting with someone, and they're like, "Hey, I know this super important person who can help you out!" And just like that, you've got a direct line to the big boss.

Networking isn't just about using people to get ahead. It's about building genuine connections and being genuinely interested in others. I mean, who doesn't love talking about their family, pets, or that time they won the office pie-eating contest? I make sure to remember those little details and bring them up later.

Another strategy I use is the "Christmas card blitz." Every year, I send out a bunch of festive greetings to my network. It's a great way to stay in touch and show that you care. Plus, who doesn't love getting a card that says, "Merry Christmas, you're the best!" It's like a little hug for your career.

Have you encountered any cultural differences in the workplace, and if so, how have you adapted to or overcome them?

When I first started in this job, I was like a fish out of water when it came to the cultural nuances of my colleagues. But instead of retreating into my shell, I decided to lean in and learn. At the end of the day, navigating cultural differences in the workplace has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. It's taught me to be more open-minded, more

empathetic, and more adaptable – all skills that have served me well, both in the office and in my personal life. So if you ever find yourself in a similar situation, my advice is simple: embrace the diversity, be a cultural chameleon, and never stop learning. Who knows, you might just discover a new favorite sport or a delicious new dish along the way!

Can you share a memorable experience or success story from your professional journey in Canada?

Picture this: I'm sitting in a virtual department meeting, trying my best to look professional and show I am not sleepy and having a mid-day slump. The tension is palpable as they announce the winners of the North American Customer Operations EPIC award. And then, they call my name. I'm pretty sure I blacked out for a second, because the next thing I know, my manager is calling out all my accomplishment and what great support I have been, and I'm full-on ugly crying. Like, the kind of crying where you're making weird hiccup noises and your mascara is running down your face.

But you know what? I didn't even care. This award was the ultimate validation that all my hard work, late nights, and

endless cups of coffee had paid off. Suddenly, my name was synonymous with "top performer," "outstanding colleague," and "ability to drive business results." Take that, imposter syndrome!

Now, I'll admit, it did take me a solid seven years to get to this point, but hey, good things come to those who wait, right? And let me tell you, this award has been the gift that keeps on giving. My confidence is through the roof, and I'm doing my work with a little extra pep in my step.

So, if you ever find yourself feeling like you're not quite cutting it, just remember: a little persistence, a lot of hard work, and the occasional ugly cry can go a long way. Dear New immigrant, I am rooting for you!