

## Free business communications course helps immigrant restart her career

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When it comes to employment, having technical skills is important – but so is knowing the language and culture of your workplace. It's the soft skills in this second area that can be challenging for immigrants, as Sanaz Hemati knows first hand.



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In 2013, Hemati moved to Canada from Iran, where she had enjoyed an eight-year career in the quality assurance department of an international food processing and packaging company. After settling in Toronto with her new husband, she was keen to explore local job opportunities in food quality assurance. However, she knew she first needed to understand the business employment landscape in Ontario.

A web search turned up just what she needed: a course called Workplace Communication Skills for Entrepreneurship and Sales & Marketing. This free course offers work-related language training to newcomers wanting to restart their business careers. It focuses on understanding the cultural aspects of local business workplaces, interacting effectively with others, and networking with local employers and business associations. Offered at 13 colleges throughout Ontario, this 180-hour course is open to individuals with training or experience in sales or marketing or in running a business.

Hemati signed up for the course in late 2013 at Seneca College, attending classes every Saturday and one weekday afternoon. She started developing the key communication skills needed to effectively interact with supervisors, coworkers, customers, suppliers and government officials. The training addressed how to handle various forms of workplace communication, including emails, reports and presentations. She also learned tips for making small talk with coworkers and handling customer complaints. The small class size allowed for considerable one-on-one support, vibrant group discussions, and plenty of opportunities to practise new communication skills.

“The course familiarized me with the local work environment, and helped me a lot with improving my communication skills,” Hemati says.

At the same time, Hemati learned about the critical career-building skills she would need to resume her business career in Ontario. She learned how to prepare an appropriate resumé, customize cover letters for different employment opportunities, and perform well in a job interview. As well, she learned tips and tricks for growing her professional network, starting with her classmates – other internationally experienced business professionals from countries such as China, Iran, Korea and Russia.

“The information was very helpful and practical, and prepared me to jump into the workforce,” Hemati says. “I made valuable contacts in that course, and afterwards, we connected with each other on LinkedIn.”

The course Hemati took is part of Occupation-specific Language Training (OSLT), a series of workplace communication training courses for immigrants with training and/or experience in business, construction, health sciences, human services and technology. Funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and coordinated by Colleges Ontario, these courses are offered at Ontario colleges as full- or part-time options, in person, completely online, or as a blend of both.

Shortly after completing the course in January 2014, Hemati landed a job in a gluten-free bakery as a quality assurance manager. This past summer, she took on a new position as a quality control technician at one of the largest food industry companies in Etobicoke, a suburb of Toronto.

She says the OSLT course has played a big role in her career momentum.

“Even though I was a professional, I had a fear about returning to work because it was a new country,” Hemati says. “By practising these important communication skills, I gained the self-confidence to rebuild my career.”

By Sharon Aschaiek ([www.cocoamedia.ca](http://www.cocoamedia.ca))