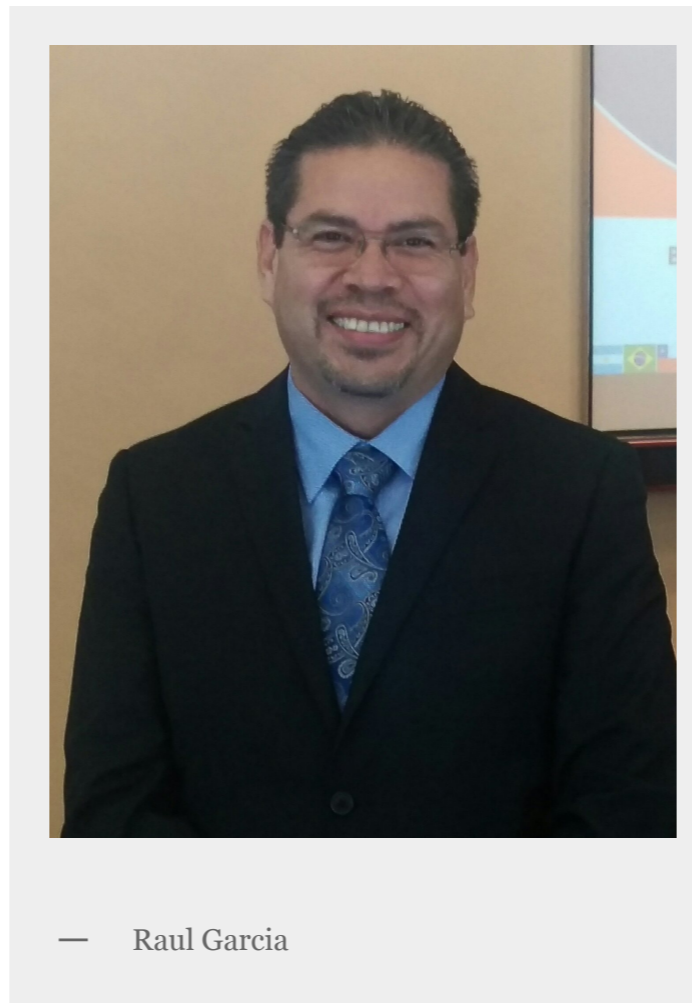


Free workplace language course helps immigrant gain skills and confidence

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When Raul Garcia and his wife chose to move to Canada from El Salvador in 2014, their goal was to provide better opportunities for their two daughters, then ages 16 and 10. But to help his family thrive, Garcia knew he'd have to integrate effectively and quickly into the Canadian workforce. Garcia, who is an experienced industrial engineer, began exploring avenues to resume his career in Toronto.



“The OSLT course was a great experience because it allowed me to recover my self-confidence. I always recommend the course to international professionals as a key part of searching for a job.”

His research turned up a promising option: an Occupation-specific Language Training (OSLT) course called Workplace Communication Skills for Technology, which offers work-related language training to newcomers wanting to restart their careers in technology or other fields. It teaches about effectively interacting with co-workers and supervisors, the cultural aspects of technology workplaces, and how to network with local employers. The 180-hour course is available at a number of colleges throughout Ontario and is open to immigrants with training or experience in engineering, architectural or information technology. Funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and coordinated by Colleges Ontario, OSLT courses also address workplace communication skills for business, health sciences, child and youth work, and construction trades.

As a participant in the course at Seneca College in the spring of 2015, Garcia learned about the proper protocols for written workplace communication such as email, memos and reports. He also received instruction in effective oral communication, for example, delivering presentations, participating in meetings and interacting with colleagues and supervisors. Through a combination of small group exercises, role-playing activities and practical homework assignments, Garcia enjoyed ample opportunities to practise and enhance his workplace language skills.

“I really enjoyed the classes, because they focused on the English skills we need in order to manage different workplace communication situations,” Garcia says.

A key component of the course focused on building communication skills to support career development. Garcia learned about how to create a résumé that clearly expressed his qualifications, and how to effectively express himself during a job interview. As well, the course helped him connect with local technology employers and industry associations and access various employment resources. Garcia also gained an understanding of the distinct characteristics of workplace culture at technology companies in Canada.

“The knowledge and skills we gained were very useful when you are trying to look for a job,” Garcia says. “It was very beneficial for me to understand Canadian culture in the IT job environment, because that helps with getting ahead.”

During the course, Garcia got to network with his classmates, internationally trained IT professionals from countries such as Colombia, Iran and South Korea. Several of them have since become part of his network, and they stay in touch on LinkedIn or Facebook and meet for coffee from time to time.

The improved English language skills Garcia gained through the OSLT course as well as previous English-as-a-second-language training prepared him to pursue a university-level bridging program in project management. The training also helped him interview for and achieve an internship at an elevator installation company in Scarborough, and after two months, he was hired as a full-time project manager. He subsequently was hired on a temporary contract as a project control officer in the Latin American IT products division of a major Canadian bank. As he now explores other employment opportunities, he continually returns to what he learned in class to help him further build his career.

By Sharon Aschaiek (www.cocoamedia.ca)