

WITH Linda West, immigration and human resource consultant



Linda West MBA, PhD – is a senior Organizational Development manager with extensive experience and accomplished service in developing and delivering human resource policy. She is a performance strategist, with in-depth knowledge of regulatory bodies and legislation related to human resource management especially in Health Care.

Angelito (Lito) Hernandez – is the President and Managing Director of a Philippine company that has a three decade history in the overseas recruitment industry. This company has numerous awards of distinction from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) of the Philippine Department of Labour and Employment. His company has worked extensively with the petrochemical, healthcare, service, manufacturing and aviation sectors.

They were interviewed prior to their Breakfast on the Frontier speech in Regina on April 22, 2008.

Frontier Centre: Does Canada have a labour shortage now and into the future? And if so, in what sector(s) is that shortage?

Linda West: The labour shortage is just basically starting. As the baby boomers retire over the next ten to 15 years the labour shortage is going to be much larger. It's going to hit Western Canada first just because of our economic boom that we're going to exacerbate that shortage. It's going to hit all sectors, from highly, highly skilled people to people in trades but we're going to generally be short in every single sector.

FC: Just picking up again on the labour shortage, can you give us some sort of quantitative idea of how big this shortage is compared to the Canadian economy?

LW: Frankly, as we moved around from table to table speaking to the people who came to this [Breakfast on the Frontier], many of their companies are today in the place where they cannot recruit enough people to grow their businesses whether it be potash, whether it be equipment for the pot ash industry, whether it be for oil and mining or the small business that are represented by the Candian Federation for Independent Business that was also here. So what you're seeing is the lack of the labour force restricting our growth and development here in Saskatchewan today, now. The projections are that whatever the shortage is in your industry that they will double every 3 – 5 years for the next 15 years. So you're going to see, depending on the industry, this shortage do nothing but grow in very large quantities.

FC: You noted that a Visa retrogression in the United States is giving Canadian employers more choices when hiring internationally. What does that tell us about international competition for attracting workers?

Angelito Hernandez: To give you an idea there is very tough competition. If you recruit a worker the processing is kind of tedious. I don't think they can wait for a long processing time because it disturbs their capacity to grow. Canada is second to the States as their favorite destination but if the processing will take a longer period of time it will probably delay the deployment. Because a particular candidate would check for means of income so he would

again accept other projects like in the Middle East while being processed in Canada.

LW: That's exactly what happened to one of our nurses. We had a nurse all signed up and they could wait for 3or 4 more months to go to Canada or they could go immediately to Dubai and they went to Dubai.

FC: From a public policy perspective, what is the single biggest improvement that could be made to immigration policy from the perspective of tackling Canada's labour shortage?

LW: There's [bill] C-10 out there right now that's trying to make it simpler and more straight forward for those very needed. The areas in our economies where we need people the most will be the ones that are moved to the front of the line so the groups of people that we need the most are moved to the front of the line. But frankly, the area that we are in to today and right now is trying to bring people in on work Visas and we need, particularly, for that labour market opinion process to be sped up and to be more user friendly. And I do think our embassy on the Filipino end is doing the very best they can and they keep increasing the work force. The issue is that the demand is increasing right across Canada, or at least from Ontario West, is dramatically increasing so we're seeing some backlog. Maybe it's just the general attentiveness of Service Canada in our embassies to request a bigger work force as the demand increases? We are literally today slowing down our economic growth because we don't have workers.

AH: Let's say the industrial countries are putting up measures to augment the shortfall in the labour shortage, even Australia has been going around the world conducting job fairs. The government is helping the employers to secure foreign workers. The most recent one, they provided a temporary work permit for two years to skilled workers for eventual conversion to an immigrant Visa. Last October, the Australian government introduced an immersion Visa for 18 months for newly graduated engineers from a particular university in the Philippines and we are processing them right now.

FC: The history of governments attempting to second guess prices and markets has not been great. Bill C-10

effectively seeks to choose which kinds of labourers the economy is going to require, do you have any perspective on the long run success of such a strategy? Or would it be better if there was actually less prescription of worker types?

LW: I guess our issue is that we now have something like a 6, 7, 8, 9 year backlog. For people who are applying for immigration in the normal process through the points program we've got such a terrible backlog that it really, truly is not allowing the people in the skilled workforce to get through. So either we need to expedite that or else we need to expedite the Labour Market Opinion, right? So if we could make the LMO faster then we could conquer it. So one or both needs to happen so if you really need highly skilled people, for example we just keep hearing about welders over and over again, you could have a welder sitting at 7 years out and that's very problematic. So one or the other has to give so the employer can get that person that they so desperately need so that they can grow their company.

FC: What advantages do Filipino workers have over immigrants from other origins in the Canadian labour market?

AH: The deployment and sending of workers is nothing new in the Philippines. During the Spanish time, we were under colonial rule for a couple hundred years. The Filipinos started to go overseas between Mexico and Manila and then many of them settled in the Gulf of Mexico, and New Orleans. During the early 1900's, many went to Hawaii and California and got into farming, apple picking, planting of oranges. During the 50's, that was the exodus of the skilled and professional levels engineers, doctors and nurses to

the [United] States. During the early 60's the U.S. adopted a nursing exchange program. Things boiled down to the American system and the English language that the Americans introduced in 1898, they sent thousands of teachers and gave us the American way of education. In fact, during those days the public education was better than the private system. Also, you probably remember the Shah of Iran?? Iran was so prominent during the 60's because they produce a lot of oil. There were a lot of Filipinos working in Iran then. Later on the economy in the Middle East improved because of the price of oil. There were Filipinos in almost all companies.... You go to these countries and you see Filipinos. Right before the Millennium, a lot of IT people had been going to the States and afterwards even UK hired more or less 35,000 nurses from the years 2000-2006. The point is Filipinos are more industrious when they are abroad. Their number one strength is their work discipline and their communication skills.

LW: So basically what you're saying is that the Philippines has a long history of exporting labour therefore their school systems and everything is set up to produce more than their local needs and beyond producing those highly skilled people those people can speak English which is just such a key component to this. Very few people work as individuals anymore, we all work in teams. So when you're talking about a welder, you want that welder to also be able to work within a team and that's essential now in our work environment so the Filipino becomes the ideal worker at that stage.