

Why Kindness Should Be Part of Your Hiring Process

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Life is constantly in flux. As people, we crave stability and certainty, and carefully construct road maps for the future – yet the universe has a way of throwing curveballs and sidelining our plans. For most of us, this uncertainty can be a major cause of stress and exhaustion and can negatively impact our mental health. Never has this been more widely experienced than in the last two and a half years as the Covid-19 pandemic ravaged the globe and caused worldwide lockdowns, economic downturn, familial separation and a tragic loss of life for many.

Across Canada and the United States, approximately 1 in 5 people will personally experience a mental health problem, and by age 40, nearly 50% of North Americans will have had a mental illness. Environmental factors, such as meaningful employment, leisure activities, access to nature and community support, play an important role in our mental health, and many of these factors fell by the wayside during the pandemic.

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The pandemic's impact on employment and mental health

While the Covid-19 pandemic affected us all, recent statistics have proven that the offshoots of the pandemic have been more strongly felt by under-represented groups such as immigrants,

Indigenous Peoples and impoverished socio-economic groups. The pandemic disproportionately impacted these minority groups, as witnessed through mental health and employment opportunities.

Take immigrants, for example. When they are searching for jobs, many of them struggle through interviews as they often lack language or local culture knowledge. The pandemic introduced new variables into this process, including online interviews, lack of in-person connection, lost networking opportunities and reduced in-person interactions. A change of basic human interaction rules took away the few constants that many job seekers had in the past. Each of these hurdles compounds their lived experience and could potentially result in mental health problems.

The pandemic also disproportionately affected marginalized groups who are living on or below the poverty line. Many members of these groups have manual labor jobs, many of which were cut during the pandemic. And for those who did switch to remote work, some did not have access to the technology required to continue working effectively.

As the founder of ComIT, a non-profit charitable organization that provides free tech training to under-represented minorities, I've spoken for years about the importance of providing marginalized groups a first chance to start or restart their careers. I've witnessed their challenges and experienced some of them firsthand when I immigrated to Canada from Argentina in 2015. I've become passionate about educating under-represented groups and matching them with organizations where they can grow and thrive.

Even prior to the pandemic, it was proven that systemic inequalities such as racism, poverty, discrimination and colonial-violence can worsen mental health and symptoms of mental illness, especially if mental health support is difficult to access. Throughout the pandemic, these impacts have been more strongly felt.

Related: What Hiring with Empathy Looks Like in a Post-Covid World

What can we do to help?

I personally believe that one way to grapple with the uncertainty of the world is to make everything a little bit lighter. When we conduct interviews or meet potential hires, it helps to remind ourselves to be mindful and respectful of interviewees. Understanding that the applicant is going through a stressful situation while looking for a job on top of their everyday struggle can help us connect more with the person, which will also give us an edge in understanding if they will be a good fit for our team.

Always remember that if an applicant has the technical skills you need and the ability and desire to learn more, these might be good people to have on your team. So, it is on us to exercise our empathy and mindfulness to find the true gems that are hiding behind the issues many of us are facing. It is on us to tend a helping hand sometimes.

Taking this stand may mean pausing throughout our busy day to remember that everyone is trying to do their best and to bring empathy to every interaction. If we're looking for employees who will be a part of our team for the long-term, emphasizing kindness is a first step to creating that reality. If we think about those around us as a part of a community and emphasize kindness, we can help build a better post-pandemic world.

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