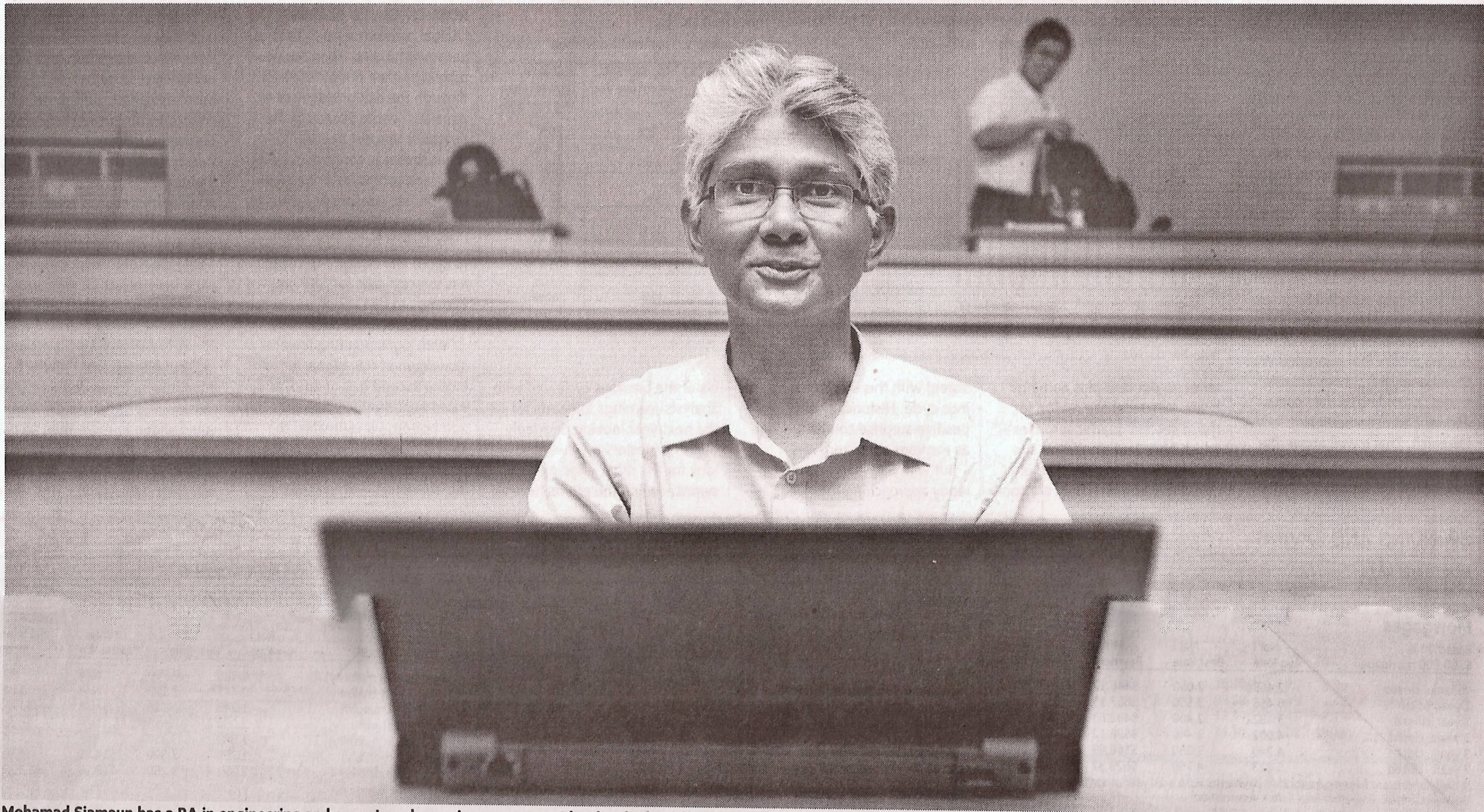


Globe Careers

JOB HUNTING



Mohamad Sjamaun has a BA in engineering and a masters degree in management but has had a difficult time finding a job that matches his experience and abilities. JENNIFER ROBERTS FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

A path to acceptance for immigrant professionals

Thousands of immigrants with advanced degrees and extensive experience in their home countries can't find jobs that use their skills and experience in Canada. New studies show that the percentage of managers from visible minorities lags far behind their proportion of Canada's population. **Wallace Immen** investigates what skilled immigrants need to do to move from menial jobs and into management

When Mohamad Sjamaun arrived in Toronto from Jakarta last year, he had high hopes of being able to use his skills and extensive managerial experience to land a professional job to be able to support his wife and four children.

He has a BA in engineering and added a masters degree in management, which led to 12 years of executive roles in technical sales and project coordinator for the Indonesian operations of Hewlett-Packard Co.

Since arriving in Canada, he has applied for managerial jobs at more than 100 companies without even getting a nibble. "I sent in résumés and cover letters about my experience and there was no follow up. "I was using up all my

savings and couldn't find any kind of work," he says. To make ends meet he took a low-paying clerical job for a scrap metal company on two-month contracts.

"Obviously I want to find something more permanent that uses my skills," he says, such as a job as project coordinator or sales or technology manager. But to do that he's realized he has to reinvent himself for the realities of the Canadian workplace.

It's a reality the majority of skilled immigrants need to face, career experts say.

"Many immigrants face a job market that doesn't know how to assess or use their skills," says Nora Priestly, project manager for a new Internationally Educated Professionals Bridging Pro-

gram at York University. While similar programs have been in place to help immigrants in regulated professions such as engineering, medicine and nursing, this program aims to help immigrants with managerial experience get into leadership roles.

There are 67 students who got into the program by word of mouth and advertisements, and all have university degrees, with 57 per cent having masters or higher. The majority of the students have five or more years of experience in their professional fields — accounting, marketing, public policy, finance and management.

All of them are underemployed or not working at all, and all are actively looking

for a job. Many are in "survival jobs" in retail, as security guards, driving cabs or working as volunteers in social programs that have only a modest paycheck attached to them, Ms. Priestly says.

Through York's program, Mr. Sjamaun has taken courses to upgrade his technical skills, and, even though he speaks fluent English, he has attended classes to improve his business language skills. He also was teamed up with a volunteer mentor, who has helped him make industry contacts.

And it is bring results: "Networking landed my first interview with a potential employer last week," he says. "I didn't get the job, but it shows I am heading in the right direction."

ROADBLOCKS

LACK OF 'CANADIAN EXPERIENCE'

» Employers often want a track record to show that employees can perform up to expectations in the Canadian workplace.

UNFAMILIAR DEGREES OR CERTIFICATION

» Employers can't be sure that foreign credentials have the same qualifications as those granted in Canada.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

» Even those who speak English or French will be unfamiliar with specific terms and phrases used in Canadian businesses

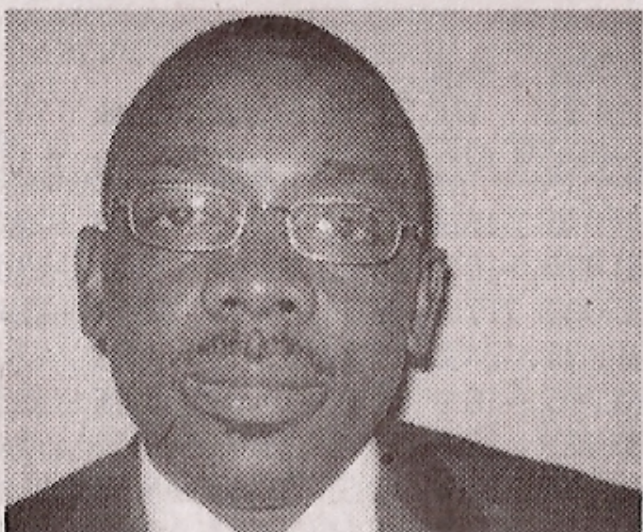
LACK OF INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE

» Legal, financial and regulatory issues specific to Canada will require retraining.

LACK OF CONNECTIONS

» A majority of jobs are found through networking and knowledge of industries, which is where mentoring can help.

UNDER RECOGNIZED, OVER QUALIFIED



PAUL FIFEN, 40, CAMEROON

CREDENTIALS: With a BA in management sciences and a masters in international marketing from a Cameroon university, he rose to the rank of marketing manager with an international logistics company in the capital city Yaoundé. He moved to Toronto in Dec. 2006.

CHALLENGE: No Canadian experience. "I have been looking for other jobs all along. Every week I send out resumes, but they say I am either overqualified or that I have no professional experience," he says. For more than year, he worked in what he calls a "survival job" at minimum wage in a call centre. Since then, he has worked for a medical device sales company, which is a full time job "but it doesn't use the skills I have and it offers no challenge," he says.

Besides that, the entry level pay is less than half what he had been making as a manager in Cameroon. So he still can't afford to bring his family here.

ACTION TAKEN: He is taking courses through a bridging program at York University in business skills, including communications, Canadian law and business ethics.

RESULT: Through the program he has widened his network of contacts and he hopes to get into an internship. He recently interviewed for a job that hopes will lead to a managerial position that may also lead to a managerial position using his skills and past experience.

LESSON: "Life can be difficult, but I always like to take on challenges and I am going to persist. I believe something better will come for me and my family from all my effort."

AVOIDING A TRAP



ARI SANYAL, 38, INDIA

CREDENTIALS: BA and MBA in marketing from universities in India and 15 years experience as advertising executive, most recently strategic planning director for BBDO in Saudi Arabia.

CHALLENGE: Moved to Canada in July, 2009 seeking a better lifestyle for his wife and two daughters, 2 and 8. "It was a big psychological challenge because Canadian employers ask for Canadian experience and I felt I'd have to start all over again and reinvent myself, at a time when the economy was at its worst."

ACTIONS TAKEN: Seeking references and contacts, he sought out business events to attend and got into a mentorship program sponsored by TRIEC, a Toronto immigrant employment service. He approached the department

head of every ad agency in Toronto and found most of them open to giving him advice and references, although there were no jobs available. After three months, he expanded his networking to a former colleague who was working in New York, who referred him to a Canadian recruiter. "Getting a reference was a huge lift for me in terms of credibility," he says.

RESULT: He was recruited to become strategic planner at Trigger Communications in Calgary, a step down in terms of title and responsibility than jobs he had before. "You have to anticipate that you have to prove yourself in a new market. If you are good, it is a matter of time before you prove yourself and get ahead," he says.

LESSON: Avoid taking a survival job if at all possible. "I have seen many immigrants get into a rut of working for low pay in a job that doesn't use their talent. It becomes increasingly harder to get out."

A SUCCESS STORY



ERIC XIAO, 46, CHINA

CREDENTIALS: BS in engineering and post graduate studies in management and English in China. Three years as engineer with company in China. Came to Canada in 1989 and got an MBA from the University of Toronto.

CHALLENGE: A lack of soft skills. "It was a struggle finding a job in Canada even with a Canadian degree, because I did not have network contacts," he says. After three years with a small company in Mississauga doing accounting work as a controller, he joined Ernst & Young LLP, at an entry level junior auditor position. But there seemed to be no next step: "There were no role models, no partners like me who were visible

minority immigrant with an accent. That made me doubt of whether I could ever make partner."

ACTIONS TAKEN: E&Y had a "learning partnership" program to team up aspiring g junior staff employees with senior executives who act as mentors available to answer questions about career objectives. "I realized I had a good reputation from a technical perspective, but to become a partner required looking at opportunities and building a business case for promotion and networking with partners to get better known — the soft side of my career."

RESULT: Named a partner at E & Y in 2006, specializing in tax transactions.

LESSON: "I had to get out of my comfort zone that had me focusing on the technical job but not building relationships. That's something that is a common problem for visible minorities."