

MAPLE 2.0 Gives a Chance to Show a “Can-Do” Attitude

By Gwen Pawlikowski

As Diljeet Brar stepped off his plane from India on December 31, 2010, he brought with him a couple of degrees in Agriculture and a belief in his own ability to succeed in Canada.

That confidence has not failed him.

Brar is a people person. He likes engaging and finding out about others. He's calm, positive and smiles easily. It's no wonder he found his first job very quickly after arriving on the final day of 2010. The new year in Surrey would hold ample opportunity that would ultimately see him find a job as a Project Manager. But there were many steps on the path to his success and MAPLE 2.0 was one of the important ones.

Within a week of landing, Brar was sending out resumes. He'd heard from others that finding a job was not easy, so he threw out a wide net. He applied for jobs in research in university agriculture departments, and he applied for the classic survival jobs. Brar simply wanted to earn money to prevent his family's savings from being depleted too quickly. Ironically, his first job was actually in his field, although in a significantly different position from what he had been doing from 2000 to 2010 in India.



During that decade, Brar's skills were being honed by his work in Communications. Working for a university in his country, Brar's job was to communicate with farmers in his local community. His Masters' degree in Agricultural Extension prepared him to be a bridge between the farmers and science, as represented by university researchers. He wrote, he interviewed and he reported information valuable to keep the

learning flow between the community and the university. It was a position where he was involved in helping people, so his first job working in a Surrey retail vegetable shop had at least a few common elements, although none of the status of his previous work.

Nevertheless, he persisted in searching for a job to use more of his capabilities, all the while staying upbeat.

“As a person, I'm not that impatient,” he said in an interview. “I'm a kind of stable personality. I knew that this would happen and I was prepared for that.”

A job closer to his target would emerge soon after. A Punjabi radio station hired him for a part-time news broadcaster position. Here was Brar's opportunity to use his communication skills. His first broadcast was the day news of Osama Bin Laden's death on May 2, 2011. He continued this work along with the vegetable shop job for a few months. Even now, he still writes some freelance articles and appears on TV news programs. Unfortunately, his knowledge in agricultural science didn't seem to be attracting any full-time employment offers.

The agricultural expert's next step was a job search program at ISS of BC. His wife, who works in soil chemistry, participated in the program as well. After completion, she was directed to a MAPLE 2.0 internship in a water lab. But just after starting at the lab, she received an offer for full time work

from a different company. Brar, in the spirit of being helpful, took over the internship left by his wife. Within a few days of working at the company, the HR department contacted him to offer a four-month contract. Even though lab work wasn't really the people-oriented job he'd hoped for, he accepted. It turned out well.

“I learned a lot. I adjusted myself in the work setting. People were good. They were welcoming. So I found my employer as an equal-opportunity employer. Everything went well,” he said of his experience.

Newcomers need a 3D formula: determination, dedication and discipline.

Clearly, things were looking up. Science paid better than broadcasting, which was better than retail vegetable sales. Unfortunately, it seemed like Brar couldn't yet achieve exactly what he wanted: he couldn't combine his skill in science with his skill in communications. So thanks to his belief that he could have everything he'd hoped for, he kept his eyes open for future opportunities.

A couple of months later, a customer service opening was advertised with the same employer. He applied, but needed to explain in the interview why he wanted to leave the lab so soon after starting. This was his opportunity to ask for the position that would mean he was back in his field.

“This was important—extremely important for me because I've been trained for that. I've spent years of my life learning agricultural science communications. I want to use that for the sake of national development, for the development of the world, for serving people, for giving back to society.”

As he explained his university work in the interview, the company was convinced. He was hired. Now in a situation where he knew he could thrive, he did. It wasn't long until he was promoted to Project Manager, a position he has held since February of 2012.

For this academic, successful integration has meant learning from mentors that have been as young as the students he used to teach. During this phase, he learned to give up the status he had experienced back home, abandoning his teaching self-image and reframing himself as a beginner. Throughout this period, he understood that his adjustment was only temporary, like passing through a tunnel on a road trip.

“I knew I would win. I knew I would pass through it—there's light after that.”

Confidence has been such an important factor for Brar throughout his job search. Despite a lack of Canadian experience, Brar surged ahead believing strongly that companies want work to be done and people to do it. They need people with “can-do” attitudes much more than Canadian experience.

“Can-do attitude can be anywhere on earth,” he says.

Brar, highly skilled in communicating messages, says there is a 3D formula that newcomers need to succeed: determination, dedication and discipline.

“If you think you can, you can,” Brar says.

MAPLE 2.0 gave Brar an opportunity to show his ability to succeed in science and to sell himself for the job he wanted. For the future, he hopes for a MAPLE 2.0 expansion so that there are more internships in places such as universities and colleges, more places where academic newcomers can get the Canadian experience to show their can-do attitudes.