

# Labour shortage a farce

## Real problem is companies aren't paying enough for people to live on

I think the so-called Alberta labour shortage is BS.

We don't have a labour shortage. We have a pay shortage.

Businesses in dire need of staff either can't or won't pay a living wage, so they can't get staff.

Edmonton and Calgary businesses are flooded with help-wanted signs. Many have other signs, too — advising they're closing early because they can't get enough employees.

I haven't done a study of the issue (but I don't think the Alberta government has done one, either).

What I have done is talked to plenty of people who want to work, but can't get a job that would cover expenses.

Three close friends with good qualifications have been looking for a decent job for weeks with no luck.

One has 20-plus years running an insurance business. Another has been a daily newspaper reporter and editor here and in Toronto for 10 years.

My third friend has many years working in fields such as property management, payroll and government.

Despite applying in their fields and related ones, they can't land a decent job that offers half-decent pay.

"I've probably sent out 200 resumes in the last three weeks," sighs my friend, who's seeking property management work.

Companies that replied are offering less than \$30,000 a year before taxes for management positions.

That kind of cash is hardly enough to support one person much less raise a teenager as she's trying to do.

She's now applying for just about any job, having done payroll and other office work. One major retailer offered her an inventory control job involving lots of overnight western travel (taking her away from her daughter) for \$10.50 an hour. "You can't live on that," she rightly says.

Because she loves to work, she's now advertising to do house and office cleaning through a company she's set up. Despite advertising, she's had no bookings.

My friend with insurance experience moved here from Ontario for the

Alberta Advantage, but is now doing manual labour for about \$13 an hour — just enough to scrape by.

My journalist pal says there aren't a lot of jobs in that biz, so he's branched out to apply for public relations gigs. Once again, pay is an issue.

"Most of those jobs are junior and I'd have to take a huge pay cut from what I got working at daily papers," he said.

Let's face it, Alberta has become exceedingly expensive. House and condo prices are skyrocketing.

Rents are way up, too.

My friend who owns an employment agency told me many months ago she'll no longer even take on national clients seeking employees if they're only offering \$12 to \$13 per hour for jobs. "It's no use advertising for people if that's the money offered," she said. "People can't live on that in Edmonton. You won't get applications for that money."

Too true. It's time businesses — especially large national chains — realized that and paid a living wage.

That would do a whole lot to solving the so-called Alberta labour shortage.

The proof?

I've got three friends who'd be more than happy to become part of the mainstream workforce.



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