

Clément Ndiaye

My name is Clément Ndiaye. I am originally from Senegal and I arrived in Canada in April of 2004.

IMMIGRATING TO CANADA

When I left the airport, everything was so big compared to Senegal or even France. Everything was just big: the roads, the vehicles; the people were nice. I was in Montreal and it was unlike anything I had seen before. It left a great impression on me and I told myself that first day: "I want to live here." My very, very first job was handing out flyers on the corner of McGill and Sainte-Catherine in Montreal. I got the job through a placement agency.

Maybe they wanted to test me to see what I was capable of a bit, but that was it, my first job. Despite all the diplomas I had, that was my first job.

AFTER ONLY THREE MONTHS, CLÉMENT FOUND A JOB IN HIS FIELD, FINANCE.

HE HAS CONTINUED TO CLIMB THE LADDER AND NOW WORKS TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY AT A BANK.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE

My first and biggest challenge was English. Entry-level positions in the financial world, here in Canada, are often customer service positions. And since Montreal is a large bilingual city, you have to be able to speak English and French in order to work in customer service. So, my biggest challenge was to learn English. Just to get a job, I had to be able to speak English with the recruiters. My first interviews were therefore not great successes. When I figured out that English was going to be my greatest challenge, I began hanging around with people who were Anglophone. I would speak with a brother-in-law of mine, who was perfectly bilingual, so that I could develop the vocabulary I needed.

And I also memorized the questions that I might be asked during interviews. When I interviewed with the Laurentian Bank, these were precisely the questions I was asked. I was able to answer correctly because in the end they hired me. And when I started working, it was really just a matter of listening to the people around me to see how they spoke. I would hang around people who were mostly Anglophone. This allowed me to improve my English and to be able to serve customers very quickly.

LIFE IN CANADA

What I love the most about my life in Canada is the freedom of thought. Anything I want, I can achieve it here. It is also the opportunity to advance professionally, without any barriers, at least visible ones. The barriers may be there, but I don't see them and I don't feel them. And this opportunity to develop myself socially, because I do not work just because I like working; I work to develop myself. My job therefore allowed me to buy my first home, to buy my first car, to travel and to meet people. It is this professional and social development that is so rewarding.

KEEPING ONE'S CULTURE ALIVE

My Senegalese culture is inside of me. In my definition of myself, I am Clément and I am fundamentally Senegalese. The way my culture manifests itself in my day-to-day life is through language. With my sisters I speak French, English, just as well as Wolof, which is the national dialect in Senegal. In terms of food, too. I love Senegalese dishes that remind me of my childhood and the years I spent in Senegal. I often go to visit my parents who still live in Senegal at least once a year. I also have a circle of friends who are also from Senegal and we often get together to chat, to eat together, to play sports together. And this is what allows me to keep my "Senegality" here in Canada.

ON CANADIAN IDENTITY

For me, Canadian identity means respect. It begins with respecting Canadian values. This term "Canadian values" I believe it begins with respecting the laws in the city, province and country in which we live; and knowing the history. It may not be necessary to learn history from the very beginning of Canada but I'm doing it. I find it very interesting to find out how a country was created. It helps me to understand the various issues in Canada, whether from a socio-political, geopolitical or demographic point of view. Getting personally interested in the country where you live. This also manifests itself through voting. Taking the time to go vote when there are elections, both at the federal and provincial levels, and municipal elections. Because there are so many people in the world who would love to have that right. We are lucky here in Canada to be able to express our opinions. For me, this is what encompasses identity. It is respecting the institutions, respecting Canadian values and having this curiosity to learn about the country that you have emigrated to.

Clément is Training and Supervision Director at TD Bank in Montreal. He is part of a committee at TD Bank that promotes cultural diversity in Canada.