

## **Pioneering Talent Retention: Economic Development Winnipeg's Award-Winning Portal**

Host: Maggie John

### **Overview:**

In this episode, Ashley Dunlop joins us to discuss Economic Development Winnipeg's (EDW) pioneering efforts to harness cutting-edge technology to enhance impact in Manitoba. Ashley Dunlop is the Director of Talent and Workforce Development at EDW. Dunlop shares the role technology has played in making talent recruitment more efficient and effective in Manitoba, the importance of newcomer recruitment, and how efforts in these areas led to EDW being awarded the first ever Technology Trailblazer Award at Magnet Network Live.

### **MAGGIE:**

We are here at Magnet Network Live. I'm your host Maggie John and I'm here with Ashley Dunlop, she is a director of talent and workforce at Economic Development Winnipeg. Welcome Ashley.

### **ASHLEY:**

Thank you so much for having me.

### **MAGGIE:**

And also congratulations so you guys won an award with Magnet. Tell us a little bit about that.

### **ASHLEY:**

Yeah, well we are very very honored to be the recipients of the Technology Trailblazer Award here at Magnet Live. So we have come from Winnipeg and have been

experiencing these wonderful connections over this morning and over the next day. And we're just really honored to be recognized for the work.

We have been working with the Magnet platform for more than three years of our project, and we've been working even longer before we started this. And so to have that work recognized, we feel like we're doing just our regular work, and so to have it recognized as a technology trailblazer is really a great honor for us.

**MAGGIE:**

Tell us about that work. It does include working in Manitoba, also job seekers across the globe, not just here in Canada. Tell us a little bit more about what you guys do.

**ASHLEY:**

Yeah. So we are the administrators of the Work in Manitoba job portal that's funded by the government of Manitoba. And it uses the Magnet technology platform as the basis of that technology.

And so what we've really done is use Work in Manitoba to be the meeting point of the talent ecosystem in Manitoba. Through the past years, through customizations, through development and promotion, we have been able to connect with our post-secondary institutions who are driving their graduates into the portal. We've been able to connect with their employment service agencies who are using our portal as their job board. We've been able to work with sector councils to really make this the definitive spot in Manitoba for meeting, connecting business and talent.

Economic Development Winnipeg—our mandate is helping the business community of Winnipeg and of Manitoba with retention of workers, with finding the right talent.

In Manitoba, we lose more workers than, you know, more people leave Manitoba than come in. And so it's really important for us to be able to find key talent to keep growing our economy.

One of the ways that we have sort of creatively, I would say, hacked the Magnet platform and the system is using it when we do international recruitment missions. Many economic development agencies across Canada go abroad to search for

skilled workers to fill the talent gaps. And so when we do that, we're doing it no differently, other than we drive everything, everyone that we're meeting into Work in Manitoba.

When we plan a talent mission, before we go, we are identifying, working with businesses to identify the jobs that they have. We are posting those on Work in Manitoba and then we're doing outreach, whether it's in Morocco, whether it's in France, in the UK, to source talent who are already applying for those jobs in the portal before we even go there.

Once we go to these events, we are actually bringing businesses who are doing live interviews with the candidates that have been identified within the Work in Manitoba job portal as the best fit.

It's a really targeted approach, a really good use of employer time. I mean, convincing a business to come take a week off—you know, we have to be able to show results. And so doing that has really helped us with making the most of those trips.

We do, you know, awareness of quality of life in Manitoba and in Winnipeg. But this has helped us really get very tangible results for our business community. Also, it helps extend the lifetime of a talent recruitment mission, whether it's overseas, whether it's in another Canadian city, whether it's at a job fair at one of our post-secondary institutions.

Because once they sign into the Work in Manitoba platform, they are part of our potential talent ecosystem. For example, companies that are looking to come to Winnipeg and they say, if we open our operations, we're going to need 200 people with this particular skill or this job title—we can show them before we account. Well, within the Work in Manitoba ecosystem, which is only talent who either live in or are open to relocating to Winnipeg, we have X number of skilled employees.

It really gives us the ability to have a pulse on what we have, what gaps we have, and what potential there is.

**MAGGIE:**

What are some of the gaps that you're finding in Manitoba?

**ASHLEY:**

So that's a great question. I would say a lot of our post-secondary institutions are doing a really great job with upskilling or skilling the new workers entering the workforce, so, you know, coming through the college and the university system.

What we have heard, for example, is sometimes the missing piece is the mid- to senior-level talent is missing in some key sectors. Tech is an example. We're actually currently running a tech mission with a focus on the key talent, and what our businesses are telling us is, we have great people coming out of our schools, but we don't have the mentors or the senior, you know, the lead UX architect is what we're missing.

And so we need those people to be able to continue to build the workforce and mentor the new graduates who are coming out.

Another sector that has been really, really active and has seen great results from the Work in Manitoba job portal and workforce solution would be our transportation sector.

Heavy-duty mechanics, truck drivers, diesel mechanics—that sector has a real skills gap. I think it was affected, you know, by the COVID pandemic. And just not enough, not enough local people coming up who want to do those jobs or who have the skills to do that.

And so we've had really great success bringing new employees from the UK, from Ireland, from Germany, from Morocco to fill these gaps.

**MAGGIE:**

Talk to me about then the diversity of experience that you probably get in having, you know, a collective of different people with different life experiences, different cultural experiences coming into the workforce in Manitoba?

**ASHLEY:**

Well, I think that it's added a lot to Winnipeg and the Manitoba workforce. I mean, one great thing about Winnipeg is it was already a very diverse city. We love to say more than 100 languages are spoken there, and so there was a lot of appreciation for cultural diversity.

We have one of the biggest cultural festivals in Canada every year. I think it's the 30th anniversary or something, our Folklorama. So people from Winnipeg really appreciate that. We also have a thing being from Manitoba, I think we are always a little bit flattered when people come to our city and have chosen to move to Winnipeg or to make a life there.

And so I always know when I was a university student, for example, when you would meet an exchange student who had come from France or who had come from Australia and they were doing their exchange term in Winnipeg, we really wanted to host them. Like we are a friendly Manitoba for a reason.

And so I think that the diversity that is coming, been coming, so we're bringing skilled workers through these missions. We also have Manitoba was the first province in Canada that had the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program and really led those initiatives in Canada, sort of pioneered the idea that regions across Canada are different, they have different needs, and some places like Winnipeg, Manitoba need some extra help in attracting workers that the more famous cities, the more well-known Toronto, Vancouver's don't need to have.

And so the spirit of immigration and the attraction of workers has a really long tradition in Winnipeg and Manitoba, which I think newcomers are really pleased to see.

You know, most of the job seekers that we see overseas are not familiar with Winnipeg when they start. Nobody has really had the dream to move to Winnipeg since they were a small child, you know? But then when they start engaging with us and they learn about the amazing quality of life, cost of living, the opportunities, it's still a place where they can experience a bit of that, you know, like, dream of getting established, having a house, being able to do all these Canadian things in, you know, access to nature that really is sort of what I think Canada has always sold.

**MAGGIE:**

And probably a lot more accessible than maybe some of the bigger cities where there's a lot more competition. I can't help but keep remembering what you said near the very beginning of our interview about people leaving. And so how do you harvest that talent? How do you keep talent within the province? How do you grow that instead of worrying about the bleeding of talent?

**ASHLEY:**

I think that that is a really important aspect to being in a place like Manitoba is retention is equally important to talent attraction. And a lot of the gap, I think, is a perception gap for youth or people of what opportunities there are in Winnipeg and in Manitoba. I was just in a session earlier today and we were talking about SMEs, and somebody said that two-thirds of people are employed at SMEs of the Canadian workforce. I would venture to guess that in Manitoba, it's even higher, you know? And so there is a bit of an education piece for people understanding that there is opportunity, like, and knowing what's in your own backyard. Sometimes you don't recognize that, but Winnipeg has one of the biggest growing film communities and creative communities in Canada and, you know, we just got a direct flight from Los Angeles to Winnipeg because of the strength of that industry. And so making sure that people are aware of those opportunities I think is very important and that they feel part of that and that you don't have to leave Manitoba or Winnipeg to have a great life and succeed.

**MAGGIE:**

Thank you so much, Ashley, for your time today.

**ASHLEY:**

Thank you very much, great to speak with you.

**MAGGIE:**

That was Ashley Dunlop, she's the Director of Talent and Workforce Development at Economic Development Winnipeg.