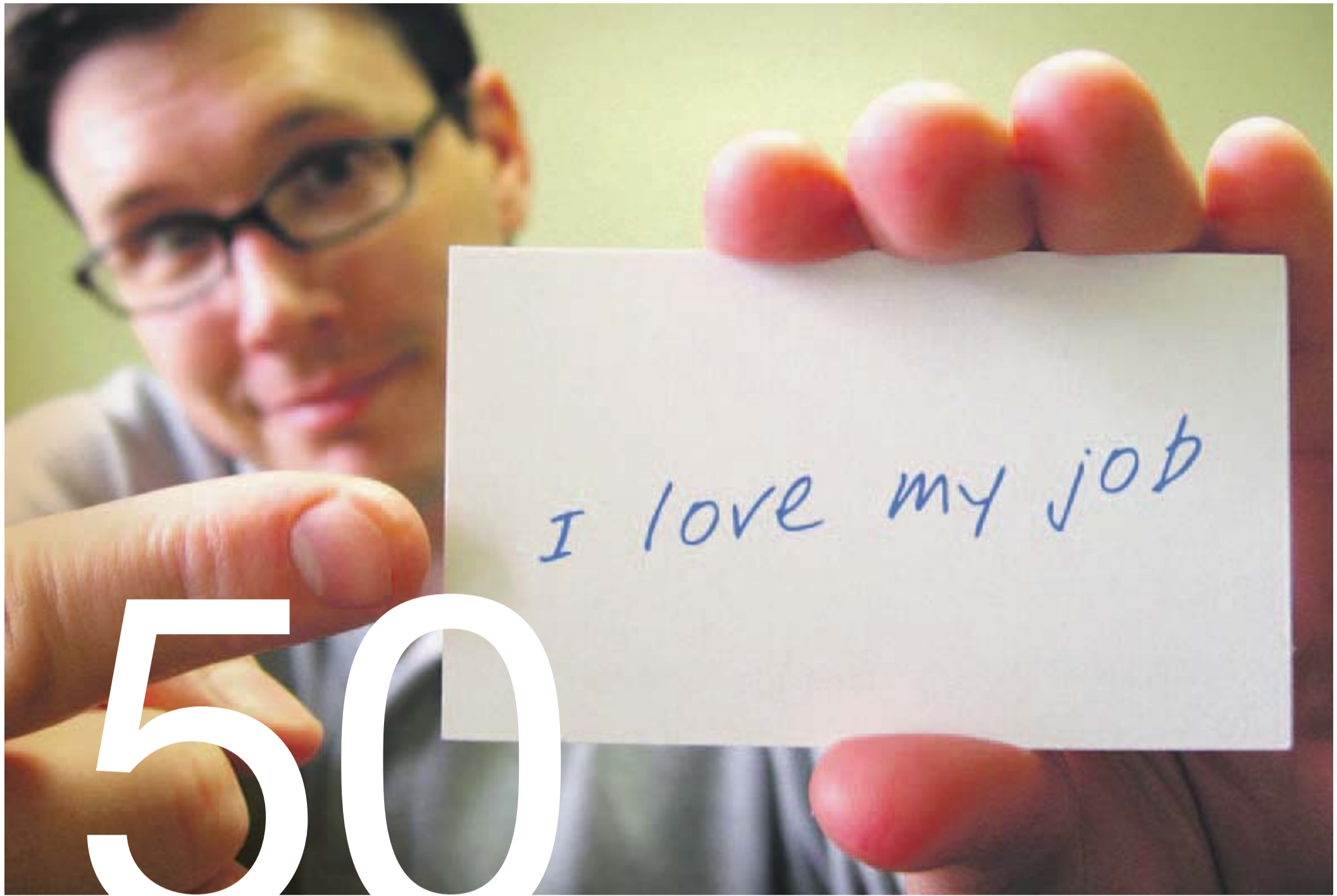


Looking for a job with a top-rated employer, or perhaps a way to make your workplace more dynamic? Then look here. The results of the 2008 Great Place to Work Institute surveys are in.



50

Best Workplaces in Canada

There is only one way to get on the “50 Best Workplaces in Canada” list – and that’s if your employees put you there.

The Great Place to Work Institute’s Trust Index survey instrument is used by thousands of organizations throughout the world, says Jen Wetherow, director of Great Place to Work Institute Canada. “It is the primary selection criterion used each year when we compile the Best Workplaces in Canada list, and is also used in compiling similar lists for leading business publications around the world, including Fortune and the Financial Times.”

While there is no singular right way to become a great place to work, she says, there are five trust-building dimensions that are commonly found in all the best workplaces: credibility, respect, fairness, pride and camaraderie.

“The first three dimensions account for an organization’s

level of trust,” says Ms. Wetherow. “A great workplace is one in which employees trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with.”

While it may sound a bit warm and fuzzy, the institute’s research indicates that trust is the foundation for organizational performance excellence. “Winning companies report an increased ability to attract and retain quality candidates. But it’s about more than just recruitment and retention – the benefits of a high-trust culture permeate every aspect of performance,” she says.

“Increasingly, business leaders are recognizing that you can’t manage an outcome such as employee engagement, but you can contribute to the building blocks of organizational culture.

Culture has been identified as a strategic advantage, and leaders in the most successful organizations are putting a strong focus on trust-building behaviours because doing so is associated with positive outcomes. In fact, independent research by the Russell Investment Group concludes that publicly traded companies on the Fortune list of “100 Best Companies to Work For” are

out-performing standard market indices by a factor of two to three.

“The benefits of creating a great place to work include improved attraction and retention of talented employees, and enhanced productivity as a result of a more engaged workforce,” says Claude Balthazard, director of human resources excellence at the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario.

While there is anecdotal evidence of a virtuous cycle of success and employee satisfaction among top-performing organizations, there are many paths to becoming a great

workplace. “I’m always struck by the diversity of these organizations. There’s a tremendous diversity in terms of the practices. They’re all recognized to be great places to work, but they seem to get there in different ways,” says Mr. Balthazard.

At D.L.G.L. Ltd. in Quebec, one of the 2008 50 Best, achieving a great culture began with a sadly unusual approach. “We’ve inverted the values of governance,” say president Jacques Guénette. “Normally what you hear in the marketplace is that the corporation must create value for the shareholders. That provides license to do almost anything, includ-

ing crazy business plans that call for uncontrollable growth.”

He cites a large Canadian corporation, which went from 30,000 to 90,000 employees and then fired 65,000 people, as an example of what can happen in the quest for shareholder value.

“We’ve turned that around completely and said, ‘Let’s put together an organization that creates value for the employees. Let’s make sure that our employees are happy,’” says Mr. Guénette. “The first consequence of this is that they stick around, gain experience and get very good at what they do. And that allows us to manufacture excellent products, and to deliver very good services. The result is that we create a lot of value for our clients in that process. And once you’ve done that, there should be value for the shareholders.”

“We’ve found,” he says understatedly, “that this works much better than the other model.”

About the Great Place to Work Institute

The Great Place to Work Institute Inc. is a U.S.-based research and management consultancy with affiliate offices worldwide, including Canada. Since 1980, the institute has been listening to employees and evaluating employers. Today, the Great Place to Work Trust Index survey instrument is the primary

selection criterion used annually to compile the “Best Workplaces in Canada” list. The index is also used in compiling similar lists for leading business publications in over 30 other countries, including Fortune’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” list in the U.S.

Inside

GPTW 3 ABOUT THE SURVEY

Research by the Great Place to Work Institute indicates that trust is the foundation for quality jobs and performance excellence, writes JEN WETHEROW, Director, Great Place to Work Institute Canada.

GPTW 4 MEET THE TOP 3

Survey highlights from the Great Place to Work Model dimensions offer insight into practices that helped D.L.G.L., Environics Communications and Nycomed Canada earn top marks from their employees.

GPTW 5 PEER RECOGNITION

Coming from the right person, a well-placed thank you or a pat on the back can be powerfully motivating. At the very least, recognition is part of what makes some companies great places to work.

GPTW 6 RETENTION TALK


Exit interviews have their place. These days, however, smart firms are using creative, continual communications processes to drive employee satisfaction and long-term retention.

GPTW 7 INSPIRING SPACES

Innovative employers are putting their office space to work in unexpected ways, challenging the boundaries of the traditional workplace and inspiring employees in the process.


GPTW 8 BEYOND PAYCHEQUES

A reasonable paycheque is important. But at some companies, unorthodox financial perks can include dollars for adopting a child or providing mortgage loans on easy terms.



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Thank you to our people and our clients. We are incredibly proud to be on the 2008 Best Workplaces in Canada list.

At Grant Thornton each of us feels honoured to be on the "Best Workplaces 2008" list.





The Winners

RANK	NAME OF COMPANY	# EMPLOYEES	HEADQUARTERS
1	D.L.G.I. Ltd. Information Technology // Software	92	Blainville, QC
2	Environics Communications Inc. Advertising & Marketing // Advertising	63	Toronto, ON
3	Nycomed Canada Inc. Biotechnology & Pharmaceuticals // Pharmaceuticals	261	Oakville, ON
4	iTRANS Consulting Inc. Professional Services // Consulting Engineering	99	Richmond Hill, ON
5	Softchoice Corporation Information Technology // IT Consulting	437	Toronto, ON
6	SaskCentral Financial Services & Insurance // Investments	56	Regina, SK
7	IT/NET Ottawa Inc. Professional Services // Consulting – Management	85	Ottawa, ON
8	Trico Homes Construction & Real Estate // Housing	101	Calgary, AB
9	Karo Group Advertising & Marketing // Advertising	80	Calgary, AB & Vancouver, BC
10	Royal LePage Performance Realty Construction & Real Estate // Real Estate	296	Ottawa, ON
11	Ames Tile & Stone Ltd. Construction & Real Estate // Housing	88	Burnaby, BC
12	eBay Customer Support Vancouver Inc. Media // Online Internet Services	811	Burnaby, BC
13	Ceridian Canada Ltd. Professional Services // Consulting – Management	1,491	Markham, ON
14	Online Business Systems Information Technology // IT Consulting	213	Winnipeg, MB
15	Edward Jones Financial Services & Insurance // Investments	1,795	Mississauga, ON
16	AdFarm Advertising & Marketing // Advertising	66	Calgary, AB
17	Grant Thornton LLP Financial Services & Insurance // Accounting	1,648	Toronto, ON
18	Windsor Family Credit Union Financial Services & Insurance // Banking/Credit Services	130	Windsor, ON
19	Urban Systems Ltd. Professional Services // Consulting Engineering	283	Kamloops, BC
20	Fuller Landau LLP Financial Services & Insurance // Accounting	109	Toronto, ON
21	Becton Dickinson Canada Inc. Health Care // Medical Sales/Distribution	247	Oakville, ON
22	Keller Williams Ottawa Realty Construction & Real Estate // Real Estate	206	Ottawa, ON
23	Thomson Carswell Media // Publishing & Printing	693	Toronto, ON
24	CIM (Consumer Impact Marketing) Advertising & Marketing // Direct Marketing	290	Toronto, ON
25	Halsall Associates Limited Professional Services // Consulting Engineering	228	Toronto, ON
26	Coastal Pacific Xpress Inc. Transportation	279	Surrey, BC
27	Protegra Information Technology // IT Consulting	72	Winnipeg, MB
28	Sapphire Technologies Professional Services // Staffing & Recruitment	300	Toronto, ON

RANK	NAME OF COMPANY	# EMPLOYEES	HEADQUARTERS
29	T4G Limited Information Technology // IT Consulting	215	Toronto, ON
30	Ernst & Young LLP Financial Services & Insurance // Accounting	3,938	Toronto, ON
31	Precision BioLogic Inc. Manufacturing & Production // Medical devices	51	Dartmouth, NS
32	Leo Burnett Company Ltd. Advertising & Marketing // Advertising	133	Toronto, ON
33	Hill & Knowlton Canada Professional Services // Consulting – Management	208	Toronto, ON
34	Randstad Canada Professional Services // Staffing & Recruitment	310	Ville Saint-Laurent, QC
35	Back in Motion Rehab Health Care // Specialty	64	Surrey, BC
36	Globalive Communications Telecommunications	132	Toronto, ON
37	Omni Companies Financial Services & Insurance // General Insurance	53	Vancouver, BC
38	Banff Lodging Company Hospitality // Hotel/Resort	449	Banff, AB
39	Pottruff & Smith Insurance Brokers Inc. Financial Services & Insurance // General Insurance	63	Woodbridge, ON
40	Sapient Canada Information Technology // IT Consulting	195	Toronto, ON
41	TD Bank Financial Group Financial Services & Insurance // Banking/Credit Services	43,302	Toronto, ON
42	The PEER Group Inc. Information Technology // IT Consulting	70	Kitchener, ON
43	WCG International Consultants Ltd. Professional Services // Consulting – Management	166	Victoria, BC
44	Skura Corporation Information Technology // IT Consulting	93	Mississauga, ON
45	S.C. Johnson and Son, Limited Manufacturing & Production // Personal & Household Goods	477	Brantford, ON
46	Sandvine Incorporated Information Technology // Hardware	253	Waterloo, ON
47	Parklane Homes Ltd. Construction & Real Estate // Housing	79	Vancouver, BC
48	Campbell Company of Canada Manufacturing & Production // Food Products	1,221	Toronto, ON
49	High Road Communications Professional Services // Consulting – Management	79	Toronto, ON
50	Pinchin Environmental Ltd. Professional Services // Consulting Environmental	229	Mississauga, ON

About the survey

By Jen Wetherow
Director, Great Place to Work
Institute Canada

Most Canadian employees like to think that they are decent, even pretty good places to work. But with today's competitive labour market and the need to make the best use of all talent in a company, the bar for work workplace quality has been rising. Being "good" is no longer enough.

Organizations participating in the Best Workplaces in Canada list have a unique opportunity to find out where they are on their quest to become – or maintain – great workplaces. The rigorous list assessment process provides metrics for tracking progress, benchmarking with the best, and sharing lessons about effective people practices.

Research from the Great Place to Work Institute's best workplaces lists over the past decade in many countries confirms that trust is the foundation for quality jobs and performance excellence. And the good news is that high-trust relationships require behaviours that can be learned and embedded into an organization's culture.

Organizations on the 2008 list of Best Workplaces were all assessed using an employee survey, the "Trust Index," developed by the global research firm Great Place to Work Institute Inc. There are 57 multiple choice and two

open-ended questions that provide an accurate, employee perspective on what it is like to work in the organization.

Each question measures one of the five dimensions of the Great Place to Work Institute's trust-based Model: credibility, respect, fairness, pride and camaraderie. Completed surveys are sent directly to the institute, and results are only ever reported in aggregate form so employees can be confident that opinions are confidential.

Two-thirds of each organization's final score is taken directly from its Trust Index survey. The remaining one-third of each organization's score is taken from the institute's assessment of the company's "Culture Audit" submission. This is a significantly more detailed questionnaire that is completed by senior HR representatives. It helps to provide a more complete picture by capturing the core values and philosophies that underpin people practices.

The organizations on the 2008 Best Workplaces in Canada list come from a variety of industries, range in size from 51 to 43,302 employees and are located from coast to coast. Each has taken a different path to creating and sustaining a great workplace, but in the end, each has forged a strong link between culture and performance.

During the 2008 list assessment process, a total of 24,063 Canadian employees were surveyed using the Trust Index

tool. Internationally, the Great Place to Work Institute surveyed over 1.2 million employees last year for similar lists around the world.

"On the quantitative side," says Dr. Graham Lowe, a national workplace expert, professor emeritus at the University of Alberta, and partner at the Great Place to Work Institute Canada, "the best workplaces list data help us to differentiate between good and great organizations. On the qualitative side, the Culture Audit offers us insights into the people practices of very successful organizations that understand the strategic importance of culture."

"It goes far beyond offering the best perks," says Dr. Lowe. "You can't compete on perks and benefits alone. It comes down to the quality of the relationships throughout the workplace, the support people are given to succeed in their jobs, and their overall enjoyment of the total work experience." ■

If you don't see your workplace on the list of 50 Best this year but think it should be, then why not sign up to participate in the 2009 list of 50 Best Workplaces in Canada? The nomination can be submitted online at www.greatplacetowork.ca.



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50 Best Workplaces in Canada

Top 3 winners 2008

The Great Place to Work Model

The Great Place to Work Model is derived from the definition of a great workplace as one where employees trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with. At the heart of this definition is the idea that a great workplace is measured by the quality of three interconnected relationships that exist there:

- The relationship between employees and management;
- The relationship between employees and their jobs/organization; and
- The relationship between employees and other employees.

COMPANIES BY RANK		SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GREAT PLACE TO WORK MODEL DIMENSIONS:					
		When asked, "Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work" employees who said "yes"	CREDIBILITY <i>The trustworthiness and competence of management</i>	RESPECT <i>Recognition of personal and professional worth and contribution</i>	FAIRNESS <i>Equitable sharing of opportunities and rewards</i>	PRIDE <i>Value attached to one's job and association with the company</i>	CAMARADERIE <i>Friendliness and sense of community (or "family")</i>
#1	D.L.G.L. Ltd. provides software specializing in the conception, implementation and support of advanced HR systems, payroll, time capture and scheduling, and pension systems.	100%	D.L.G.L. has a clear vision of where it is going and has assured its employees that it will not go public or subvert their interests for the goals of shareholders.	All employees and their families have access to D.L.G.L.'s gymnasium, fitness centre and personal trainer, ville de Quebec kitchen, outdoor terrace, gazebo, bistro chez Claude (equipped with home theatre, pool table, car simulators, massaging chair) and more.	Compensation at D.L.G.L. exceeds IT industry norms. Plus, a quarterly bonus shared among all employees is based on objectives set at the beginning of the year and peer evaluations. Yearly profit sharing is based on hours worked and overall contribution.	D.L.G.L. strengthens team development by supporting lateral movement and cross-functional placements.	D.L.G.L. recently commemorated its 25th anniversary with an evening at a special resort that involved all employees and their spouses. The staff was wined, dined and entertained.
#2	Environics Communications Inc. offers marketing-communications and public-relations services for public, private and governmental organizations.	98%	Each member of the Environics' team knows the overarching goal is to do the right thing: to give the best advice and propose the best course of action, even if it's unpopular.	A culture of collaboration is evidenced by the fact that 50% of Environics' new hires are internal referrals. More importantly, Environics employees are empowered to contribute, and full credit is always given to those who initiate winning concepts.	Environics' systematic approach to rewarding loyalty also helps prevent favouritism. After 5 years, employees receive \$4,000 toward a holiday, plus one additional week of vacation. Other significant rewards are offered after 7 and 8 years of service.	While the Canadian Standards Association doesn't strictly fit into any of Environics' key focus sectors, the firm took on the account because it believes in CSA's commitment to safety and in the impact its work makes on Canadians.	At Environics' 12th anniversary, employees shared memories of their first day on the job, and posted them on their office doors. The initiative sparked gales of laughter, as people circulated the office and read the mostly comical stories.
#3	Nycomed Canada Inc. is a privately held subsidiary of a global pharmaceutical company.	95%	Nycomed's outstanding communications systems include employee surveys, focus groups, a suggestion box, breakfast with the President, pod casts, and town hall meetings. Information flows freely throughout the organization.	Permanent Nycomed employees have access to \$3,000 per year in post-secondary tuition funding or \$5,000 for post-graduate studies. Last year, about 30% of the company's employees took advantage of this perk.	To ensure that employees have a voice within the organization, Nycomed has developed a dispute resolution system employees are able to use without concern for reprisal. They also have a 360-degree feedback process on managers.	Since 1997, Nycomed has dedicated over \$2 million dollars in community support. It also encourages employees to become involved in fundraising and community service.	The HR systems and practices at Nycomed are comprehensive, well-documented and thoroughly integrated. New employees are welcomed with an inspiring letter from the CEO and treated to a departmental lunch.



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The power of peer recognition

A well-placed thank you or a pat on the back – particularly coming from the right person – can be powerfully motivating. And if not, at very least recognition is part of what makes some companies great places to work.

“It’s not just about business,” says Sunny Daljit, chief executive officer of Keller Williams Ottawa Realty. “At the end of the day, it’s also about having a life worth living. And recognition is part of that.”

Mr. Daljit introduced a peer-to-peer recognition initiative to the Ottawa-based affil-

iate of Keller Williams International that exactly captures this spirit and has clearly contributed to the company’s standing as one of the 50 Best Workplaces in Canada.

“Fill the Bucket” is a program that encourages employees to publicly acknowledge and thank each other for exceptional effort or work. All of the company’s major meetings begin with at least one person’s words of praise. Usually, says Mr. Daljit, there are several people anxious to share.

According to Mr. Daljit the initiative helps reinforce positive, productive behaviour. But

more importantly, he says, it fosters camaraderie, breaks down hierarchical barriers and makes the company’s meetings more productive because it frames them for success.

And, in at least two instances that he’s aware of, Fill the Bucket has impressed meeting guests so much they have left positions to go work for Keller Williams. Most outsiders, says Mr. Daljit, have not experienced that level of gratitude and recognition and are inspired by the company’s warm feeling and attitude.

Top ranked employer IT/NET Ottawa Inc. also

shares a desire to nurture a warm, family-like corporate culture.

Joanne Beaton, vice president of corporate services, says employees at the IT consulting firm are encouraged to acknowledge colleagues’ exceptional work by sending them a cash-valued gift certificate through the company’s “My Thanks” peer-to-peer recognition program.

My Thanks is not regulated, meaning the value of certificates is determined by who ever is awarding it and can be done any time and as often as employees choose to pass on

recognition. Those who receive certificates can spend the value they’re awarded as they like.

In 2007, the company spent approximately \$4,000 to \$5,000 on this program, but according to Ms. Beaton, it would be well worth even a much higher cost. Like Keller Williams, IT/NET’s program reflects a philosophy that acknowledges employees are motivated by more than salary and that well-placed recognition reinforces a culture that recognizes employees’ contribution from a personal perspective.

“People really enjoy the ability to give this gift certi-

cate – it feels good to award recognition when it’s deserved,” says Ms. Beaton. “I have received a couple – senior employees tend to receive it less. But it’s pretty cool to be recognized by my own!”

The message and feel that My Thanks has helped foster throughout the company, says Ms. Beaton, is very much in keeping with its collaborative, inclusive approach. It’s part of what has generated the company’s tight-knit, family feel.

And – as with Keller Williams Ottawa Realty – peer-to-peer recognition is part of what has made IT/NET Ottawa Inc. one of Canada’s 50 Best Workplaces. ■



Keller Williams Ottawa Realty has built tremendous team spirit through a host of initiatives, including “Fill the Bucket,” a program that encourage employees to publicly acknowledge and thank each other for exceptional work. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Best practice profiles

Peer-to-peer recognition

Fuller Landau LLP has monthly “KUDO” awards. Managers, partners and employees can nominate their co-workers for this award, and a written certificate of recognition and a gift certificate (\$30) are awarded to KUDO winners.

CIM (Consumer Impact Marketing) has an awards program called “Mark of a Leader” (MOAL). Employees can nominate their peers, and once a quarter a winner is chosen and awarded cash and prizes. At the annual gala awards night, the ‘Core Value Leader of the Year’ is crowned, plus the overall ‘Leader of the Year,’ who wins a crystal trophy, a trip around the world and one extra week vacation.

Sapphire Technologies has a Superhero program where anyone can nominate another for performance, dedication, great ideas, etc. Every two months, HR chooses the winner, who is recognized on the website and by managers. Winners also receive a \$100 Jump Gift Card.

High Road Communications has the High Impact Award. Each month, staff nominate those who they feel did an outstanding job on a task, enhanced the working environment or showed tremendous passion for the job. Nominations are then all read aloud at the monthly staff meeting, and one is chosen randomly for a prize such as gift certificates to their favourite store or restaurant. ■



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Ongoing communications strike a chord with employees

Retention interviews take front seat

Any employee who has quit a large firm likely remembers the exit interview as one of the last times they talked with their employer before walking out the door forever. These days, however, smart firms are using creative two-way communications to drive employee satisfaction and long-term retention.

At Online Business Systems, for example, a business and information technology consulting company headquartered in Winnipeg, management regularly conducts Online Check Points with employees. Previously called "stay interviews," these meetings help managers to understand what they are doing well and what they could do even better.

"We do exit interviews when people leave the company – but why wait until people leave to capture this information?" says Ria Neuendorff, director of the company's people care team. "Let's find out how people are thinking and feeling right now – that way, if we see patterns that evolve

from the checkpoints and we need to make changes, we can address them before people leave."

Questions range from addressing company morale to the effectiveness of communication. Typically, the checkpoints are conducted one-on-one, but focus groups are used

when a collective viewpoint is important.

"We capture the information, and we share it with our career mentors to explain what we're doing right, where we could be doing better, and the action items that we need to address," explains Ms. Neuendorff.

"It's an opportunity for our team members to voice their opinions," she says. "And they have great insights – after all, who knows the company better than the people who work for us, and who are most important to us?"

Communication is also essential at the Windsor Family

Credit Union, a full-service, member-owned financial institution serving Windsor and Essex County.

"I spend time with 12 staff members on a quarterly basis in our CEO advisory committee," notes Marty Komsa, Windsor's president and CEO. "A number of years ago, they

talked about our very extensive interview process and orientation program. But one of the suggestions was that after people have been on the job for a period of time, we have to talk to them, to find out how things are going, whether or not their expectations of the job have been met, and to tell them whether they have met our expectations."

As a result, new staff members now meet with the human resources co-ordinator after three months, as a "check-in," and with the vice president of human resources for a more formal "retention interview" after six months. This two-way communication has contributed to a full-time staff turnover rate of less than five per cent.

"The information in many instances is used to change future training programs and to change certain aspects of the job," says Mr. Komsa. "We truly believe that the key to our success is listening to our employees and ensuring that they have input into their work environment." ■



Ria Neuendorff, director of Online Business Systems' people care team, says she regularly conducts Online Check Points with employees to help managers understand what they are doing well and what they could do even better. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Need some time off? No problem, say top employers

For many progressive companies, trust is becoming an ever-more important part of employee relations. As some of Canada's outstanding employers have learned, one of the best ways to build trust with workers is to demonstrate a spirit of flexibility, particularly when it comes to an employee's need to take some personal time out.

Windsor Family Credit Union, for example, provides its employees with 10 days each year that can be used for any purpose, from being sick to taking care of family members to simply having a day for themselves.

"We went to the staff and asked them about the concept of sick days," explains president Marty Komsa. "They came back and said that the whole value system of the worker has changed over the years, and that people require more time to take care of chil-



Softchoice employees such as Nicole Lindstrom and Marc Krille (holding "Gracie" the dog), enjoy a workplace that fosters wellness and well-being, in part, by allowing them to take time off when they need to. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

dren, spouses, in-laws, other family members and even themselves."

The organization listened and responded by replacing sick days with personal days that require no explanation from the employee. If an employee chooses not to take all of the allotted 10 days a year, they're paid out for the

full balance during the first week of December.

"As an organization, we advocate for family values and family needs," Mr. Komsa explains. "If you need a personal day next week, because you want to take your mother-in-law or your mother to the doctor, or simply because you need a break from the pres-

ures of raising a family, go for it."

As for employees, he notes that there's 100 per cent support for keeping the policy the way that it is now. "They think it's fantastic," he notes. "And we're happy, because it indicates the way that we value our employees."

Softchoice took a slightly

different angle, but one that reflects the same issue of providing employees with choice and with trust.

"We don't have any sick day caps for employees – we ask them to manage that," says Maria Odoardi, vice president of people. "They're responsible for deciding what's best for them if they're not feeling well. We encourage them to go recover, and that includes allowing people to be eligible for short-term disability pay after five days at 100 per cent of their base day pay. We try to make that whole experience very easy for them and not a worry at all."

It's a good example of the role that trust plays in Softchoice's workplace culture. "We want to encourage our employees' well-being and wellness – if you're stressed about something else when you're ill, such as finances,

you're not focused on recuperating."

In addition, it makes it easier for employees to make the choice to stay home when they have an illness such as the flu, which could be spread to other employees if they went to work. "We approach that by saying that we'd rather trust people to do the right thing rather than having us implement policies to help guide behaviour. In doing so, people take responsibility for that themselves," Ms. Odoardi notes. "There's a high level of trust between everyone in the company, and as a result we're much more invested in the company – we recognize that the decisions that each one of us makes takes into account the experience of everyone else. This concept helps to provide us with a really high level of employee engagement." ■

Best practice profiles

Wellness innovation

SaskCentral subscribes to the Best Doctors program. This gives employees immediate access to the best medical knowledge around the world including top-ranked hospitals, the latest technologies, opinions of world-class specialists and personal care management. This additional resource helps employees make the best decisions about health care.

Ceridian Canada Ltd. has an Annual Wellness Week where each location's committee organizes activities such as tai chi demonstrations, massage therapy sessions, healthy snacks/potluck events, sessions on managing stress, balancing work and family, heart disease, gait analysis, etc. Most of the sessions are held during lunch breaks to accommodate as many employees as possible. ■

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Our traditional image of office space is being challenged by some beautiful and innovative physical spaces. Perhaps even more impressive are the novel ways that companies are putting these spaces to work.

At Globalive Communications Corp.'s downtown Toronto corporate headquarters, for example, the company has apportioned space simply for community giving. Globalive's founder and CEO Anthony Lacavera says this contemporary office space, complete with a 2,500-square-foot outdoor patio, is being offered to local charities to host their fundraising events.

Globalive's philanthropic arm is called Shamba – the name of both the foundation and the space.

Shamba means "farm" in Swahili, and the concept for the Shamba Foundation is to mobilize business networks in an urban farm of sorts, where many hands make light work.

The recipients of that work are charities and non-profit organizations who can use the

Shamba Space as a zero-cost event venue to raise fundraising dollars.

All costs are covered, including personnel, drinks and food, through both Globalive and its partner sponsors. Globalive operates YAK Communications – providing home phone, high-speed Internet and long distance services to Ontario, B.C. and Quebec.

"A number of Globalive team members donate their time to greet guests or engage as servers during the events," says Mr. Lacavera. "I've always wanted Globalive to give back in a meaningful way that truly involved the team instead of it being a more passive thing."

The funky, 12th-storey space has a fun, warm, engaging feel, complete with urban chic furniture, a phenomenal audio-visual system, a bar and a very large outdoor grill.

Organizations ranging from Little Geeks, a Toronto-based charity that collects, refurbishes and redistributes donated home computers to children in need, to Habitat

for Humanity have raised over \$100,000 since the patio opened in July 2007. A single Shamba Night can command anywhere from a few thousand to tens of thousands in one night alone.

From one hive of activity to another, Karo Group, a successful Calgary-based branding

agency, has a community of another sort on its second-storey rooftop space – bees.

"We have three hives up there," says Chris Bedford, president and CEO of Karo Group, "and produced about 150 jars of honey last year."

Mr. Bedford credits the idea to former staff member

Rudy Gelderblom, who still returns twice a year to set up the hives (which he stores during the off season) and help with the extraction of the honey.

"We have an open and supportive culture and if someone has a passion like that, we usually take the approach:

"Sure. Let's give it a go," he says.

Going into their third year of producing "Rooftop Honey," Karo employees get involved in a variety of different ways. A handful help maintain the bees, which are apparently quite low maintenance. Most, however, get involved by buying honey futures.

"It's very fun. Certain people try to monopolize and you see e-mails flying around that so-and-so is trying to get a corner on the honey market," says Mr. Bedford. "It creates good fun and banter."

He says he likes the metaphor the bees serve for Karo. "If you ever observe a beehive, it appears to be chaos, yet, somehow in the middle of that, they produce these perfect, magnificent structures. Our business is like that; people, computers, meetings and activity and at the end of it all, a product comes out of it, somehow. It happens without being obvious from just observing the activity of the people." ■



Globalive Communications Corp. CEO Anthony Lacavera says the company offers the 2,500-square-foot outdoor patio of its downtown Toronto corporate headquarters to local charities to host their fundraising events. Since it opened in July 2007, charities have raised over \$100,000 on the patio. "I've always wanted Globalive to give back in a meaningful way," says Mr. Lacavera.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Employers find green initiatives boost workplace performance

Imagine how well Canada would be doing in reducing its environmental footprint if every business in the country became carbon neutral.

That's just what Environics Communications Inc. is doing. The Toronto-based public relations company is working with The Pembina Institute on a carbon audit of its operations, and plans to be carbon neutral by this summer.

"We'll review their report, and follow their recommendations as to how we can reduce our carbon footprint," says Bruce MacLellan, president of Environics. "It's not possible to be 100 per cent carbon neutral, so we will purchase gold standard carbon offsets for the remaining amounts."

Mr. MacLellan embarked on meeting his goal to become the greenest PR agency in North America in mid-2007, and says it isn't always easy being green.

"It's a case where supply has not yet caught up with

demand," he says, remarking on how difficult it was to find a green caterer so the company could reduce its amount of waste.

It's not easy, and it's also not cheap.

Environics' power costs increased by 10 to 15 per cent when the company switched to Bullfrog Power – a leading power provider of 100 per cent green electricity.

As well, the company pays 40 per cent more for its 100 per cent recycled paper, bought through Quebec-based Cascades Inc., than it would for non-recycled paper, a cost that Environics has offset by reducing its paper use by 33 per cent (it has gone double sided).

"We are willing to pay more to be green, because it's the responsible thing to do," says Mr. MacLellan, adding that this philosophy fits well with his very environmentally aware and concerned mid-30s workforce of 100 employees.

"It's three cheers from them," he says. "They are all proud to be working at a company that would do this."

That has been the case at Karo Group as well.

President and CEO Chris Bedford, based in Calgary, says his branding agency has been better able to attract employees whose values are aligned with Karo's. "This gives you some tangible ways to have a conversation about values even during the interview process. If it isn't their thing, it's evident. If it is, it's equally as evident," says Mr. Bedford.

A popular and well-used environmental initiative of Karo's is its smart cars – one at its Calgary office and one at its Vancouver office. "They are used constantly," says Mr. Bedford. "Because they are available to everybody on staff, the cars allow them, if they don't have a car or don't want to commute in a car, to have the ability to book the

car for business or personal use, 24-7."

Another way Karo employees are offered alternatives is through the company's bike-friendly environment.

"We have a couple of mountain bikes that people can book, and we encourage that for a variety of reasons. We're very close to the pathways, and biking is a healthy thing

to do. It can also be just as productive to grab the bikes and ride down to the river for a meeting," says Mr. Bedford, adding that employees who bring their own bikes to work can store them in the company's bike storage area.

On top of some faithful recycling practices, Karo also gets involved in environmental

stewardship through its work.

"We get behind a lot of different organizations. Last year, for example, we donated a significant amount of our time to Climate Change Central and built them a new website," says Mr. Bedford. "Our employees felt good about getting behind a cause that had such a strong environmental mandate." ■



Karo Group employees like CFO Joe Strasser use the company's smart cars to get around Vancouver and Calgary, and help demonstrate the company's interest in the environment. PHOTO: SUPPLIED



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Best practice profiles

More innovative spaces

The PEER Group Inc.'s office space has been set up to provide gallery-like settings to allow employees to exhibit their art as well as the artwork of their spouses and children.

TD Bank Financial Group has a Workplace Accommodation Policy (WAP) that outlines TD's commitment to accommodation and a barrier-free workplace. There is a dedicated Accommodation Fund for deploying tools and

facilities that employees with disabilities need to do their jobs such as sign language interpreters, large screen monitors and changes to chairs and desks.

Urban Systems Ltd. recently acquired another floor for its head office and asked employees to form teams and present their ideas on how to best organize the new and existing floor space. The proposals were then presented to

the architectural firm responsible for the redesign for incorporation into the final plan.

AdFarm's office decor is very popular among staff, and it attracts visitors. It symbolizes the rural environment and is therefore a physical embodiment of AdFarm's brand. Adfarm Calgary recently appeared on Citytv Calgary in a segment called "Cool Spaces." ■

50 Best Workplaces in Canada

Compensation takes new twists

Firms help fund adoptions, home purchases

For some lucky employees in Canada, work is more than an occupation or profession – it is a means to achieve certain life goals that could otherwise take much longer, or maybe never happen at all.

Such transformative benefits are available to staff at select firms that offer, for instance, grants to facilitate adoptions, or interest-free, long-term loans to finance a mortgage and buy a property. Edward Jones is one such

company. Employees here have access to financial support for adoptions – up to \$5,000 in assistance for each adoption.

During 2006, Edward Jones paid more than \$134,000 in adoption expenses for 27 children on a global firm basis.

The program is available to all actively employed full-time associates (employees), and has been in place since 1999 at the company.

“Through a variety of ways – including salaries, commissions, bonuses, profit sharing retirement plans and limited partnerships – Edward Jones associates, financial advisors and BOAs (branch office administrators) can, over time, build a very good life for themselves and their families,” said Gary Reamey, principal of Edward Jones, Canada.

Nycomed Canada in Oakville is also very generous to those employees seeking to adopt children, and offers them the opportunity to utilize an Adoption Reimbursement program. This gives them up to \$15,000 (taxable) to cover the costs associated with adoptions, including legal and adoption fees, travel and hotel expenses. As parents of adopted children know, such expenses can add up quickly, especially when the adopted child is from overseas. Employees who are adopt-

ing children need only retain and present the relevant receipts for reimbursement. “We do this as the expenses accrue. The employees don’t have to wait until all the expenses are totalled,” said Sherrill O’Neil, HR business partner at Nycomed.

At Banff Lodging Company, a novel mortgage program is helping provide employees with valuable housing assistance. The program provides eligible employees who are purchasing a home in Banff with second mortgages of up to \$40,000 – interest and principal free for 10 years.

“We make it possible for our staff to purchase right in Banff as opposed to in adjacent communities,” said Gordon Lozeman, president of Banff Lodging Company. “Not only is there no commuting necessary, but it results in staff embracing the community – meeting at the post office, coaching hockey – those sorts of things. If they embrace community, they stay.” Home ownership has also

become much easier for employees of D.L.G.L. Ltd. in Blainville, Quebec. There, 40 per cent of employees have taken on a \$5,000 interest-free loan to kick-start home ownership.

“They pay it back whenever it is convenient for them within a three-year term,” said Martine Castellani, who works in the company’s marketing department. Other attractive benefits include a \$500 grant for buying a computer.

“It’s part of our philosophy, the quality of life, to ensure that our employees are happy with their workplace,” said Ms. Castellani. “A healthy workplace is reflected in good relationships with our employees, clients, shareholders and suppliers.”

Do such thoughtful benefit programs pay? Just ask D.L.G.L. The company has virtually zero employee turnover, and the average service tenure is 10 years. “Once people start working here, they generally don’t leave,” said Ms. Castellani. ■



Financial services provider Edward Jones and pharmaceutical company Nycomed Canada are among the Canadian companies that provide financial assistance to employees seeking to adopt children. Other firms, such as IT systems provider D.L.G.L. and Banff Lodging Company, provide eligible workers with mortgage loans on generous terms. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Employees proud to work for philanthropic minded companies

At its heart, attracting and retaining quality employees is about corporate culture. As some of Canada’s highest rated employers are showing, charitable giving is a significant element of this, and a sincere way for companies to show they care.

Eight years ago, Trico Homes committed \$100,000 a year to the Kids Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta. At the

time, Trico was a mid-size Calgary home builder and raising that amount of money wasn’t the easiest thing to do. But today, says Richard Gottfried, Trico’s vice president of corporate communications, the company has grown alongside the foundation and is now its largest corporate supporter.

“That’s the way that we approach our community investment partnerships. We

make a long-term commitment to create a development plan we can work on together,” explains Mr. Gottfried, noting the approach helps create a legacy envisioned by Trico founder and CEO Wayne Chiu.

The company and its employees have found some creative ways to raise funds, including the Trico Homes Ride for a Lifetime, an annual

charity motorcycle ride that in five years has raised more than \$1.3 million.

“We really try to go that extra step, while creating lots of opportunities for our employees to volunteer and participate,” Mr. Gottfried says. “Along with supporting some very valuable organizations, employee pride is probably one of the key returns on this investment – how proud they are of what we, and they, do in the community. And never forgetting to have fun or to take time to celebrate the team’s accomplishments.”

Toronto-based T4G Limited, a national full-service, project-based technology services company, is also community

focused, having committed to raising two per cent of annual revenue for charity.

Paul Barter, T4G vice president of strategy, explains. “A portion of that is raised through donations, but a significant portion is due to activities that we carry out with our employees. The logic is that you have a multiplier effect. One of the company’s primary stakeholders is our employee base – we want to support whatever they’re passionate about, so if they want to donate money or volunteer time for a particular charity, we want to incent them to do just that.”

In addition to supporting employee efforts within busi-

ness units – to build neighbourhood playgrounds, for example – the company hosts the Ultimate Jet Set Experience, an annual gala dinner and auction that supports children’s charities. Last year, it raised \$270,000 for the Sick-Kids Foundation and the Canadian Asthma Foundation. T4G absorbs the administration costs so that all proceeds can be directed towards the charities. It’s been so successful that T4G has expanded the gala to Halifax in 2008, and recently established a registered charity called Future Focus.

For companies such as T4G and Trico, charitable giving is all in a day’s work. ■

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Top employer offers incentives for fitness

If employees are happy and productive – so goes the reasoning at some Canadian companies. But as these innovative employers also know, workers may need just a bit of incentive to turn those good intentions into action at the fitness centre, gym or swimming pool.

Intent on helping drive employees off the couch, a handful of Canada’s best employers have introduced incentive programs designed to promote fitness.

At professional services firm Ernst and Young, for example, a fitness reimbursement program has proved extremely popular. The firm reimburses its employees up to \$1,000 per year for fitness-

related fees, including club memberships, yoga, dance and other classes, tennis lessons, ski lift tickets, golf green fees and virtually any other physical activity. Alternatively, people can use the money to purchase home fitness equipment.

“In the first full year, 74 per cent of our people claimed an average of \$665,” said Karen Wensley, the Canada People Team Leader at Ernst and Young in Toronto. “Someone even took trapeze lessons!”

Windsor Family Credit Union also makes fitness a more attractive undertaking for its employees. Windsor’s Employee Wellness program, for instance, pays two per

cent of an employee’s previous year’s earnings for activities that enhance the worker’s physical or mental well-being. This can include fitness club memberships, spa treatments, even extra vacation days or vacation packages.

“Encouraging a work-life balance among our employees is an essential part of who we are as a people-oriented organization,” said Marty Komsa, president and CEO of WFCU. The company also funds a smoking cessation program, and even offers in-house, no-cost massages.

When it comes to encouraging employees to ‘walk the walk,’ these HR innovators are showing ‘money talks.’ ■

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Attraction and retention strategies at work

Leading manufacturers show what it takes

While legions of Canadian manufacturing companies complain about persistent challenges of hiring and retaining workers, some firms are well stocked with motivated workforces thanks, in part, to inspiring programs that reward and benefit employees in often unexpected ways.

Consumer products giant SC Johnson has been polishing its expertise in this field for more than a century. The family-owned and managed company pioneered paid vacations and profit sharing in the early 1900s (1920 in Canada).

Today, the 469 employees at SC Johnson in Canada enjoy access to a slew of policies and benefits designed to improve their lives at work.

These include an employee gym and an executive chef on staff in the cafeteria, who develops healthy menus for all the shifts and has won Eat Smart awards. SC Johnson also treats its employees to paid, one-day outings, like fishing trips, site-seeing tours and rounds of golf.

As well, SCJ has a group of cottages in the Muskokas that employees and their families can use. Free pagers for



Consumer products giant SC Johnson has over 100 years experience of developing programs that reward and retain employees. Pictured above, SCJ employees Jesse (with his wife Kim) and Gerry, chat during a community event that also involved a tour of the SCJ facilities earlier in the day. "The day was a huge success and built greater awareness of our operations and our community for SCJ employees and their families," says human resources manager Leslie Duncan. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

staff are another welcome perk. These are offered to expectant parents, people whose elderly parents are in need of care, and other potential emergency situations. SCJ even has an appeals process, whereby employees can have their opinions heard by

senior executives. "Programs like these are critical to employee retention," said Leslie Duncan, manager of human resources at SCJ. "We only have a two per cent turnover rate, and that is in part due to the benefit programs," she said. "We

believe that if you don't feel valued, you won't stay."

These same "valued employee" principles are in place at Campbell Company of Canada. For instance, the Wellness Within program inspires Campbell employees to incorporate health and well-

ness goals into their daily routines.

This thoughtful incentive rewards workers for participation in activities such as walking programs, where steps are counted. The company goes even further by helping employees measure the bene-

fits of fitness. For example, Campbell's provides its health-minded employees with access to a "Life Scale," a tool that measures weight and body mass index. Participation is further rewarded with incentives such as gift certificates and coupons. The company also encourages wellness by hosting educational programs such as its "lunch and learn" sessions, presented for cancer awareness during Cancer Month in April.

Hourly employees at Campbell's Toronto plant are also given two full paid days per year, called Wellness Days, to use at their discretion. All employees can also further improve themselves outside of work under the "personal leave" policy, which allows them to take an unpaid leave for up to three months for an approved personal or community purpose - knowing that their job is waiting for them.

"We have to show that we value the employee, both inside and outside work," says Laura Lee-Blake, HR director of human resources at Campbell's. "Our goal is to help them be the best person they can be." ■

Appreciative Inquiry helps Atlantic Canada innovator grow strategically

One glance at Precision BioLogic's corporate values reveals three words at its core: trust, curiosity and fun. While the company was built on this principled foundation, it wasn't until Precision formalized a process to make the most of its values that it truly began to realize its worth.

The Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, maker of products used to assess blood coagulation disorders was recently named one of Canada's 50 Best Workplaces.

Describing the company's core values chairman and CEO Michael Scott says, "Some of these things we just took for granted as being part of who we are as a company. Then about a year and a half ago we were moving; our company was growing and our structure was changing. We wanted to look at those things we wanted to retain as we made these changes."

To achieve its goal, the

Inquiry resonates with a lot of good management and leadership practices. Enlightened management that values and respects employees and offers meaningful work can foster a great place to work."

Precision spokesperson Lisa Kennedy describes, "After we had gone through the initial stages of this process, I thought one member of our team captured the essence of Precision BioLogic well when

he said, 'We're more than just a company. We're a community,'" she says. "We have moved forward with a closer connection to one another, and that connection has only strengthened, even as we have

gone through a great deal of growth and change as a company. It's allowed us to avoid many of the problems that other growing companies might face."

Armed with a consensus-

based shared vision of its future, Precision's management can now plan strategically and with confidence, knowing it has buy-in from its staff.

"It is extraordinarily powerful," says Mr. Scott. ■



Precision BioLogic chairman and CEO Michael Scott says Appreciative Inquiry is "extraordinarily powerful!" PHOTO: SUPPLIED

company implemented Appreciative Inquiry, a cutting-edge, organizational development process that recognizes that sustainable change requires both strong management commitment and employee participation.

The AI process included a grassroots review of company values, with a view to understanding what Precision employees felt were the most important values to sustain as the business grows. Each employee interviewed two co-workers with whom they typically had little regular contact, discovering what each appreciated most about working at the company. The results were then summarized using a consensus-based process, and subsequently formalized as the company's core values.

Rick Fullerton, a director-at-large of the Human Resources Association of Nova Scotia, says, "Appreciative

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50 Best Workplaces in Canada

International comparisons offer further insight

Learning from the world's best

We all have some sense of what makes a great place to work here in Canada. But what spells greatness for employees of companies in Germany, India or Brazil? What makes workers in places like Sweden, Italy and Holland look forward to heading to their jobs each day?

Great Place To Work Institute (GPTW) has established affiliates in over 30 countries, and, as in Canada and the U.S., has been asking employees about critical variables in what makes a great workplace. Each year, the institute estimates that over one million employees worldwide are surveyed about the companies where they work. No matter what the country, a few key factors never change.

"It's a global phenomenon. It doesn't matter what country you're in. Respect and fairness and credible management practices are universally valued," explains Dr. Graham Lowe, one of the partners of the Great Place to Work Institute Canada, and president of the Graham Lowe Group.

"It all boils down to relationships and having a culture



Great Place to Work Institute Canada partner Dr. Graham Lowe says the strong global economy has motivated companies worldwide to dig much deeper to discover the drivers of employee engagement. What they have learned is that "Respect and fairness and credible management practices are universally valued," he says. "It all boils down to relationships and having a culture of trust." Dr. Lowe notes the companies on the Best Workplaces in Canada list "clearly grasp that in order to have business success, they have

of trust. With the strong economy, there has been a notable trend that companies have had to dig much deeper to discover the drivers of employee engagement in every country. The companies that are on the Best Workplaces in Canada list absolutely get it. They clearly grasp that in order to have

business success, they have to connect culture and strategy."

And while Canadian companies on this year's list certainly "get it," a recent article by Dr. Lowe notes, "In contrast, the average Canadian employer is lucky to have one-third of its workers feeling so inspired, according to a recent

survey by EKOS Research Associates Inc. and the Graham Lowe Group."

"Recognition of the importance of high-trust, and taking action, is also lagging behind in Canada," he adds.

Dr. Lowe notes that the original 100 Best Workplaces in Europe list produced by Great

Place to Work Institute Europe was sponsored by the European Commission, a move that seems unlikely to happen by the Canadian government anytime soon. The list is now run independent of any European Union sponsorship. Still, simply applying to be on the list can be an excellent jumping

off point for Canadian companies wishing to become industry leaders – and who wish to reap the benefits of high-trust relationships with their employees.

"Companies learn a great deal about what the deeper issues are within their company and how that affects business," says Dr. Amy Lyman, co-founder of GPTW and chair of the board of directors. "We will not talk about a company unless it makes the list. Some companies try three or four times and work really hard to make lasting change before they make the list."

Companies that don't quite measure up can work with GPTW, or independently, to bring about positive change, based on the results of the application process. Conferences, webinars, consulting services and networking events can all lead company managers to today's way of doing business, one that operates on a basis of trust and respect.

"Our goal is to make the world a better place by helping companies become great places to work," says Dr. Lyman. ■

Key lessons learned from 2008 survey

The companies on the 2008 Best Workplaces in Canada list are not immune to the pressures of a tight labour market, but they are better positioned to meet these challenges. When asked what the most important or pressing issue would be in the coming year, the two most common answers were recruitment (40 per cent) and retention (28 per cent).

Being branded as a "Best Workplace" may help get top talent in the front door, but as the companies on the 2008 list show, it is organizational culture that will keep employees there and enable them to fully contribute.

Not surprisingly, when employees at winning organizations were asked if they look forward to coming into work in the

morning, 84 per cent said yes. By comparison, only 34 per cent of respondents answered favourably to a related question in a recent national workforce survey.

Does this mean any organization can become a great place to work? "Absolutely," says GPTW list manager Brenda Fleming. "You'll note that there is great diversity among the organizations recognized on this year's list. Each has taken a different path to greatness, but the one thing they all have in common is a high-trust culture."

The best workplaces share several common characteristics. First and foremost is a strong commitment from the CEO and senior management. Without their support, organizational

change becomes difficult or impossible. Second, it is critical that managers at all levels genuinely believe that people are indispensable to the success of the organization.

When developing a strategy for change, experts at the Great Place to Work Institute recommend that organizations take a multi-pronged approach. A combination of practices will be more effective than a single policy or program. The strategy should also have a long-term focus because of the cumulative impact of progressive people practices. Finally, actions to create great workplaces must involve employees since the change will be more sustainable if employees have a sense of ownership.

It's said a company is only as good as the people it hires.

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