

THE BEST WORK PLACES IN CANADA 2007

BY ANDREW WAHL,
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44. Info-Tech Research Group
45. S.C. Johnson and Son
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48. Monster Canada
49. NewHeights Software
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IN APRIL 2001, DAVE CAPUTO GOT SOME bad news. The telecom industry was melting down, and Cisco Systems, which had acquired his Waterloo, Ont., video-networking company, PixStream, just four months earlier for \$554 million, had decided to shut down its new division. Caputo wasn't about to just send his team of engineers home, though. Instead, he told them to think about the future of the Internet—specific ideas would be the property of Cisco—while he and his partners went out to raise the venture capital necessary to finance a new company. Good to his word, he secured \$19.5 million from four VCs—only weeks before the 9/11 terrorist attacks put financiers into lockdown—and on Aug. 31, Caputo presided over the new company's first all-employee meeting and unveiled its name: Sandvine Inc.

Caputo also revealed "The Sandvine Way": an attempt to articulate its ideal corporate culture, an eight-point statement that is now on the back of every employee ID tag. "We're a bunch of engineers," says CEO Caputo. "So why don't we engineer our culture?" The way he saw it, Sandvine's culture would be so critical to the startup's success that he designed it before he knew what his company was even going to make.

Today, Sandvine is a quickly growing networking-equipment company of 170 employees traded publicly on the TSX and on London's AIM. And as one of 31 organizations to appear for the first time on our newly expanded list of 50 Best Workplaces in Canada, it also provides evidence of the rising awareness among corporate leaders that workplace culture can be a key competitive differentiator—so much so, that it can't be left to chance.

"There is a growing interest in understanding the links between

culture and performance," says Graham Lowe, a 30-year expert on workplace issues and partner at the Great Place to Work Institute Canada, based in Kelowna, B.C., which conducted more than 13,000 employee surveys for this year's ranking. "It seems to be percolating up through the ranks of employers, and it's something that's being talked about. But, of course, the rhetoric is always out front of the practice. What we see on the list are companies that really take culture seriously."

But how do managers—whether engineers or not—design a corporate culture? After all, having a great workplace isn't about the foosball table in the company lunchroom or any other perk or benefit to which money can be devoted. Sure, it all helps. But the loyalty and commitment that managers really seek boils down to just

one complicated, five-letter word: Trust.

Canada's Best Workplaces, a diverse group of organizations, have applied unique, innovative—and sometimes deceptively simple—methods of building trust. Just look at the company that tops this year's list, Back in Motion Rehab. A closely knit, 57-person chain of rehabilitation and disability management clinics based in Surrey, B.C., Back in Motion is open and credible with employees. Although it's a private company, management allows all its employees to know its financial health, and upholds a policy that the highest-paid director's base salary is less than two times that of the average staff member. When times were bad a few years ago, directors gave up all forms of compensation rather than lay off staff; and now that times are good, the company shares 30% to 50% of distributed profits. When a client compliments the work of a staff member, they're publicly acknowledged via companywide e-mail or at meetings. Such small gestures add up, and it shows: when anonymously surveyed, 100% of Back in Motion's employees agreed with the statement, "Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work."

Success stories can be drawn from all 50 companies. The list itself is the work of the Great Place to Work Institute Canada (*please see "Methodology," opposite*), and uses the same Trust Index model that is the basis of *Fortune's* 100 Best Companies to Work For in the U.S., the *Financial Times'* U.K. ranking, and has spread to 27 other countries. In 2006, some 1.2 million employees completed the 59-question survey at about 3,000 companies worldwide, which were subject to independent culture audits.

Survey responses fall into five broad categories—credibility, respect, fairness, pride and camaraderie—that, when taken

together, define a workplace's trust levels. The Trust Index taps into a set of shared values and attitudes about workplaces, regardless of whether they're in Canada, the U.S., Europe, Latin America or India. For instance, employees at a company in the Top 25 in any given country agreed 86% of the time, on average, with the statement, "I feel I make a difference here." (Response rates ranged from as low as 68% in Italy to as high as 93% in Denmark, while in Canada 88% agreed.) The overall statement, "Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work" was affirmed 89% of the time, on average, while 91% of employees at the Top 25 Canadian employers agreed.

Compared to the global average of responses from each country's highest-ranked employers, Canada's Top 25 average employee response rates were slightly higher on nearly every question. The best Canadian employers appear especially to excel in giving promotions to those who best deserve them (16 percentage points higher than the global average, and six higher than the Top 25 in the U.S.), and encouraging employees to balance their work and personal lives (at 85%, 12 points higher than the global average). Perhaps most surprisingly, in an era when switching jobs is not only expected but encouraged by career experts, 85% of employees at Canada's Top 25 workplaces say they plan to stay there until they retire, 11 percentage points higher than the global average for best workplaces. In general, Canadian employee responses were nearly on par with those from the top U.S. employers.

So what do Canada's best workplaces look like? In general, compared with other 2007 survey participants, employees at our 50 best workplaces are significantly more likely to have a better work/life balance, to experience a psychologically healthy work environment and to perform meaningful work while having fun with co-workers. The result? They look forward to coming to work, they pursue professional-development opportunities, plan to stay with their company a long time, feel they make a difference and, most importantly, give extra to get the job done.

In other words, these workplaces get more out of their people—and it pays off. Companies that have been recognized as having leading cultures by the Great Place to Work model consistently outperform their peers on the stock market over the long

METHODOLOGY

To choose the Best Workplaces in Canada, we rely on two things: our evaluation of the culture of each organization, and the opinions of an organization's employees. We give the latter considerably more weight: two-thirds of a company's total score comes from employee responses to the Trust Index survey (comprised of 57 scaled and two open-ended questions) created by the Great Place to Work Institute in San Francisco. The survey goes to a minimum of 350 randomly selected employees from each company (or all employees if less than 350) and asks about such things as credibility, fairness, respect, pride and camaraderie.

The remaining third of the score comes from our evaluation of a culture audit submitted by each company. It examines demographic makeup, pay and benefits programs and how the companies themselves say they exhibit the core elements of the Great Place to Work Institute Trust Index Model, which is based on credibility (two-way communication, competence, integrity); respect (support, collaboration, caring); fairness (equity, impartiality, justice); pride (in personal job, team, company); and camaraderie (intimacy, hospitality, community). Culture audits are evaluated by a team of trained evaluators. Individual evaluators score each submission and present the company or organization to the team, providing a rationale for their scoring. Team members ask questions, weigh the scoring against other submissions and ultimately come up with the final score.

After evaluations are completed, our team conducts various searches to ensure that the organization has not been involved in any unethical business practices in the past year. If news about an organization comes to light that may significantly damage employees' faith in management or suggest that it would not be a good example of a great place to work, we may exclude it from the list.

This methodology is identical to that used by the Great Place to Work Institute to compile lists of "best workplaces" and "best companies to work for" in 30 countries around the world. About 184 organizations contacted us to participate; of them, 103 finished the survey process.

To nominate your organization for the 2008 Best Workplaces in Canada list, go to: www.greatplacetowork.ca.

run. (For more on this, see "The human element," page 78.)

It doesn't matter if they're as big as TD Bank Financial Group, with nearly 55,000 employees, or as small as the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation in Ottawa, with only 50: all do something of value that could be transferable to other organizations. Small and medium-sized companies are often stretched by their fast pace of growth and don't have the resources that large organizations do for formal programs, but according to Lowe, they still manage to have the kinds of culture worth emulating. "When managers from large companies see in smaller places the level of interaction and the level of support that people are able to provide each other, they'll often ask, 'How do we create that in a large bureaucracy? How do we create that sense of people being in it together?'"

Part of the trick is to strip away as much bureaucracy as possible. To have everything determined by policies is the antithesis of trust. "That's the legacy some of today's big organizations have to overcome," says Lowe. "It's moving away from rigid control systems to saying, 'We need to give employees responsibility and trust them to take that responsibility.'"

Trust, of course, is a two-way street. Organizations must trust their employees before they will in turn trust their managers and senior leaders. Large companies might formalize their initiatives, but Lowe says many best practices really amount to low-cost attitude changes. "A commitment to respect, to openness, to transparency, to managers following through with promises—those are basic behaviours that should just be how businesses run, and therefore not a budgeted program." Lowe thinks the issues of workplace culture—and more specifically trust—are finally moving onto the radar screens of good managers. "They're actually willing to talk about it," he says, "which is a big breakthrough."

Few managers have the chance to start from scratch, like Caputo did with Sandvine. But in the following pages, we lay out the building blocks of trust—and what Canada's best workplaces do to inject these qualities into their cultures. One thing is clear: it only works when it's by design. ANDREW WAHL

Want to nominate your organization for next year's Best Workplaces ranking? Visit www.greatplacetowork.ca.

VITAL SIGNS

WHAT DO EMPLOYEES THINK OF THEIR WORKPLACE? JUST ASK THEM

AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WHO AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT:

"Management delivers on its promises"	"People here are paid fairly for the work they do"	"Everyone has an opportunity to get special recognition"	"You can count on people to co-operate"
81% at 50 Best	73% at 50 Best	80% at 50 Best	86% at 50 Best
66% at those companies that didn't make the list	57% at those companies that didn't make the list	63% at those companies that didn't make the list	74% at those companies that didn't make the list

HOW CANADA'S BEST WORKPLACES STACK UP TO THE WORLD'S BEST

Comparison of Top 25 companies in each region	Canada	U.S.	Europe	India	Global*
"Promotions go to those who best deserve them"	82%	76%	76%	73%	66%
"People are encouraged to balance their work life and their personal life"	85%	81%	82%	76%	73%
"I plan on working here until I retire"	85%	85%	68%	63%	74%
"Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work"	91%	92%	93%	89%	89%

THE BIG QUESTION

Percentage of employees who agree with the statement,
"Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work"

Back in Motion Rehabilitation	100	Tourism British Columbia	93.9
Canadian Health Services Research Foundation	97.6	Ernst & Young LLP	93.7
Urban Systems Ltd.	96.7	Keller Williams Ottawa Realty	93.2
Sapient Canada Inc.	95.1	Coastal Pacific Xpress	93.2
Sandvine Inc.	94.9	Globex Foreign Exchange Corp.	92.7

* AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF AFFIRMATIVE RESPONSES AT TOP 25 COMPANIES IN EACH OF 13 REGIONS



FAIRNESS FIRST

And remember, we're not just talking about pay

When the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a report earlier this year showing the country's Top 100 CEOs earn more in a single day than most employees do all year, the news struck a chord with average folks everywhere. The story made the rounds on radio stations, blogs and newspaper pages, prompted by the glaring disparity in compensation between the haves and the have-nots. The thought running through many people's head? No fair!

Fairness in the workplace, it appears, is a hot topic. And although compensation is an important part of the equation, justice in hiring, firing, managing and promoting matters, too. "Fairness is at the very top of employees' minds," says Daniel Skarlicki, an organizational behaviour professor at the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business in Vancouver. "We are seeing more progressive companies take a much stronger perspective on it. People who feel fairly treated are more engaged and willing to go above and beyond the call of duty. Fairness also predicts higher-quality decision-making and more willingness to provide higher levels of customer service."

The companies that scored the highest in terms of fairness in this year's Best Workplaces in Canada ranking understand this. As a result, they are also reaping the benefits: less staff turnover, more engaged and loyal employees and an edge over their competitors.

At the **Windsor Family Credit Union**—a member-owned financial institution that serves personal, commercial, community and institutional customers in Windsor, Ont., and surrounding Essex County—all full- and part-time employees are offered a generous benefits plan with premiums and annual deductibles fully paid, regardless of how many hours they put in. "Just because these individuals are working for us for 12, 20 or 30 hours a week,

that doesn't mean they should be treated any differently than an employee who's with us for 37 or 40 hours a week," says president and chief executive Marty Komsa. "In our industry, we need part-time employees to fill in for peak periods throughout the week."

Since introducing the all-inclusive benefits policy more than a decade ago—a move Komsa admits seemed "unheard of" at the time—the 150-employee credit union has been rewarded with higher-than-average retention rates and a readily accessible pool of often hard-to-find part-

FAIRNESS	THE TOP 10
Company	Score (%)
Back in Motion Rehab	87.6
Edward Jones Canada	87.0
Halsall Associates	86.9
Environics Communications	86.0
SaskCentral	85.4
iTRANS Consulting	83.4
Vancity Credit Union	83.0
Randstad Canada	82.0
Karo Design	82.0
1-800-GOT-JUNK?	82.0

time workers. These same candidates are also perfect for shuffling into full-time roles if, and when, the need arises.

Going above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to workplace fairness is something rehabilitation-and-disability management provider **Back in Motion Rehab** understands, too. After realizing it was falling behind when it came to competitive compensation, the firm, based in Surrey, B.C., teamed up with one of its local, private-sector rivals to obtain comprehensive market-based salary information. "It makes it challenging when you're hiring and putting offers out to know if they're fair and reasonable," says Ken Hemphill, human resources director. "You don't want to be offering something that is so low it's insulting." In addition to more competitive salaries, all staff recently received pay raises of between 3% and 13%, above the inflationary increases most employees receive.

Although fairness at work is most often equated with tangibles—such as salary, benefits and perks—an open and transparent approach toward the way decisions are made and relationships are handled is often overlooked, Skarlicki stresses.

But not at **S.C. Johnson and Son**, the Brantford, Ont.-based Canadian division of the worldwide consumer-products giant, where managers are provided with diversity tool kits intended to stimulate discussion among all employees about fairness when it comes to training, communication, retention and advancement,

HOW TO FOSTER FAIRNESS

Want to foster fairness? Daniel Skarlicki, an organizational behaviour professor at Vancouver's Sauder School of Business, offers these tips:

1 Manage employees' expectations. Managers should focus on under-promising and over-delivering. People tend to feel very fairly treated when they sense they got more than they expected. "It's not what you get, it's what you get relative to what you thought you might get," Skarlicki says.

2 Seek employees' input. Resist the temptation to introduce a series of so-called fairness initiatives without talking to employees first. Do your best to integrate suggestions.

3 Make decisions transparent. Management has a tendency to sugar-coat negative news. This often happens during performance evaluations. Contrary to popular belief, says Skarlicki, employees want the "cold, hard truth." A dose of reality will help them improve their performance instead of being left wondering why they're stuck in the same old salary rut year after year.

4 Explain how decisions are made. Many organizations do a poor job of managing the rumour mill. The result? Employees fill in the gaps themselves. Take a more transparent and honest approach to communication and decision-making.

5 Don't throw money around. Compensation is only one component of fairness. Diagnose what's wrong and fix it by putting into place procedural and interactional fairness. Many times, an employee will choose to stay at a company that pays only average wages if they have a manager who treats them fairly.

to name just a few areas. In a workplace where job titles and seniority levels vary so widely—approximately half of S.C. Johnson's employees work in manufacturing—this is no easy task. But regardless of whether they are on the assembly line or in a corner office, all staff members are given the same opportunities in terms of training, mentorship and profit-sharing. "The whole idea is to create an environment that is attracting, retaining and developing the best people—and that's by respecting and valuing everyone's individual differences and similarities," says Shirley Langley, vice-president of human resources.

Langley points out that S.C. Johnson is aware of those principles when it comes to customers and suppliers, too, and that it takes its commitment to promoting diversity among external partners very seriously. "It's just about making everything that we do—whether it be internally or externally—as inclusive as possible," she says. "One of the things we teach our employees is that no matter who's walking in the door, you must treat them respectfully."

Fostering fairness right from the start is exactly what Vancouver-based junk removal company **1-800-GOT-JUNK?** had in mind when it teamed up with a local placement firm to help "expose its brand" to potential employees over the age of 40. "This is not an equal-opportunity type of policy where we're trying to fill quotas," says Helen Sheridan, director of people. "There are stereotypes that people hold

THE 50 BEST WORKPLACES AT A GLANCE

1. BACK IN MOTION REHAB

SURREY, B.C. | HEALTH CARE | 57 EMPLOYEES

BiM prefers to promote existing staff, even if that means supporting additional training—all employees are entitled to up to \$700 per year and paid days off for education. It has also shared 30% to 50% of distributed profits.

2. 1-800-GOT-JUNK?

VANCOUVER, WITH OFFICES WORLDWIDE | JUNK-REMOVAL SERVICES | 300 EMPLOYEES

A renovated open-concept workspace gets different departments mingling. Employees are encouraged to share their "101 Personal Life Goals" and support each other's dreams—when the CEO heard about one employee's goal to read *Anna Karenina* in Russian, he had a rare copy sent to her from Moscow.

3. URBAN SYSTEMS

KAMLOOPS, B.C. | ENGINEERING, PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | 270 EMPLOYEES

The so-called University of Urban Systems is open to all staff and offers courses from effective business writing to leadership training. All managing partners and many staff members have also attended a several-day-long course put on by the Queen's University School of Leadership.

4. ENVIRONICS COMMUNICATIONS

TORONTO | MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS | 80 EMPLOYEES

The ESRA awards (arse spelled backward) get staff laughing at their embarrassing moments. The "Five for Five" program gets them out of the country—in their fifth year, employees are given \$5,000 and an extra week of permanent vacation to go anywhere in the world.

5. KARO DESIGN

CALGARY, VANCOUVER | COMMUNICATIONS, WEB, INTERIOR AND PRODUCT DESIGN | 70 EMPLOYEES

Karo owns a Smart car and two mountain bikes employees can borrow for biz or pleasure. Staff members are given as much time off as they need for volunteer work, and interest-free loans have been given to those in need.

6. VANCITY CREDIT UNION

VANCOUVER | FINANCIAL SERVICES | 2,300 EMPLOYEES

Managers have a budget to thank staff with anything from gift certificates to dinners. Environmental commitment gives employees a sense of making a difference: Vancity products include a Clean Air Auto loan to reward low-emission cars; it plans to go carbon neutral by 2010.

7. EDWARD JONES CANADA

MISSISSAUGA, WITH OFFICES CANADA-WIDE | INVESTMENT ADVICE | 1,765 EMPLOYEES

Management eschews job descriptions and lets employees set their roles. Those who succeed in diversifying clients' assets get up to two "Diversification Trips" each year—2006 destinations included the Amalfi Coast and Grand Cayman.

8. HALSALL ASSOCIATES

TORONTO, WITH SIX OFFICES ACROSS CANADA | CONSULTING ENGINEERING AND PROJECT-MANAGEMENT FIRM | 215 EMPLOYEES

The firm's lean structure emphasizes teamwork and knowledge-sharing over hierarchy and titles. "You'll even see seniors reporting to juniors on particular projects," says career development manager Mike Peddle.

9. ITRANS CONSULTING

RICHMOND HILL, ONT., WITH FOUR OTHER OFFICES IN CANADA | TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND TRAFFIC ENGINEERING | 90 EMPLOYEES

Staff hit social events from skiing to an annual anniversary soiree they fly in to from around Canada. Mentors and "lunch and learn" sessions tackle personal and professional development.

about workers in that age range but that don't hold true of the people we're hiring at all. What we look for in our hires is our values. Those can be exhibited whether you're 20 or you're 50."

Since the partnership began a little less than a year ago, 1-800-GOT-JUNK? has received an amazing response from applicants in the 40-plus category, placing several in a variety of sales and call-centre roles. It's a win-win situation. "With the demographics the way they are, we've got this whole group of boomers that are starting to retire who want to keep their finger in the game," says Sheridan. "There's a huge candidate pool for us there in terms of bringing in more seasoned, experienced workers." Younger hires have the benefit of learning from their more experienced colleagues, and the boomer set "get to feel young again," she adds.

As all of this year's Best Workplaces show, fairness extends well beyond paycheques. That's probably a good thing, too, considering that water-cooler chat about who's making what will probably never really go away.

More importantly, says Skarlicki, what's fair—or not—is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. "Fairness is about perception. It's not just about what I get. It's what I get relative to what others are getting."

ERIN POOLEY



WELL DONE!

A little respect goes a long way

It's safe to say the phrase "our employees are our most valuable asset" has entered the pantheon of cringe-inducing corporate clichés. Yet for all of its glibness, the statement does at least recognize that workers should be prized—and that's something every employer needs to be aware of on a consistent basis. Treat your employees with respect, and they'll have a lot more enthusiasm for their jobs.

It's a simple concept that's equally simple to put into action. Even a pat on the back as acknowledgment for a job well done can go a long way to ensuring an employee feels respected. Many companies have awards to recognize accomplishments, but Chris Bedford, the Calgary-based president of design and branding firm **Karo Design**, prefers a more immediate approach. Employees who have completed outstanding work are discreetly awarded with an afternoon off to go skiing or to the spa, paid for by the

RESPECT THE TOP 10

Company	Score (%)
1-800-GOT-JUNK?	87.4
Edward Jones Canada	87.2
Urban Systems	87.1
Karo Design	87.0
Back in Motion Rehab	86.7
Environics Communications	86.2
SaskCentral	85.8
Vancity Credit Union	84.5
Keller Williams Ottawa Realty	84.4
Banff Lodging Co.	84.4



company. "It recognizes something that's of the moment," he says. "It's not formal, and it's not expected, so it carries weight."

Respect goes beyond simply acknowledging successes, of course. Employees also have to know their opinions are valuable—and that's why management should actively seek out their suggestions and ideas as often as they can. Some companies employ incentives for ideas. **Globex Foreign Exchange**, for example, a foreign-exchange broker based in Edmonton, offers a cash bonus or extra time off for suggestions management deems worthwhile.

Obtaining suggestions is only a first step; implementing them is a true indication of how much management values employee opinion. When Karo Design moved to a new office complex two years ago, managers issued a survey and held a series of one-on-one discussions with staff members to find out what they wanted in an ideal workplace; the suggestions were used to determine the layout of the new digs. Bedford says employees were fairly satisfied with the old office, so the changes ended up being minimal—added parking, better lighting, a Smart car for employees to sign out during the day or after work. But to exclude staff members from such an important decision would have been unthinkable for management. "If we're respectful of employees, then they're going to be in a better place to do their job to the best of their abilities," Bedford says.

It's also up to a company to help enhance those abilities, not

HOW TO BUILD RESPECT

Respect is something that is earned. Follow these simple steps, though, and you'll be well on your way:

1 Invest in employees. Offer training and development programs so they can further themselves professionally. Don't limit staff members to training that only relates to their current positions, however. Let them decide how to further their education outside of internal corporate programs—and provide funding for them to do so.

2 Acknowledge good work and extra effort from employees. This can be done formally through awards programs, or informally with personal recognition from a manager. Whatever way you choose, show employees they are valued.

3 Use a variety of ways to encourage ideas from employees, such as suggestion boxes or one-on-one meetings. Foster an open environment so staff members feel comfortable offering unsolicited ideas. Don't just collect suggestions, either. Be fully committed to responding to each and every one, and implement the useful ideas, whenever it's possible.

4 Include employees in important decisions. It's always a good idea to facilitate feedback, but when management is considering changes that directly affect employees' jobs, you'll want to make an extra effort to let them voice concerns.

5 Recognize that employees have lives outside of work. Allow flexibility with schedules so they have a degree of control over their hours. Not only will they appreciate the freedom, they'll also appreciate the trust shown by management.

only through training programs but by providing the resources for employees to develop their skills on their own time. Take **SaskCentral**, for example, a Regina-based company with \$4.4 billion in assets that provides investment services and support activities for credit unions. CEO Sid Bildfell says the company is committed to helping its staff members further their education in a variety of ways. "Every employee wants to be successful, and it's up to the company to create an environment in which the chances of increasing success are exponential," says Bildfell.

That's why SaskCentral encourages employees to obtain their executive MBAs. The company foots the bill for the entire cost of the program, although employees must first complete a lengthy application process and not everyone who applies will necessarily receive full tuition coverage. Nevertheless, a handful have completed their EMBAAs at Queen's and Royal Roads universities. Employees are given one day off a week to study, and their work responsibilities are shared among colleagues to help lessen the load.

For those who can't commit to an EMBA, SaskCentral offers a host of online courses ranging from project management to developing leadership skills through its intranet site, allowing employees to learn at their own pace and on their own time. In addition, everyone is allotted \$850 a year to put toward education, whether or not the course is directly related to their current position. **Deloitte**

THE 50 BEST WORKPLACES AT A GLANCE

10. ERNST & YOUNG LLP

TORONTO AND 13 LOCATIONS | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (FINANCIAL) | 3,775 EMPLOYEES

Employees can exercise flexibility and work from home. A concierge service for help with errands and a backup child- and elder-care program contribute to work/life balance. In summer, staff get an extra day off each long weekend.

11. WCG INTERNATIONAL HR SOLUTIONS

VICTORIA | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (HUMAN RESOURCES) | 152 EMPLOYEES

Employees leaving the company often say they feel like they're leaving a family, says HR director Barbara Patterson. Hours are flexible, and monthly massages are offered on company time. "Mya's Wish Foundation" was created to help a former employee whose two-year-old daughter required medical care.

12. ADFARM

CALGARY, WITH THREE SATELLITES | AGRICULTURAL MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS | 81 EMPLOYEES

AdFarm shares profits through a bonus program.

Employees can purchase shares in two company-owned farms and participate in their management. "It's a great way for staff who don't have the agriculture background to get their feet wet," says executive assistant Donna Ford.

13. SASKCENTRAL

REGINA | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (CREDIT UNIONS) | 52 EMPLOYEES

Employees are encouraged to complete their MBA—and are provided with full tuition. In addition to a focus on hiring First Nations employees, celebrations see native elders and powwow dancers mingle with staff, and all employees take a two-day aboriginal history workshop.

14. RANDSTAD CANADA

CANADA-WIDE | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (HUMAN RESOURCES) | 233 EMPLOYEES

Honesty and integrity are encouraged through training and initiatives like the 1-800-INTEGRITY phone line, where employees can report misconduct anonymously without fear of recrimination. Profit sharing and a share-purchase plan give staff a stake in company success.



15. KELLER WILLIAMS OTTAWA REALTY

OTTAWA | REAL ESTATE | 195 EMPLOYEES

Keller Williams University is known for offering "the best real-estate training in the business," says CEO Sunny Daljit. Employees participate in profit sharing on top of commissions—very rare in the industry—and six realtors representing staff vote on the direction ownership is taking the company.

& Touche LLP takes this approach a step further and covers the full cost of any course an employee completes.

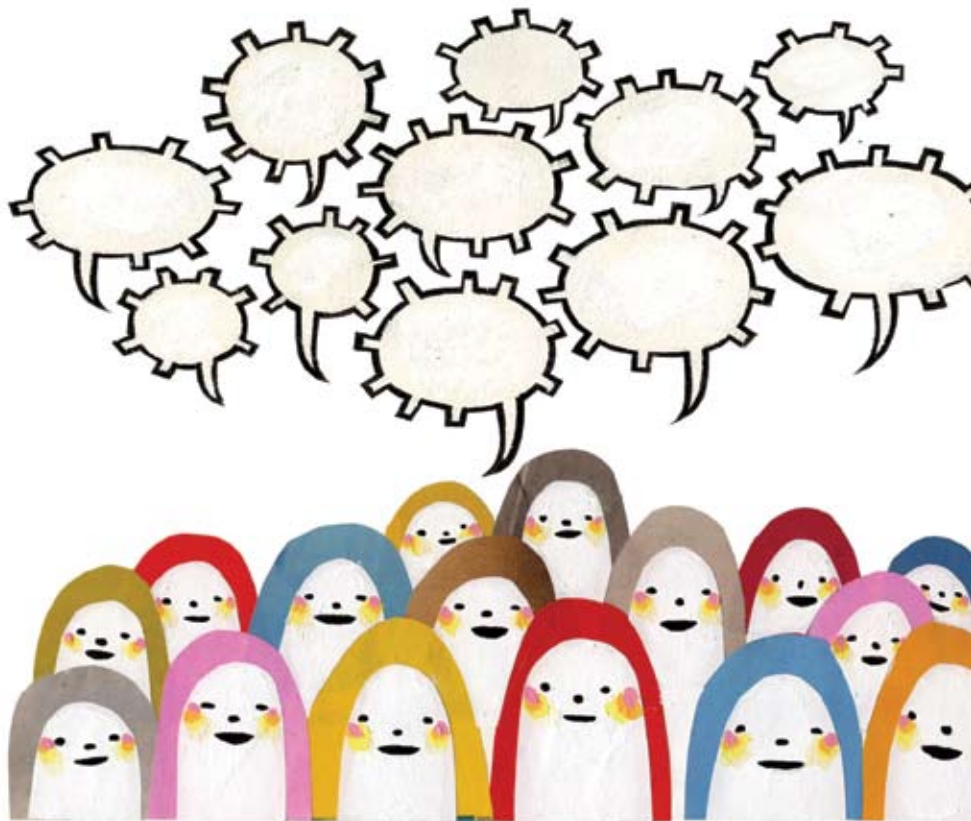
These situations are win-win, of course, since better-trained staff will be reflected in company performance. "We need to constantly invest in ourselves to remain competitive," Bildfell says.

While providing the means for employees to enhance their professional performance makes it clear they're valued, it's also important to remember that they are not just assets in which to invest but real people with their own lives. Don Pinchin, president of environmental health and safety consulting firm **Pinchin Environmental** in Mississauga, Ont., is well aware of how much staff members value life outside of work. The company grants new hires three weeks vacation time (rather than the provincially legislated two weeks) and also pays time-and-a-half for any hours worked in excess of 37.5 hours a week. Both policies are rare in most industries. "I would say people value more time off than they value money," Pinchin says. The company also allows workers to set their own schedules. "There's no one sitting over their shoulders watching their time sheet," Pinchin says. "We expect them to do their jobs, and there's no reason to suspect they won't be truthful."

That sentiment is echoed by Cameron Gatey, CEO of engineering and planning consulting firm **Urban Systems**, based in Kamloops, B.C. "If our employees are working long hours and they want to take an afternoon off to go golfing, they do it," he says. "There's no structure, and there's no permission." Workers are still held accountable for their actions, of course, but how and when they complete their duties is almost entirely up to them. The philosophy shows management trusts that people are skilled and responsible enough to do their jobs without intense scrutiny. While the lack of formal rules may make some organizations nervous, Gatey says the approach has never created any problems. "We treat employees like trustworthy people, and they act in a trustworthy manner," he says.

And being able to work without management constantly poking their noses in your business—it doesn't get any more respectful than that.

JOE CASTALDO



TALK THE TALK...

If you want true workplace cred

Want to build credibility with your employees? Then slap on a pair of glasses and suspenders and make like Larry King. That's what David MacDonald does. As CEO of computer software and hardware supplier **Softchoice** in Toronto, MacDonald hosts a monthly conference call (complete with a video slide show employees can view live on their computers) called the DMac Show. In it, he discusses company performance, fields questions and interviews staff—as pictures of him in his Larry King getup appear onscreen. MacDonald actually hosts two calls for his 630 employees—one for the West Coast and one for Central Canada. "We have a culture of humility," he says. "We don't take ourselves too seriously, particularly me."

While the goofiness of the DMac Show may help to humanize the boss, the real impact comes from what's discussed. Effective communication is key to building credibility with employees, and the program is an opportunity to both reinforce Softchoice's goals and provide a breakdown of whether or not the company is meeting targets. For it to be worthwhile, however, the information can't be sugar-coated. A credible

CREDIBILITY THE TOP 10

Company	Score (%)
Back in Motion Rehab	90.3
1-800-GOT-JUNK?	89.5
Urban Systems	88.8
Kingfisher Oceanside Resort & Spa	87.9
Hill & Knowlton Canada	87.8
iTRANS Consulting	87.3
Halsall Associates	86.9
SaskCentral	86.5
EnviroNics Communications	85.8
Karo Design	85.5

management team is one that keeps employees informed about all issues and challenges—and doesn't flinch when it comes time to deliver the bad news. On the DMac Show, MacDonald is open about discussing where his company needs to improve. "We know what the challenges are. And by articulating them, employees know they're being addressed and we're not just sitting up there thinking things are OK," he says.

Video updates and conference calls like DMac are a convenient way to communicate broadly across an organization, but that shouldn't stop managers from meeting with employees in the flesh, says Gary Reamey, head of the Canadian division of investment dealer **Edward Jones**. This month, he set up a program called Face-to-Face with Gary Reamey, which involves meeting with all 160 employees in small groups over the course of the year. "I'd do walk-arounds all the time and meet with different employees across the firm," Reamey says, "but to sit down and meet formally in small groups, that was their suggestion."

Reamey's informal meetings with employees over the years have yielded real change within the organization, such as the introduction of tuition reimbursement and a program that subsidizes the cost of adoption up to \$5,000 per child. The intimate setting of the Face-to-Face sessions, he says, will encourage employees to bring up questions and concerns that wouldn't ordinarily get addressed in a larger group.

At a great workplace, problems need to be solved, and employees need to have confidence that management is competent

HOW TO BUILD CREDIBILITY

Credibility is a key component of trust. Without it, you have nothing. These pointers can help:

1 Employ a variety of ways to keep employees informed about important issues and changes, such as through newsletters, video updates, town halls and face-to-face meetings. The method isn't as important as the information, however. Be honest about challenges and setbacks—and tell staff members what's being done to solve them.

2 No employee is going to trust a managerial team that can't do its job well. Become an expert in your field; look to training to improve your managerial skills and boost your knowledge. That will foster an environment of continuous learning.

3 Deliver on all promises. Employees lose faith particularly fast when management is unable to follow through on its claims, so ensure all commitments are met. Build a track record of continuously matching words with actions.

4 Be consistent in your performance. Remember that credibility is lost a lot faster than it can be gained, so never let your work ethic slide. If mistakes are made, acknowledge them honestly, accept responsibility without placing blame and work to fix the situation.

enough to help solve them. A few past successes certainly do a lot to build credibility, but a willingness to pitch in and do some grunt work when necessary shows workers just how serious the top brass is about the needs of the firm. That's what senior management at Edward Jones Canada chose to do when a client satisfaction survey backfired. The company hired an outside firm to collect feedback from clients over the phone, but received complaints from those who received the calls at odd hours. Apparently the firm had neglected to account for time-zone differences. Reamey says he could easily have delegated another department to send apology letters, but instead decided that he and other senior managers would split up the list of disgruntled clients and call them back personally (at an appropriate hour) to apologize.

Acts like this show that behind all of the talk about achieving objectives, there's a real commitment from the top. But long term, managers can further build credibility by

working to improve their own skills. At **Halsall Associates**, an engineering and project-management firm in Toronto, every employee has a career coach. That includes the president, Peter Halsall.

Halsall set up the coaching program 10 years ago to help staff determine their career goals and the skills they want to develop—and the company gives them the funding to follow through. Employees can also undergo training to become a career coach for others. "Sometimes engineering is set up for the Dilberts of the world. It's not set up for people who want to excel," Halsall says. "So we wanted to set up something different." Since every

THE 50 BEST WORKPLACES AT A GLANCE

16. INTUIT CANADA

EDMONTON | IT/SOFTWARE | 385 EMPLOYEES

The Intuit Women's Network helps females across the company connect and work on leadership and work/life balance. A program giving staff up to four days a year for volunteer work has a 90% participation rate, and the company matches employee charitable donations, dollar for dollar, up to \$1,200.

17. WINDSOR FAMILY CREDIT UNION

WINDSOR, ONT. | FINANCIAL | 120 EMPLOYEES

Staff get a bonus of 2% of their previous year's salary to spend on their well-being, from vacations to fitness equipment. All full- and part-timers receive full benefits. Staff who submit improvement ideas can win an extra week of vacation and a \$5,000 trip.

18. TRICO HOMES

CALGARY | RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT | 96 EMPLOYEES

Community work builds bonds; one undertaking has seen employees repair the roof at Calgary's Leighton Arts Centre. An outside consultant is brought in regularly to make sure staff suggestions are addressed.

19. MICROSOFT CANADA

MISSISSAUGA, ONT. | SOFTWARE |

900 EMPLOYEES

Microsoft Canada gives employees 40 hours of paid volunteer leave yearly, and its devotion to child safety—such as developing software that helps police catch child pornographers—is a source of pride. Onsite perks include a massage therapist, acupuncturist, personal trainer and nutritionist.

20. THE MARKETING STORE

TORONTO (OFFICES WORLDWIDE) | MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS | 160 EMPLOYEES

An annual awards event recognizes staff who embody talent and teamwork in five categories, from delivery of top-notch work to living company values. Winners receive a plaque and a \$2,500 cheque.

21. SANDVINE

WATERLOO, ONT. | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY | 175 EMPLOYEES

New hires are greeted with a welcome basket, a mentor, a box of Timbits to share with their new co-workers, and stock options. Seasoned employees can earn performance-based bonuses and option grants.



manager uses a coach, the program promotes a culture of learning and self-improvement and demonstrates that managers, too, are concerned about performing their best.

Employees need reassurance that managers will act ethically and responsibly when doing their jobs, and won't sacrifice integrity to get ahead. At **Environics Communications**, which operates in the slick world of public relations, ethics takes on a special significance, according to president Bruce MacLellan. "We've fired clients for being rude or inconsiderate," he says. "We consider that inappropriate behaviour for clients, and also for the work culture of our firm." Although MacLellan declines to cite examples, he says the company has also severed relationships with those who have insisted on releasing inaccurate information. Employees can refuse to work for a client they do not feel comfortable with, as well, provided they have reasonable objections. "That freedom to choose is the best way to get great work and dedication from your employees," MacLellan says.

Smart managers know credibility must be earned—and that requires a consistent track record of honest and open communication and the ability to back up rhetoric with action. Plus, it means it's going to take time. But hey, if looking like Larry King can help accelerate the process, don't hesitate to at least give it a try. **JOE CASTALDO**



THE 50 BEST WORKPLACES AT A GLANCE

22. KINGFISHER OCEANSIDE RESORT & SPA

COURTENAY (VANCOUVER ISLAND), B.C. | HOSPITALITY | 180 EMPLOYEES

Regular "Night Owl Meetings" give overnight staff a sit-down, pre-shift meal with managers to keep them informed. All employees have the power to immediately resolve guest disputes by comping up to \$1,000. Those in financial need get help through a special fund.

23. FULLER LANDAU LLP

TORONTO | FINANCIAL SERVICES (ACCOUNTING) | 104 EMPLOYEES

"Fridays with Michael" let staff members lunch monthly with the firm's managing partner, Michael Epstein, to ask questions and receive updates. A popular educational presentation and lunch celebrates one of the ethnic or geographic



backgrounds of a different team member each month.

24. CERIDIAN CANADA

WINNIPEG (10 SATELLITES) | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (HUMAN RESOURCES) | 1,439 EMPLOYEES

Every year, a group of top employees receive a trip to an exotic locale, such as Peru or South Africa. Staff can qualify for tuition assistance of up to \$2,000 yearly and can be awarded bonuses of up to \$1,500 or even more for exceptional performances. Company philanthropic efforts include funds set aside for employees to distribute to local charities of their choosing.

25. GLOBEX FOREIGN EXCHANGE

EDMONTON, WITH OFFICES CANADA-WIDE | FINANCIAL SERVICES | 115 EMPLOYEES

Management seeks feedback from staff to better operations; even if suggestions aren't used, employees receive a cash bonus or extra time off for their input. A percentage of

each of the company's foreign-exchange transactions goes to a charitable foundation, with employee and client donations matched.

26. SOFTCHOICE

TORONTO | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY | 343 EMPLOYEES

President and CEO David MacDonald keeps staff up to speed with a monthly conference call modelled after *Larry King Live*. Managers and future company leaders get skills training. A Friday beer cart and a "bring your dog to work" policy—for pooches who've passed a committee review—show employees they're trusted by management.

27. KINGSTON ROSS PASNAK LLP

EDMONTON | FINANCIAL SERVICES (ACCOUNTING) | 80 EMPLOYEES

The company assists employees for whom English is a second language with a free eight-week international business course, half of which is conducted during working hours. Monthly sessions see co-workers bond over such activities as trivia contests and fingerpainting.

PROUD OUT LOUD

Accomplishment and connection pay off big time

When John Hancock joined **Microsoft Canada** in Toronto five years ago as a consultant, he knew he was going to be working with some of the best in the business. What he didn't bargain on was the sense of accomplishment that came from spending 18 months working with law enforcement agencies to develop a Child Exploitation Tracking System (CETS) to battle online sexual abuse. Using his software-development skills to improve how authorities store, search and share large amounts of information is among the "most rewarding" things Hancock says he's ever done. Now in charge of helping police forces around the world get CETS up and running, he says he's proud that the resources of Microsoft could be put toward developing such an important social tool, especially because it was an idea that emerged after a Toronto cop personally contacted Bill Gates. And, he adds, knowing that Microsoft Canada was the driving force behind the initiative is "part of the attraction" of coming into work every day.

Hancock's project is just one example of how this year's Best Workplaces build employee pride. While it may be relatively easy to measure employees' overwhelmingly positive responses to statements such as "I feel I make a difference here" and "I feel good about the ways we contribute to the community," pride is much harder to actually instil in a workplace. It often boils down to developing a sense of connection between employees, the customers they deal with, and perhaps most

importantly, the community. "It's very clear to me that people who are proud of their company are happy in their work," says Sharif Khan, vice-president of human resources for Microsoft Canada, who notes the company's staff attrition rate is half the industry average. "They're more creative, more committed, more productive."

Teri Currie, executive vice-president of human resources for **TD Bank Financial Group**, says her organization has deliberately striven to create a culture where employees, from tellers on up, feel "empowered" to "make the right decision" at the direct point of contact with customers. Not having every decision vetted by a senior employee instils a sense of confidence, she says, and that, in turn, results in job-retention rates over 90%, strong word-of-mouth when it comes to recruitment and high levels of job satisfaction in employee surveys.

At Vancouver-based **Vancity**, Canada's largest credit union with \$12.5 billion total assets, pride comes from knowing that a piece of the corporate pie—one-third of profits each year, in fact—goes back to members as dividends and into the community in the form of grants to social-service organizations and charities. But Ellen Pেকেles, vice-president of community leadership, says it's not enough for employees to only have a vague sense that Vancity gives money to worthy causes. "They need to connect how the community goodness connects to the bottom line, and to really imbed that spirit into their work culture," she says. Carol Mills, a member services manager

PRIDE THE TOP 10

Company	Score (%)
Back in Motion Rehab	94.4
Microsoft Canada	89.1
Urban Systems	88.7
AdFarm	87.7
Karo Design	87.7
Enviro-nics Communications	87.6
Halsall Associates	87.6
Vancity Credit Union	87.5
Canadian Health Services Research Foundation	87.4
Trico Homes	87.4

28. ONLINE BUSINESS SYSTEMS

WINNIPEG (THREE OTHER OFFICES) | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES | 220 EMPLOYEES
Employees who refer a new consultant to the company get an hourly wage bonus for every hour the new hire bills as long as they're both employed; those who have referred business-team hires get a \$1,000 bonus.

29. HILL & KNOWLTON CANADA

CANADA-WIDE | STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS | 185 EMPLOYEES
A unique structure helps employees connect with—and learn from—co-workers across the country. An annual award gives \$10,000 to the best teams. "Beer Cart Fridays" and a life-sized bust of Elvis (which sits on the desks of culprits who abuse e-mail) lighten things up.

30. IHS CANADA

CALGARY | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY) | 280 EMPLOYEES
On top of the three weeks' paid vacation employees start with, they can request up to six weeks' unpaid leave a

year—many use it to volunteer in underprivileged countries. Two employee-run committees distribute IHS's yearly charitable donations; it also shares profits.

31. TOURISM BRITISH COLUMBIA

VICTORIA, WITH AN OFFICE IN VANCOUVER | TOURISM | 149 EMPLOYEES
A rotating employee committee takes organizational values beyond "words on a page"—initiatives like monthly CEO "mouth-about's" to update staff sprung from these committee discussions. Staff support each other outside work. One new hire from out of town arrived with few possessions; co-workers lent items to help her transition.

32. HEENAN BLAIKIE LLP

MONTREAL (10 OFFICES ACROSS CANADA) | CORPORATE/LABOUR LITIGATION | 900 EMPLOYEES
Offices nationwide stay connected and celebrate legal victories through an extensive intranet system. The law firm helped pioneer the City of Toronto's Youth Employment Partnership Initiative, hiring interns for 12-week positions and helping them find full-time jobs.



BEST WORKPLACES

at a Vancity branch in downtown Vancouver, takes that spirit to heart. She is now a mentor to a teenage girl thanks to her work with PLEA, one of the non-profit organizations that has received a \$1-million Vancity grant for its work with at-risk youth. "I know this is something I likely never would have gotten involved in if it weren't for Vancity's support of PLEA," she says.

A similar sense of volunteerism is fostered at TD, where employees are given at least a day off a year, and more if warranted, to work as volunteers for a charitable organization of their choice. If they put in more than 40 hours of volunteering, they can even apply for a \$500 grant that goes directly to their charity. So far, \$550,000 in grant money has been handed out this way; that's in addition to the money that TD directly gives to charities—more than \$33 million in 2006.

Workplace pride also comes from knowing that every staff member is working toward the same goal. At **AdFarm**, a Calgary-based communications firm geared toward the North American agricultural sector, the company's focus conveys a strong sense of purpose to its employees, according to creative director Glenn Dawes. AdFarm staffers "know their jobs centre around making sure the company is the best agriculture-based advertising firm

HOW TO BUILD PRIDE

While it may be relatively easy to measure, pride is much more difficult to create. Here are some tips for building a proud workplace:

1 Find ways for employees to understand the organization's connection with the community. Demonstrate that its commitment to charitable works, social responsibility and volunteerism isn't just good public relations.

2 Make sure employees understand goals and purposes, and that these are clearly spelled out. When everyone knows the score, it's easier for them to pull in the same direction. Pride comes from individuals seeing what has been accomplished by working together as a team.

3 Empower workers to make decisions at the customer level. Employees who feel that they have leeway in their jobs to make the "right decision" depending on circumstances are happier, more confident and more productive. They'll even give extra—because they feel their work has special meaning and is not just a job. They'll also look forward to coming to work and will stick with you.

there is," Dawes says. "It almost gives employees a sense of relief to know that we're so tightly focused."

According to Grace Pulver, Vancity's vice-president of human resources, instilling pride means setting high standards in terms of how employees do their job, but it also means making sure they're offered the proper training and career-enhancement opportunities, as well as incentives like profit sharing. "People who feel pride in their organization will take the initiative," she says. "They'll do things they've not necessarily been asked to do for the well-being of the company."

Pride also comes from allowing employees to have a say in how a company operates, by having mechanisms in place that ensure good ideas for improving customer service or operations get noticed. TD's "Stop It" program, for instance, credits

employees for coming up with good ideas that save time or money. The initiative has freed up 300,000 employee hours annually.

In the end, TD's Currie says pride in an organization is best described as what employees are doing when no one is looking: "Are they engaged with customers? With fellow employees? With the larger community?" With the right culture, the answer to these questions will be a resounding "Yes!" **ZENA OLIJNYK**

THE 50 BEST WORKPLACES AT A GLANCE

33. COASTAL PACIFIC XPRESS

SURREY, B.C., WITH AN OFFICE IN CALGARY | TRANSPORT | 145 EMPLOYEES

If management likes a potential hire but no position exists, they'll give them three months at the company to try to create a role that could lead to a full-time job. All employees get training and a personal coach.

34. BANFF LODGING COMPANY

BANFF, ALTA. | HOSPITALITY | 400 EMPLOYEES

After employees have been with the company full time for three years, it will match their down payment on a home in Banff with an interest-free loan of up to \$20,000; it doesn't have to be repaid for 10 years.

35. CANADIAN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH FOUNDATION

OTTAWA | RESEARCH FOUNDATION | 50 EMPLOYEES

Employees can take English or French lessons to be certified bilingual; those who have reached this level receive a yearly bonus. Staff get benefits with premiums paid by the employer, and flexible working arrangements.

36. PINCHIN ENVIRONMENTAL

MISSISSAUGA (OFFICES IN ONTARIO AND MANITOBA) | HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING | 208 EMPLOYEES

Staff start at three weeks' vacation, and time-and-a-half pay kicks in for those who work more than 37.5 hours weekly. Founder and president Don Pinchin's open-door policy means time for employees



no matter what their title. "The respect for him is unbelievable," says HR manager Patricia Cavallari.

37. DELOITTE & TOUCHE LLP

CANADA-WIDE | AUDIT, TAX, CONSULTING AND FINANCIAL ADVISORY | 6,814 EMPLOYEES

In 2006, each full-time employee got an average of 142 hours of in-house training. Tuition is covered for those who continue their education independently, whether or not the study is related to their position. New hires get a mentor, and those still on their way to becoming a chartered accountant get an exam coach.

38. THE PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

VANCOUVER, WITH OFFICES IN EDMONTON AND CALGARY | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (HUMAN RESOURCES) | 80 EMPLOYEES

All new hires, no matter where they live, are flown to Vancouver, where they'll stay in a four-diamond hotel for five days of orientation. Other perks include

flexible working arrangements and a yearly team-building trip to destinations such as Hawaii and Vegas for those who perform well.

39. TD BANK FINANCIAL GROUP

TORONTO | FINANCIAL SERVICES |

54,995 EMPLOYEES

A diversity leadership council chaired by senior staff promotes an inclusive environment for women, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and employees who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. Employees can also opt for payroll charity deductions and are eligible for paid time off to volunteer.

40. LANNICK GROUP OF COMPANIES

TORONTO | PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (HUMAN RESOURCES) | 80 EMPLOYEES

Potential hires can partake in a one-day job shadow and meet team members from throughout the company; once they're hired, they'll receive orientation and training. A commission and bonus program rewards those who've made a contribution.

41. CONCERT PROPERTIES

VANCOUVER | REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT | 125 EMPLOYEES

Not only does CEO David Podmore encourage an open-door policy, he takes two groups of employees chosen from a random draw to Pennask Lake, near Kelowna, B.C., for three days of fishing yearly. "It's true Canadian wilderness. There are no words to describe it," says employee Lizette Parsons Bell, who went last year.

WORK BUDS

When it comes to teamwork, camaraderie counts



Sally Rich knows well the anxiety of starting a new job. She's switched employers several times during her 20-year career as a software developer. But when the 47-year-old joined **Sandvine**, a high-tech networking-equipment company in Waterloo, Ont., she quickly felt at home. On her first day, in January, she found a gift basket on her desk with hot chocolate, coffees and Sandvine swag. Nearby was a box of Timbits—but they weren't for her. They were for the long line of people stopping by to introduce themselves after an e-mail went out to the entire 140-person office announcing her arrival. "People are so friendly here," says Rich. "You know how, as soon as the sun comes out in the spring, even complete strangers smile at you when you walk down the street? Sandvine's like that. I noticed it straight away."

First impressions are important. The best workplaces help set the tone for rookies from Day 1, helping them get off on the right foot. Sandvine makes a point of it, and with more than just gift baskets. In addition to the warm greetings and orientation, Rich was paired up with a "buddy," someone on her team who was responsible for answering all her niggling questions in the first few weeks. She also immediately

started training, so she quickly got up to speed on the available technology. "It's not like some companies, where you're given a desk and you sit there for the first few days, thinking, 'I feel like a lump on a log,'" she says. "The training made me feel comfortable and made me feel like I belong—that I can do my job."

Laying out the welcome mat is only a first step to building camaraderie. Employees spend a lot of their waking hours at work, so it's important they not only enjoy what they do for a living, but whom they work alongside. And although managers can't engineer lifelong friendships between office mates, they *can* create an environment that lets people be themselves, share a laugh and celebrate together.

The simplest way to encourage the forging of personal bonds: mix in some food and drink. It needn't be elaborate—in fact, it's better if it's informal and largely driven by the employees themselves. Sandvine, for

instance, stocks beer in its kitchen alongside soft drinks, while **Hill & Knowlton**, a public-relations firm, upholds a tradition of "Beer Cart Friday": at 3 p.m. each week, trollies laden with snacks and beverages, including wine and beer (only clients' products, naturally), clink through the office.

42. IMMIGRANT SERVICES SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

VANCOUVER | SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SERVICES | 200 EMPLOYEES

Staff are proud of their community involvement—volunteers (often new Canadians) play a major role in the organization, and are rewarded with appreciation events and help finding jobs. One current employee was a refugee trying to get back into the workforce when her volunteer position led to a full-time gig at the organization two years ago.

43. HIGH ROAD COMMUNICATIONS

TORONTO, WITH OFFICES IN VANCOUVER, OTTAWA AND MONTREAL | PUBLIC RELATIONS | 76 EMPLOYEES

A staff committee provided design input during recent office renovations, and employees had the chance to design their own cubicle space. Regular performance reviews give staff members insight from their managers and peers, and everyone gets an extra day off each quarter to help with work/life balance.

44



CAMARADERIE THE TOP 10	
Company	Score (%)
Back in Motion Rehab	97.3
Karo Design	91.6
Envionics Communications	91.3
1-800-GOT-JUNK?	91.2
WCG International HR Solutions	91.2
iTRANS Consulting	91.1
AdFarm	91.0
Sandvine	89.8
Urban Systems	89.8
Halsall Associates	89.7

Small, spontaneous celebrations can be most effective. **Sapient**, a Toronto-based IT consulting firm, encourages frequent events to counteract the pressures of meeting client demands. Project teams “pass the torch” by surprising other teams with breakfast or ice-cream sundaes—a good deed that gets passed on—and they are responsible for arranging events such as dinners to celebrate milestones with clients. “We have to remind ourselves that we do need some distraction during the day, we do need to build relationships, to make sure our clients feel a positive energy,” says human resources manager Lou-Ann Paton. “We need to make sure we’re bonding with people, that it’s a feel-good achievement versus just an intense, driven organization.”

Clearly, fun cannot overtake the actual work that needs to get done, but managers shouldn’t control it too tightly, either, lest there be too much “corporate” and not enough “culture.” Senior leaders can actively promote opportunities for team building, but it’s up to employees to get involved—so put it in their hands.

Simple gestures are sometimes all it takes, like giving staff the chance to express their individuality. At **Thomson Carswell**, an IT solutions provider, members of the customer-relations team in Toronto rotate responsibility for decorating their area for holidays. “It’s just a fun way to share a little bit about who they are,” says Jayne Jackson, manager of HR. Staff members at Sandvine maintain a personal page on the internal directory, complete with photos, so that when someone from another department has to contact them, they’re not just another faceless name.

Employees can also make their own rules. Sapient has its project teams, which include client representatives, all set the ground rules for their meetings, with lighthearted penalties for non-compliance. Show up late? Sing a song. Your mobile phone

HOW TO CULTIVATE CAMARADERIE

Looking to create a workplace in which people pull together? These steps will help get you there:

1 Set the ground rules—and let employees be creative. Make sure people feel they can be themselves and have opportunities to express individuality. Celebrate special events and accomplishments frequently with small and informal occasions. Actively encourage people to demonstrate that they care about each other.

2 Create a hospitable workplace. Help foster an environment that gives people the chance to socialize daily. Remember, a little fun goes a long way, so trust employees to have a laugh and still get the job done. Help new hires feel at home, with training and personalized orientation, such as assigning a “buddy.” Don’t forget to do the same for people changing jobs or work units.

3 Build a sense of community. Foster the feeling of a “family” in which employees can count on each other both professionally and personally. Give teams responsibility to plan their own events.

rings? Tell an embarrassing story about yourself. “We needed to have ground rules, but we didn’t want it to be so policeman-like,” says Paton. “Rather than just having them on the wall, everyone is made aware of it and everyone gets on board.”

Such methods simply promote what comes naturally to most of us—making a personal connection with others. The strongest bonds can be formed in times of trouble, so one of the clearest indications of the health of a workplace’s culture is how it rallies around someone who has fallen on tough times. Take the **Kingfisher Oceanside Resort & Spa**, in Courtenay, B.C. Its Angel Fish Fund provides financial support to staff in need, with the money voluntarily contributed by fellow employees on their paycheques, which is then matched by the company. About 30% of the 188 employees chip in, and there’s usually as

much as \$1,500 in the pot every two weeks to support the two to five anonymous nominations the committee gets a month. Cheques are cut for about \$350, on average, and go toward things like replacing a broken-down hot water tank or covering part of an unexpected dental bill. For instance, when Kingfisher night auditor Teresa Stace-Smith suffered a kitchen fire the day after the birth of her son, she received \$750 to help pay for cleaning and repairs. “If that didn’t happen, we probably wouldn’t have been able to get it done at all,” says Stace-Smith. “It’s not really a burden on anybody to do that, it’s like helping family out. It makes you want to do your job well.”

Ultimately, that’s what good managers do: provide the conditions under which employees will perform their best. There is no better motivation than working alongside people about whom you genuinely care—and shared successes will mean so much more.

ANDREW WAHL

THE 50 BEST WORKPLACES AT A GLANCE

44. INFO-TECH RESEARCH GROUP

LONDON, ONT. | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH | 185 EMPLOYEES

Staff support each other—employees went out of their way to provide lifts to a co-worker who’d broken bones in a motorcycle accident, and everyone pitched in to help another who lost everything in a house fire. They also support sick children in the community.

45. S.C. JOHNSON AND SON

BRANTFORD, ONT. | MANUFACTURING, PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS | 463 EMPLOYEES

Management prefers promoting employees to looking outside, and a development program helps them advance their careers. Staff can rent one of eight cottages at the company resort in Muskoka each summer.

46. THOMSON CARSWELL

TORONTO | INFORMATION SOLUTIONS PROVIDER | 683 EMPLOYEES

Staff choose from a slew of training opportunities—in-house instruction, tuition reimbursement for college

and university courses, access to more than 1,000 online courses, on-the-job development experiences, French and English language courses and more. During the office’s recent redecoration, employees could choose their own office paint colour.

47. SAPIENT CANADA

TORONTO | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CONSULTING | 170 EMPLOYEES

Late for a meeting or forget the company’s no-cellphone rule? Guilty Sapient employees must stand up and break into full song. Staff also share laughs during regular professional development days, when they can chat over free lunch and ice-cream sundaes in between community building activities and a town hall with management.

48. MONSTER CANADA

MONTREAL, WITH TORONTO, CALGARY AND VANCOUVER OFFICES | ONLINE RECRUITING | 100 EMPLOYEES

This company will go the distance for staff—management tried everything to bring home an employee stranded in

Lebanon during last summer’s war, attempting to send a corporate jet. “Monster Idol” sees outstanding workers get judged by a panel for a chance at winning a trip.

49. NEWHEIGHTS SOFTWARE

OTTAWA WITH AN OFFICE IN VICTORIA | COMMUNICATIONS SOFTWARE | 53 EMPLOYEES

A culture of openness means employees can grill superiors at regular Q&A sessions. “Sometimes I’ll wince, but I’ve never seen management get upset about anything asked,” says PR director Rob McLean. CEO Owen Matthews’ passion makes for companywide pride. “We’re still a startup, but we believe what we’re doing will make a difference,” McLean says.

50. COBALT ENGINEERING

VANCOUVER | MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM | 90 EMPLOYEES

The firm rewards staff with a profit-sharing plan based on individual, team and company performance. Fifteen per cent of company profits are distributed to employees based on position, length of service and team profitability.



CULTURAL DUE DILIGENCE

Contemplating a career change? Culture is the key to finding a great workplace

BY GRAHAM LOWE



Canada's labour market is the hottest in a generation. HR professionals are talking about "extreme recruiting," and executive-search consultants have never had it so good. Growing numbers of experienced managers and professionals are being lured to new employers with perks and promises unheard of in the 1990s. In many organizations, at least half the senior managers are approaching retirement age, and there is neither the bench strength nor a robust

succession plan to address the exodus. Expect the quest for new talent to intensify.

So you may soon face that most existential of working-life questions: Is this job opportunity that just landed in my lap the best chance I'll have to re-energize my career? Before you jump, though, be as sure as possible that you'll wind up in a truly great workplace, where you'll be able to realize your career aspirations.

Above all, you'll want to conduct due diligence on a prospective new employer, digging deeper than the predictable interview discussions about how you're ready for the new challenges and responsibilities on offer. Culture is the clincher in whether you'll be moving into an environment that fully supports your career aspirations. Just as recruiters focus increasingly on "culture fit," you need a personal framework for assessing the culture that will shape your daily work experience.

Viewing a prospective new employer through the lens of the Great Place to Work Institute's (GPTW) model of a high-trust culture can reduce the risks of a career move. It is a helpful due-diligence tool for anyone exploring a potential job offer. The Institute's five pillars of trust—credible management practices, respectful relations between managers and employees, fair treatment and processes, pride and a sense of camaraderie—have proved to be an accurate predictor of great workplaces in 30 countries.

The Institute's research suggests that differences in corporate culture can be greater than the range of compensation and benefits offered for top jobs. Factoring in culture gives new meaning to the term "total rewards," which usually encompasses the tangibles of pay, benefits and perks. Equally important are the intangible rewards—for example, a sense of personal accomplishment, being challenged to develop your abilities, feeling connected with your team and knowing your contributions are truly valued and depend on relationships of mutual trust.

As Ram Charan emphasizes in his new book, *Know-How: The 8 Skills that Separate People Who Perform from Those Who Don't*, when businesses recruit executives, due diligence demands an approach that gets "to the truth of the person." Just as critical, then, is for the prospective recruit to get to the truth of the company. The only clear path to that is through an organization's culture.

Corporate recruiters search for solid evidence of performance in the reputed high-performers they are interviewing for top jobs. So as that reputed new high performer, you also need to probe for concrete evidence that the claims made about the company's culture are reflected in its daily practices. That will help you see through "employer of choice" branding to determine if it is real.

Pay careful attention to how the executive team talks about the organization's culture and their role in sustaining it. For starters, do they even talk about this? Look for what is unique about a company through the eyes of its employees. That defines its

cultural DNA, something no competitor can clone. In great workplaces, senior managers are storytellers, helping employees feel a common bond through their contributions to something special.

Take credibility, one of the pillars of workplace trust. Credibility reflects how openly managers communicate, their competence in co-ordinating people to strive for the corporate vision and the integrity of their daily actions. For example, employees must be confident that managers run the business ethically. Good predictors of future ethical practices are the values that guided past decisions.

Ethical standards and codes of conduct are displayed on most corporate websites these days. So you need to find out how rooted these standards are in everyday practices by asking questions such as: *What are the guideposts that the executive team uses in a difficult situation? And what is a recent difficult situation that tested these values?* Environments Communications illustrates the point. The marketing and communications firm has actually turned down new business that is inconsistent with its strong ethical standards—no matter how much the opportunity may have been worth.

Trust assures personal and collective responsibility for actions. How corporate leaders value employees and their contributions is an enabler of respect—another pillar of a high-trust workplace. Many great workplaces have a company philosophy built around respect for employees' contributions as a driver of performance. For example, Coastal Pacific Xpress (CPX) distinguishes itself in the trucking industry by its employee-first philosophy, which rests on the basic principle of treating its drivers with respect. Evidence of this philosophy can be found in stories about customers who were "fired" (as CPX puts it) by employees because they were disrespectful and abusive toward staff.

Respect is also practised by supporting employees to fully develop their skills and potential. Learning and development programs are common now, so look for signs that the learning process is incorporated into people's jobs—the hallmark of a learning organization. For example, Google (No. 1 on the GPTW 2007 list of best companies to work for in the United States, published by *Fortune* magazine in January) has spectacular benefits, such as 11 free gourmet cafeterias at its headquarters. But the company's efforts to nurture employees extend far beyond such perks. All Google engineers spend 20% of their time cooking up new ideas that will benefit the company, which takes them outside their job and into other areas of the business.

Having multiple channels for employee communication also contributes to strong cultures with high trust. Look for how openly corporate plans and information are shared, and the types of ongoing opportunities for employees to have input and contribute to improving the work environment. Ironically, too many organizations these days conduct engagement surveys without then engaging employees to act on the results to make workplace improvements. If the company you're checking out surveys its

JOB SEEKERS SHOULD KEEP SEVERAL THINGS IN MIND WHEN TRYING TO SEPARATE GOOD WORKPLACES FROM BAD

CORPORATE CULTURE DUE DILIGENCE CHECKLIST

BASED ON THE GREAT PLACE TO WORK INSTITUTE'S FIVE PILLARS OF TRUST, the following questions can provide anyone looking for that next big career opportunity with a culture checklist. Discuss these questions with your executive recruiter, if you are using one. Raise them in interviews with the executive team and in discussions with managers and front-line employees. Don't jump ship if the answers are not totally genuine and convincing.

CREDIBILITY

- ☒ What are the core values that guide executive decision-making, and how are managers held accountable for living the values?
- ☐ What do the values and vision say about employees' contributions to business success?

RESPECT

- ☐ How are employees' contributions recognized, developed and encouraged?
- ☐ Do workers have a voice? Does the climate allow employees to speak openly about mistakes and learn from them?

FAIRNESS

- ☐ What commitment do executives make, and what concrete actions has the company taken, to foster a work environment free of discrimination and favouritism?
- ☐ How equitable and balanced is the distribution of perks, recognition, rewards and training opportunities at the organization?

PRIDE

- ☐ What is the basis of the company's reputation as an employer, and how does this play out for employees? Do its claims about being a top employer have substance in the eyes of employees?
- ☐ Do employees express genuine pride in their job and the company?


CAMARADERIE

- ☐ How are new employees at any level welcomed and made to feel part of the workplace community?
- ☐ Do employees, from the front lines to the executive suite, actually enjoy their co-workers and have fun at work?

employees, be sure to find out how results are actually used to make the workplace better.

Organizations on GPTW best workplaces lists demonstrate an impressive array of leading practices in this regard, ranging from town hall meetings, video conferences with the CEO, question-and-answer sessions with the executive team, focus groups, confidential feedback systems and all sorts of creative employee-suggestion methods. Back in Motion Rehab, for example, runs a transparent open-book business in which all employees know the financial picture—even though it is a private company. Ernst & Young conducts an annual employee survey and mobilizes working groups to make improvements based on the results. Online Business Systems not only surveys its employee but also conducts "stay" interviews—a twist on exit interviews—to find how to improve.

Personally, you may conclude that the time has never been better to expand your career horizons. Be sure to follow cultural signals as you go down this path. But if you are content where you are, maybe it's time for a cultural checkup using the suggestions

above. That is something any employee can do. If you are a manager, be prepared to put your results on the table for discussion. Try to imagine how the next prospective recruit is checking out your company. You better have authentic answers to those probing questions about your culture if you want to remain competitive. 

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