

Focus on well-being helps companies keep employees

Award winners detail wellness initiatives that help with recruitment and retention

AUDREY CARLETON

Recruiting and retaining talent is essential to any strong organization. But accomplishing this while juggling other goals can be a challenge.

With a growing emphasis on mental health and wellness within Canadian workplaces, more organizations are seeing a correlation between their employees' well-being and their willingness to stick around.

Here are a few ways that the winners of the 2019 Employee Recommended Workplace Awards, created by The Globe and Mail and Morneau Shepell and presented on March 19, have improved recruitment and retention by adopting wellness initiatives in the workplace.

COMPETITIVE BENEFITS MAKE A COMPETITIVE COMPANY

"We don't have enough employees in Quebec to work in every job available, so we have to be a very good place to work so we can keep our employees. ... We try to focus on wellness and on what employees need to have in their life. ... Everybody wants to do sport or have time for training, so we just opened a gym at the office. We just try to listen to what they need and what they want, so they can be happy where they work."

- Elisabeth Paquin, advisor, human resources at Aéroport de Québec Inc., in Quebec City. Winner, mid-sized not-for-profit organization

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES IN REACHING PERSONAL GOALS

"We have other support benefits, such as employee wellness programs, where folks can be eligible for up to \$150 per employee for health and wellness related initiatives that they may take on. ... Does \$150 make someone physically fit? No. It won't by itself. But it complements the things that they're doing on their own, or it can be a catalyst to doing something."

- Mark Phillips, chief administrative officer at the Town of Kentville in Kings County, N.S. Winner, small governmental organization

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

"We have a culture that's very inclusive, a culture where people look out for each other, and so there is very much a family feeling at OCAS. ... We created what we call a 'fun squad,' and it is a committee of employees who get together ... and the mandate for this committee ... is, No. 1, whatever program that we do should practise inclusion, and No. 2, that whatever events we do are fun. And what I mean by 'inclusion' is we celebrate a lot of things here at OCAS and the fun squad takes a direct role in it. For example, Christmas celebrations, Diwali celebrations, [Lunar] New Year, all those things are celebrated, and we want to create a workplace where, instead of not doing something or not celebrating a particular religious belief, we want to be able to celebrate all of them."

- David Hong, vice-president, customer and employee success at OCAS Application Services Inc. in Guelph, Ont. Winner, small not-for-profit organization



Top Category winners of the Employee Recommended Workplace Award. GLENN LOWSON/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

2019 Top Category Winners

BUSINESS STRUCTURE	SMALL	MID-SIZED	LARGE
Privately owned	Sklar Wilton & Associates	MDS Aero Support Corp.	Avison Young (Canada) Inc.
Publicly traded	Herman Miller Canada Inc.	Sandoz Canada Inc.	Pason Systems Corp.
Not-for-profit	OCAS Application Services Inc.	Aéroport de Québec Inc.	CAA Club Group
Governmental	Town of Kentville	Northwestern Health Unit	NB Power

Source: Morneau Shepell, The Globe and Mail

Employee Recommended Workplaces

ORGANIZATION

- Active International
- Administration portuaire de Québec
- Aéroport de Québec Inc.
- Air France KLM
- Alberta Recycling Management Authority
- Allnorth Consultants Ltd.
- Arrow Engineering Inc.
- Avison Young (Canada) Inc.
- Back in Motion Rehab
- Benefits by Design
- Big Bang ERP
- BlackBerry Ltd.
- CAA Club Group
- Calgary Meals on Wheels
- Canadian Mental Health Association of N.B.
- Canadian Pharmacists Association
- CBCL Ltd.
- Citron Hygiene
- Credit Union Central of Manitoba
- Deluxe Payroll
- EfficiencyOne
- EGUS
- Evolocity Financial Group Inc.
- FIRST Insurance Funding of Canada
- Frontier College
- GeoSpectrum Technologies Inc.
- Gore Mutual Insurance
- H&R Block Canada
- Habitat Systems Inc.
- Herman Miller Canada Inc.
- Hi-Tech Business Systems Ltd.
- Ingredion Canada Corporation
- Innovation Credit Union
- Innovative Automation
- Intercon Messaging Inc.
- InvestorCOM
- Jazz Aviation LP
- Klick Inc.
- La Maison Orphée
- Lifemark Health Group
- LivingWorks Education Inc.
- Loopio Inc.
- MacLean Law
- Mainstream
- MDS Aero Support Corp.
- Municipality of the County of Cumberland
- NB Power
- Nestle Canada Inc.
- N.B. Association for Community Living
- Northwestern Health Unit
- OCAS Application Services Inc.
- Orix Geoscience Inc.
- Pason Systems Corp.
- Pensionnat Notre-Dame-des-Anges
- Prime Data Inc.
- Raymond James Ltd.
- Ronald McDonald House Charities SW Ont.
- Sandoz Canada Inc.
- School Boards' Co-operative Inc.
- SFU Childcare Society
- Shaw Communications Inc.
- Sionna Investment Managers
- Sklar Wilton & Associates
- SouthEastern Mutual Insurance
- Special Risk Insurance Managers Ltd.
- Stelvio Inc.
- TD Bank Group
- Thinkific
- Town of Kentville
- Triovest Realty Advisors Inc.
- Util-Assist
- Voices.com
- Workplace Resource
- Zimmer Biomet Canada
- ZLC Financial

Source: Morneau Shepell; The Globe and Mail

HELPING EMPLOYEES ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN ALL FORMS

"Our company purpose is to help others succeed. And we realize that a key enabler to helping our clients succeed is helping each other internally succeed."

"About three years ago we created a program that we call Spirit 32, ... a whole-person development program. We had, for example, a 16-week mindfulness training program that was part of that. We've done a series of seminars on brain health. We have a naturopath who has come in and given sessions on how to get well and how to boost your immune system. We have a corporate movement program where we try to get people up and moving, we have a healthy snacking centre ... and we have a whole team that works to keep that alive and fresh."

- Sarah Liverance, partner at Sklar Wilton and Associates in Toronto. Winner, small privately-owned corporation

SPARKING CONVERSATIONS AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

"Over the past couple of years we set up a mental-health committee because we said, 'We just want to ... get rid of the stigma, and start talking about stress management and how stress affects one's performance.'"

"Because we've been able to talk about mental health and physical health and wellness all around and work-life balance ... we've been able to have conversations with employees to say, 'You know what, if you're going through a tough time, take some time off, reach out to our employee assistance program, reach out to someone in the organization.'"

- Carole Morris, director of human resources at MDS Aero Support Corp. in Ottawa. Winner, mid-sized privately-owned corporation

CULTIVATING SUPPORT NETWORKS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES

"We have a gym, boot-camp classes, yoga classes, a ball-hockey court, hockey at lunch time. And then we have a lot of clubs. Those clubs are fantastic because they're not always in work time, but they get people meeting other co-workers that they don't interact with day-to-day in their work life. So they'll go hiking together, or there's a soccer group, there are some people who go mountain biking. Once they build those connections, they're living more of a healthy lifestyle, and getting out and being physical, which also helps mental well-being, so it's doing all that, but then they're also building connections and relationships with employees and co-

workers. That really helps with retention."

- Heather Hantos, director of human resources at Pason Systems Corp. in Calgary. Winner, large publicly-traded corporation

SHOWING SUPPORT FOR MENTAL WELLNESS FROM THE TOP-DOWN

Last year, the CEO of Avison Young sat down with the company's staff to share his own experiences grappling with mental health. His candor "broke the bubble" around the stigmatized topic in the workplace.

"I think breaking that fourth wall and just getting everyone to be on the same page and know that they have the company backing them, even if they're going through a tough time, I think that it really resonates with our employees. ... I think with the focus on health and wellness being an underlying thread to our culture, us trying to make sure that employees have enough time to get out and do other things that they enjoy, be with their families, focusing on that, putting emphasis on it, I think it's really helped employees be happier at work. Happier employees are more productive at work, and they want to stay."

- Parveen Sandhi, director of human resources at Avison Young (Canada) Inc. in Toronto. Winner, large privately-owned corporation

HAPPY EMPLOYEES HELP RECRUIT NEW TALENT ON THEIR OWN

"I feel like focusing on the wellness and health of our employees sort of speaks for itself. Those employees are champions of the organization, and they do a lot of the work in promoting the organization through their own happiness and well-being at work. We can also use them as examples when recruiting, so we can say 'Here are some of the ways that we support our current staff.'"

"We have alternate work schedules for people that have conflicting times in their days. ... We have great benefits that are family friendly and great sick and vacation time."

- Rachel Palichuk, Northwestern Health Unit, with 13 offices across Ontario. Winner, mid-sized governmental organization

SHOWING EMPLOYEES THEY ARE VALUED AND SUPPORTED

"The more emphasis we have on employee health, like total health or psychological health, it really speaks to new employees coming in because they feel like it's a more inclusive place of employment. And it's helping them understand that they don't have to

be the perfect employee, they're there because of the skills that they're bringing to the job, and whatever else you bring with it, we can help. ... Who they are as a person is really critical to us."

- Shelley Parker, industrial psychologist at NB Power in Fredericton. Winner, large governmental organization

PROMOTING COMPANY VALUES WITHIN AND BEYOND THE OFFICE

"Our focus is always been on the safety of our members and looking after them, and for us that starts with our employees. So saying that we look after employees helps fulfill that promise, gives them purpose and connection to what it is that we do. When it comes to retention, when you feel actual connection with what the organization's purpose is, and you feel that you share the same values and you feel that you share the same drive, it makes what you do worthwhile. ... Wellness plays a huge part of that culture of looking after people and being people-centric and being member-centric."

"We do a variety of programs. From a physical standpoint we'll have challenges, we have an on-site wellness coach who can help people with their health goals, a wellness committee that looks after activities. But we also take an expansive view of what wellness looks like, so we have a great rewards program that allows employees to recognize each other and give each other points that they can redeem for goods."

- Tony Tsai, AVP corporate communications at CAA Club Group in Toronto. Winner, large not-for-profit organization

HELPING EMPLOYEES ASSESS THEIR OWN WELL-BEING

"We decided to go on that journey about two and a half years ago, where the organizational context meant it was perfect timing for us to introduce a Total Health Index. It was a big cultural shift, selling to the employees that in order to be a high-performing company moving forward ... we needed to start managing our energy, instead of just managing our time. ... And that's where the Total Health Index started to feed this HR strategy. ... You do your questionnaire, with a personalized, confidential result that you get at the end. So you get basically your score card on 'what's my energy level' or 'what's my balance or my unbalance' in four pillars. The first year we did it, we had a little over 50 per cent participation. When we did it last year, we had close to 85 per cent participation. So that's a good signal that people bought into it."

- Marc St-Pierre, vice-president of human resources at Sandoz Canada Inc. in Mississauga, Ont. Winner, mid-sized publicly traded corporation

THE ORGANIZATION IS ONLY AS HEALTHY AS ITS PEOPLE

"Our organization is only as healthy as our people. Things that matter to us, matter to our employees and we demonstrate that daily through wellness, diversity and inclusion. We believe it helps us attract and retain the very best people in the industry."

- Camille Paquette-Small, manager, Talent and culture, at Workplace Resource Canada in Toronto, a certified dealer for Herman Miller Canada Inc. Winner, small, publicly traded corporation

Responses have been edited for clarity and length.

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