



The four simple behaviours
any business leader can adopt
to drive employee engagement

Be the **BOSS** your **EMPLOYEES** **LOVE**

By Deborah Aarts
Illustrations by Matt Taylor

A three-hour daily commute is the kind of thing that makes a person reassess her employment situation. Tracy Clark was no exception. That's why, in 1999, the young and energetic data-entry clerk from Lac du Bonnet, Man., quit a job she loved at Winnipeg equipment financier National Leasing. Tired of the slog, she took a job closer to home—and quickly regretted it.

The atmosphere at Clark's new gig was cold and impersonal, a stark contrast to the family vibe she'd loved at National. She missed feeling as though she were part of a team and that her work had purpose. So, a year after leaving National, she popped in to her old employer to say hello to some former colleagues—and to see whether it was as good a place to work as she remembered.

As Clark walked down a hallway, a group of businessmen—bankers, or maybe lawyers, she thought—approached from the opposite direction. Among them was National president and CEO Nick Logan.

What happened next floored her.

Logan stopped, excused himself from his guests and shook her hand. He asked about her baseball team and life in Lac du Bonnet, and said how much the company missed her. Then he carried on.

"I'll never forget it," Clark recalls. "I had been a junior employee, and I hadn't worked there in a year. But he remembered me, and took the time to greet me personally. It absolutely solidified my decision to come back."

That was almost 13 years ago, and Clark—who's now happily serving as National's accounting manager—still considers her CEO's

personal touch a major contributor to her job satisfaction.

Clark is just one employee, but she's one employee who feels motivated to do good work, talks up her employer at every opportunity and never has "one foot out the door"—the hallmarks of employee engagement. So, imagine the benefits that can accrue when a CEO's personal touch touches all.

As it happens, thousands of people just like Clark work for the companies on the 2013 list of the 50 Best Small and Medium Employers in Canada (BSME), including 33rd-ranked National Leasing. Produced by the Queen's Centre for Business Venturing and Aon Hewitt in partnership with PROFIT, the BSME ranking is based on the results of detailed surveys of employees, executives and HR managers that measure employee engagement at participating organizations.

Many factors play a role in employee engagement; among them are the fairness of compensation, the quality of performance feedback and whether the rank and file feel heard by upper management. But the data show that, more often than not, companies with high-performing workforces have CEOs who lead the employee-engagement charge. Adopt their mindset and employ their practices, and you too could be the boss everyone loves.

"It's a matter of fact that high engagement correlates very strongly with improved corporate results," confirms Einar Westerlund, who spearheads the BSME program as director of project development for the Queen's Centre for Business Venturing. Yet, given HR's reputation as a "soft" discipline, many CEOs—busy enough with sales and strategy—happily delegate the job.

They do themselves a disservice: employees of BSME firms perceive their leaders twice as positively as those in less engaged firms. "We see very big swings in engagement solely based on staff confidence in those at the top level," says Westerlund.

According to David Zinger, a Winnipeg-based employee-engagement consultant, CEOs play a vital role in driving engagement because their enthusiasm for staff well-being—or lack thereof—is so visible. "The CEO sets the tone," he says. "Staff will follow that lead."

What makes BSME CEOs so good in winning the hearts and minds of their employees are not words but actions; specifically, these four blindingly simple behaviours that any boss can model right away.

1 Get out of the corner office

Business analyst Kathy Chenglath joined iQmetrix (No. 24) in 2008, when the Vancouver-based software developer acquired the Winnipeg firm she worked for. Intra-company fraternization wasn't the norm at her old employer, so Chenglath was nervous when she learned she'd be in a four-some with iQmetrix CEO Chris Krywulak at a company golf tournament soon after the merger, before all the deal's practical implications had been determined.

Chenglath needn't have worried. Krywulak proved to be personable and approachable. He asked his new charge plenty of questions about her and her work, and reassured her about her future with iQmetrix. There was no awkwardness at all, says Chenglath; in fact, the round was fun. She left the tournament feeling that her new boss—headquartered halfway across the country—was always within

reach. "It was pretty clear that this is an organization in which executives are just like us employees," she says. "They don't make it feel top-down."



People rarely say
"I SEE THE CEO
TOO MUCH"

That's exactly the atmosphere Krywulak wanted to foster when he founded iQmetrix in 1999; his goal was to make himself as accessible as possible. In his experience, employees feel more confident—and, as a result, more driven—when they can interact comfortably with the boss. "It's hard for someone to feel intrinsically motivated in a top-down environment," he explains.

Fostering this type of approachability is something of a subtle art. If you're too gung-ho, you'll come across as disingenuous or, worse, meddlesome. But if you wait for employees to come to you, you risk overlooking the many who always will be too shy to bug the boss, no matter how friendly you are.

That's why it's important to create highly visible opportunities for employees to

interact with you—and make sure everyone understands that you're available. "Most CEOs are very quick to recite the old cliché of 'My door is always open,'" explains Westerlund. "But when there's not a clear invitation to come in, that open door is only imagined."

It's hard to demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being from within your office. That's why Zinger advises executives to err on the side of the visible: "There aren't many companies where people say, 'I see the CEO too much.'"

Front-line interactions are central to the work of Alan Norris, CEO of Calgary-based developer Brookfield Residential Properties Alberta LP (No. 28). "It's critical for everyone, not just my direct reports, to know they have access to me," he says. "I want to give that direct line of sight."

That results in a lot of "management by walking around." Norris often will stroll across his office to deliver a message instead of emailing. It's a simple act, but it allows him to engage one-on-one with

people he would have no meaningful contact with otherwise.

Sound like a time-waster? Employee feedback pegs the practice as a major motivator. Besides, Norris bristles at the notion that his forthcoming approach compromises his personal productivity: "When you're a CEO, your work should be 90% interpersonal."

Ryan Moon, a Brookfield veteran of more than a decade, has shared many one-on-one interactions with Norris, during which the pair have discussed everything from the competition to the organization's direction.

"He's open like that with everyone," says Moon, a sales manager. "It creates a culture that spreads right down through the organization." That culture is one in which employees feel valued, inspired and well-informed—the dividends of a CEO's effort to spend more time in the lunchroom and less in the corner office.

2 Make your goals their goals

In 2011, Sherry MacDonald unveiled to employees an aggressive and ambitious three-year plan for her organization, Toronto-based RESP administrator CST Consultants Inc. (No. 32). It represented an upheaval, and she knew staff might be apprehensive. So, she made sure that the plan explained the role of every person in the company—no matter how junior—in executing the plan, tying the significance of their day-to-day work to reaching the target. She delivered the message herself when possible, and trained her direct reports to do the same. "It's about reinforcing to everyone why they were coming to work each day," MacDonald says. "I was relentless in this, no matter who I was talking to."

This is one of the most effective levers a CEO has in driving engagement, according to Aurora, Ont.-based leadership consultant Bill Hogg. "People get excited when they feel they're genuinely a part of something and making a contribution," he says. "If they're thinking of completing their tasks and not their purpose within the organization, you're not going to have an engaged work environment."

When a CEO personally shares how an individual or group affects corporate goals, it lends gravitas to duties that might otherwise seem meaningless. And it gives clarity to information that might otherwise be misinterpreted—if not overlooked entirely—when buried in an email or posted on a bulletin board.

Finally, it serves as motivation for front-line employees. Take telephone service specialist Laura Taylor, a 10-year veteran of CST. "It's great that we get information that comes from Sherry herself," says Taylor, "because it shows us that she's engaged in what we do." Taylor says knowing her boss respects her contributions makes her feel important and empowered.

3 Keep your mouth shut and your ears open

You can learn a lot about the health of your business simply by listening to your staff's ideas, concerns and general perceptions. Giving employees a chance to weigh in not only tells them their opinion counts, it can prompt them to brainstorm and think beyond their day-to-day tasks.

While many CEOs treat staff communication as monologues, more enlightened

bosses know that dialogue is far more effective. That's why many BSME leaders have learned to spend most of the time with their mouths shut and ears open. "These CEOs get in front of staff with tons of questions about what the company can do better," says Westerlund. "And they probably only spend 20% of their time in these interactions talking. The other 80% is listening."

How can you get your employees to talk? It helps first to understand what makes them tick. Take Pinchin Environmental Ltd. (No. 49), a Mississauga, Ont.-based consultancy specializing in environmental and health and safety assessments. Its staff of almost 300 is composed overwhelmingly of technically minded individuals; they tend to see things scientifically, not emotionally. President Don Pinchin knows that if he wants to get staff talking, he has to speak their language. "Asking them about an engagement strategy or a management style will leave them cold," he says. "But if I ask them about their ideas for the latest analysis technique, they'll get very excited. That's how I engage them to share what's on their mind."

Venue matters, too. Many CEOs think their staff-outreach duties are complete after addressing the masses from a podium at an all-staff meeting. While large gatherings—physical or virtual—can be effective ways to disseminate information, they are a lousy way to gain insight into what's eating your employees. According to Zinger, few are comfortable enough to speak candidly about their concerns or share a budding idea in so public a venue.

If you're looking for honest feedback, you're more likely to get it where employees feel most comfortable. At Brookfield, Norris holds periodic meetings with his construction and sales teams, not in a hotel ballroom but on jobsites over pizza. "I get the best questions that way—very direct and blunt," says Norris. "And I don't shirk away from the answers. I think they appreciate that."

The feedback loop shouldn't be only for complaints, either. It also can be an excellent way to drum up new ideas. This past year, Brookfield challenged employees at all levels to share their business-improvement suggestions. Staff then had a chance to discuss their proposals with executive managers, either in one-on-one or small group meetings. "It's not just some company policy saying there are opportunities to speak to those at the top," explains Geoff Bobiy, a land acquisition manager

who has worked at Brookfield for almost seven years. "There are formal channels through which to do so."

4 Say thank you—and mean it

In an episode of TV's *Mad Men*, the aloof ad agency boss Don Draper butts heads with protégé copywriter Peggy Olsen, who's angry that her contributions to an award-winning ad campaign haven't been acknowledged. "You never say thank you," she says, choking back tears. "That's what the money is for!" Draper barks in retort.

Mad Men is set in the 1960s, when employee engagement would be a concept as foreign as the smoke-free workplace or casual Fridays. So, it's no surprise that the no-nonsense Draper can't fathom that his employees could want more than just a paycheck. Although few bosses today are so unenlightened, many underestimate the role that even tiny expressions of gratitude can play in keeping their charges charged.

Is it a simple matter of sending thank-you emails once a quarter? Not exactly. According to Westerlund, showing gratitude for specific, individual achievements—especially to unsung heroes near the bottom of the org chart—is most effective. "When the CEO acknowledges a particular contribution of an employee on the front lines," says Westerlund, "there's a huge payoff."

That assertion holds true for National Leasing's Logan, who holds a one-on-one appreciation lunch with each new employee after their first few months on the job. He starts simply by thanking each for joining the firm. He then talks to them about their specific goals and reiterates the importance of their contributions. When rookies inevitably comment on how unusual they find it to have such an intimate audience with the CEO, he shares the following credo: "You working for National is the most important part of my day. I have to talk to you so you know you understand our strategic plan, and that you bear responsibility in our success—or our failure."

Logan considers his personal efforts to win the hearts and minds of his employees not a burden but a personal goal. Good employees, he reasons, are the most valuable asset of all; why would he entrust their engagement to someone else? "All we have is people to make us better than our competitors," he explains. "Keeping them engaged is my job. When it comes down to it, it really is my only priority."

How to have a **WINNING** WORKFORCE

Attracting and retaining good people is good business. Engaging those people is even better business—way better

Engaged employees are those dream staffers who not only do good work every day, but also go above and beyond the call of duty without being asked, search for better ways to do their jobs, collaborate with others to benefit the business, recommend their company to jobseekers and are loyal to their employer. Research shows that if you build a highly engaged workforce, your company is far more likely to enjoy higher

growth rates and shareholder returns, along with lower absenteeism and voluntary turnover, than companies with only moderately engaged workers.

But unlike other areas of HR that favour big companies and their big budgets, high engagement can be achieved by companies of any size. Case in point: the members of the Best Small and Medium Employers in Canada ranking for 2013, whose HR tactics prove that workplaces need not be huge to be world-class.

perks, including subsidies for gym memberships, paid cellphones and staff barbecues, are icing on the cake.

DLGL LTD.

Blainville, Que. | HR software | FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT

(FTE) EMPLOYEES: 87 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Jacques Guénette

1 Mutual respect goes a long way at DLGL. Managers start with the assumption that employees are both competent and honest; that translates into a work environment in which staffers feel empowered and accountable, and micromanagement is kept to a minimum. Reasonable work schedules—a rarity in the software sector—and fair contracts provide additional incentives. As a result, workers are content to stay put: DLGL's employee tenure averages 15 years, and its voluntary turnover rate is negligible.

ARROW GROUP OF COMPANIES (Arrow

Professional Services) | Toronto | Staffing and human-resources services | FTE EMPLOYEES: 200 | CHIEF EXECUTIVES: Sam Ibrahim and Shaemin Ukani

2 Management transparency is very important at Arrow. All financial results are shared freely with employees, and senior managers invite staff to ask questions and air concerns about the company's direction. These and other empowerment-boosting policies—such as having employees choose which charities the firm supports—give staffers a sense of ownership that translates into high job satisfaction. Benefits and

HABANERO CONSULTING GROUP

Vancouver | Information-technology consulting

FTE EMPLOYEES: 83 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Steven Fitzgerald

3 Starting with the hiring process, Habanero makes sure employees at all levels understand the “why” of their work—that is, how their efforts contribute to the firm's overall success. Regular events, such as “all hands on deck” Monday morning update meetings, help to make staff feel connected. In addition, management regularly supports employee-initiated changes to the way it operates. For instance, when staff requested a review of the existing RRSP program, managers encouraged a small group of volunteers to research alternatives—and ultimately accepted that group's recommendation for a better provider.

DEVFACTO (DevFacto Technologies Inc.)

Edmonton | Information-technology consulting

FTE EMPLOYEES: 70 | CHIEF EXECUTIVES: David Cronin and Christians Izquierdo

4 DevFacto strives to create the team atmosphere that drives staff engagement. At the Edmonton head office, employees are encouraged to collaborate in both traditional work settings and more

casual environs, such as the fully stocked kitchen and the board-game area. To maintain strong ties with satellite operations, DevFacto has a companywide instant-messaging program, an internal social network and slick videoconferencing equipment. Coupled with a progressive approach to education that allots each employee three weeks per year for training, these initiatives have helped keep the staff turnover rate at zero throughout DevFacto's five years in business.

PROTEGRA INC.

Winnipeg | Business-performance consulting

and software development | FTE EMPLOYEES: 71

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Wadood Ibrahim

5 Like many companies, Protegra conducts annual employee-satisfaction surveys. Unlike many companies, it acts on the results, setting aggressive targets to improve problem areas and issuing quarterly mini-surveys to make sure the changes are effective. Furthermore, every employee's feedback counts when it comes to setting the firm's strategic direction. Each year, Protegra hosts strategic-planning sessions during which the staff collaboratively determine the priorities and goals for the year ahead. A flexible attitude toward work preferences—employees can work from home occasionally and create their own schedules—makes staffers feel respected.

iGATE CORPORATION

Toronto | Consulting, information-technology and business process outsourcing services | FTE EMPLOYEES: 376

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Phaneesh Murthy

6 iGATE has instituted a system to make sure every employee is in a rewarding and productive role. The firm first helps each worker understand their strengths and talents. Next, manager and staffer set short-, medium- and long-term career goals. Once these are established, the company helps employees develop the skills needed to meet their goals through training. This enables iGATE to monitor and foster staffers' work satisfaction while helping to keep them on the career track by providing motivating reminders about their stated goals.

CYBERTECH GROUP OF COMPANIES

(Cybertech Automation Inc. and i-Gen Solutions Inc.)

Edmonton | Engineering and industrial information-technology services | FTE EMPLOYEES: 87

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Ken Martel

7 In an effort to retain staff as long as possible, Cybertech has loaded its benefits portfolio with incentives for people to stick around. Most of the firm's employees are shareholders, creating motivation for them to do their best work—and to see it rewarded in the long term. The company also offers very generous (four-figure) service awards for veteran staff who reach 10-, 15- and 20-year milestones. As a result, Cybertech boasts an annual turnover rate of less than 1%.

OACIQ (Organisme d'autoréglementation du courtage

immobilier du Québec) | Brossard, Que. | Real estate

regulation enforcement in Quebec | FTE EMPLOYEES: 159

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Robert Nadeau

8 OACIQ takes pains to really listen to, and act upon, the requests of its employees. This has led to such measures as implementing a carpool program and lobbying to change local bus schedules to accommodate staff. The philosophy also has yielded more fundamental shifts in the organization. For instance, in recent years, the management has placed greater focus on employees' desire for better work/life balance, offering schedule flexibility so long as customer service is not compromised.

ISL ENGINEERING AND LAND SERVICES LTD.

Edmonton | Engineering consulting | FTE EMPLOYEES: 287

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Rod Peacock

9 It's a challenge to engage employees at a firm that's in flux. ISL faced this during a recently completed five-year succession plan that saw a wholesale change of leadership. To ward off anxiety, the company made the process fully transparent, explaining exactly how, when and why the changes would take place. Moreover, ISL used the opportunity to create development programs for its youngest staff, giving the firm more bench strength and employees better chances at promotion.

OODLES OF KUDOS

An employee-recognition program called Applause, housed on the intranet of **The Sovereign General Insurance Co.** (No. 17), allows any employee to pat a colleague on the back for anything from winning a new account to pitching in on a co-worker's project. “What's nice about it is it tells a story about what someone did to make a difference,” explains executive vice president and COO Rob Wesseling. “There's no hierarchy to it; everyone's involved.”



INTELEX TECHNOLOGIES INC.

Toronto | Software for environment, health, safety and quality (EH&SQ) programs | FTE EMPLOYEES: 190

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Mark Jaine

10 Big decisions are a group exercise at Intellex. During strategic planning, every employee—from newbie to senior vet—gets face time with the CEO. This makes everyone feel connected, valued and engaged in the company's future. To shore up loyalty further, Intellex has an office dedicated to helping its workers enrol in training and access resources to help them develop their careers. Other staff-pleasing perks include birthdays off, fitness allowances and a tuition-assistance program for the children of employees.

VIGILANT GLOBAL (4323009 Canada Inc.)

Montreal | Software for financial markets

FTE EMPLOYEES: 95 | CHIEF EXECUTIVES: Josh Felker

and Arvind Ramanathan

11 Vigilant Global employees receive many attractive benefits, including free breakfasts and lunches, salary top-ups for new parents on leave and ample opportunities for professional development, both in-house and external. Staffers also get a strong voice with their employer. The company has implemented several mechanisms to ensure two-way communication, such as an annual employee-engagement survey, semi-annual town hall meetings, a monthly employee-penned newsletter and a blog filled with staff contributions.

BBD (Benefits by Design Inc.)

Port Coquitlam, B.C. | Employee-benefits services

FTE EMPLOYEES: 77 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Mike McClenahan

12 When employees join BBD, they get more than a cookie-cutter “welcome to the team” email from HR. Thanks to an elaborate onboarding program, they undergo an orientation that involves leaders from all areas of the company, who share the ins and outs of their jobs. As a result, new hires assimilate early and get a complete view of the business. Monthly team meetings with executives and structured, ongoing communication forums for co-workers keep communication flowing. Employee wellness ranks high, too, with discounts for services, internal walking and running clubs, and free fruit and vegetables at the office.

SOLVERA SOLUTIONS

Regina | Information-technology consulting

FTE EMPLOYEES: 165 | CHIEF EXECUTIVES: Reg Robinson

and Jim Ostertag

13 At Solvera, each employee can direct up to \$500 in company funds annually to initiatives they feel will build the company's reputation. These projects have included charitable contributions, lunches at client sites to celebrate project milestones and converting the money into time off to volunteer. The idea is to show employees—and the public—that the company's direction doesn't just trickle down from the C-suite, and that every staff member plays a role in the firm's achievements.

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS OF ALBERTA | Edmonton | Physician regulation and

health-facility accreditation | FTE EMPLOYEES: 96

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Trevor Theman

14 Employee recognition is a big priority at the college. In addition to issuing awards to those who achieve tenure milestones and hosting regular staff-appreciation luncheons, the organization runs a program that enables employees to recognize and thank colleagues for anything they deem to be noteworthy. In addition, an onboarding program that includes an orientation with all department managers helps rookies feel informed and involved, while an open office with plenty of natural light makes the workplace a pleasant place to be.

ACHIEVERS (Achievers Solutions Inc.)

Toronto | Employee reward and recognition programs

FTE EMPLOYEES: 169 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Razor Suleman

15 It should be no surprise that a firm specializing in employee rewards offers a rich menu of perks, including Friday socials and generous vacation policies. But the firm also drives employee engagement through communication, including an open-book policy for its finances and daily companywide meetings in which employees offer quick updates. To foster individual initiative and agency, Achievers helps staff create customized

BEST EMPLOYERS

professional-development plans, and encourages them set goals for themselves, their departments and the company as a whole.

CBCI (CBCI Telecom Canada Inc.)
Lachine, Que. | Video conferencing and teleconferencing solutions | FTE EMPLOYEES: 89
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Denis Dumouchel

16 CBCI's core values don't just live on a plaque in the lobby. Those values—integrity, respect, creativity, winning and a team approach—form the basis of biannual employee reviews aimed at ensuring that each staff member works with the reviews in mind. To entrench the values further, employees are encouraged to nominate colleagues for Core Legend, a quarterly award given to those who have exemplified a specific core value. In addition, training programs (run in concert with suppliers and other partners) and an open approach to employee feedback make staffers feel valued and respected.

THE SOVEREIGN GENERAL INSURANCE COMPANY
Calgary | Commercial property and casualty insurance
FTE EMPLOYEES: 245 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Rob Wesseling

17 Sovereign General has built many mechanisms to make employees feel special. These include a program that encourages people to give co-workers a virtual pat on the back using the firm's

intranet. On the annual employee celebration day, everyone receives a gift and a hand written thank-you card from their manager. Other engagement-driving activities include informal mentoring, employee-driven charitable endeavours and post-hire interviews to make sure new recruits are comfortable and informed.

IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group [Canada] Inc.)
Mississauga, Ont. | Hotel chain | FTE EMPLOYEES: 175
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Richard Solomon

18 This hotel chain offers plenty of training opportunities to its staff, no matter what the role. A curriculum of classroom and electronic courses allow employees to develop their skills in anticipation of future promotion within the company. On the employee-recognition front, a program called Global Bravo! has been a particularly successful initiative. It enables staffers to send a congratulatory or thank-you e-card, along with a stipend, to a colleague they deem worthy of a reward.

NURSE NEXT DOOR HOME CARE SERVICES (Nurse Next Door Professional Homecare Services Inc.) | Vancouver | Home-care franchises
FTE EMPLOYEES: 114 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: John DeHart

19 This company encourages its staff to think big, and provides resources to help each employee set—and reach—career, health and financial goals. A “dream wall” at headquarters allows individuals to share their aspirations and drives home the “anything is possible” ethos. When employees demonstrate one of the firm's core values in their work, they are rewarded with Flowerbucks, an intra-company currency that can be used to purchase everything from gift cards to iPads to vacations.

THE DILAWRI GROUP (AutoMall Properties Inc.)
Winnipeg | Automotive dealerships and related shops
FTE EMPLOYEES: 339 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Ashok Dilawri

20 It can be easy for employees of firms with multiple locations to feel disconnected from the mother ship, but not so at Dilawri. Its managers give performance reviews, not just annually but monthly, weekly or even daily, so that everyone knows exactly where they stand. Top employees are enrolled in a management-training program that involves close mentorship and sponsored training. Meanwhile, the WOW Committee, a group comprising employees at all levels and from all outlets, meets monthly to develop programs to improve employee satisfaction, such as staff-recognition awards and an annual Christmas party for workers' kids.

MENNONITE SAVINGS AND CREDIT UNION (ONTARIO) LTD.
Kitchener, Ont. | Financial services | FTE EMPLOYEES: 147
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Brent Zorgrager

21 In recruiting, Mennonite Savings and Credit Union seeks out employees who share its values in order to maintain a strong sense of community among staff. This emphasis makes employees

feel that they are contributing to something larger than themselves, which helps drive staff engagement. In addition, management now actively solicits the ideas and opinions of both staff and the credit union members who comprise their client base, so that all can be involved in co-creating solutions. This makes staff and members alike feel valued, involved and informed about decisions affecting the business.

INTUIT CANADA ULC
Mississauga, Ont. | Financial and tax software
FTE EMPLOYEES: 400 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Brad Smith

22 When an employee survey revealed that Intuit staff wanted opportunities to build new skills and adopt the best practices of their colleagues elsewhere in the organization, Intuit created an international temporary assignment program. It allows employees to work at other Intuit locations around the world, with the site and role determined by both the individual's development goals and the business's needs. As well, a buddy-based onboarding program eases the transition for new hires.

BESTECH (Boudreau-Espley-Pitre Corp.)
Engineering, technical and environmental services for the mining sector | Sudbury, Ont. | FTE EMPLOYEES: 115
CHIEF EXECUTIVES: Marc Boudreau and Denis Pitre

23 Management at Bestech strives to listen to employee concerns through quarterly all-staff update meetings, regular one-on-one meetings between managers and their direct reports, and the CEO's policy of taking all new employees out for lunch. A voluntary employee share-ownership plan allows staff to buy into the future of the company and pays out regular dividends. Other popular benefits include a fitness centre, paid professional membership dues and employer contributions to a group RSP.

IQMETRIX (iQmetrix Software Development Corp.)
Vancouver | Software for retailers | FTE EMPLOYEES: 225
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Christopher Krywulak

24 The core values of the iQmetrix culture are trust, freedom and personal responsibility. When employees start at the firm, they are encouraged to help create the type of organization at which they'd want to work—and, with minimal hierarchy and bureaucracy, they have considerable licence to do so. This philosophy has bred significant loyalty among employees, who appreciate the vote of confidence.

MACADAMIAN (Macadamian Technologies Inc.)
Gatineau, Que. | Software design and engineering
FTE EMPLOYEES: 165 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Frederic Boulanger

25 Macadamian encourages its employees to let their creative juices flow—even if their creativity isn't directly related to their work. Through a program called CreativiDay, staffers can allocate some of their on-the-job hours to projects of personal interest that hone their skills, such as writing a blog or developing an application. In addition,

everyone receives a paid day off (in addition to statutory holidays) each month. Flexible work hours and regular pizza lunches help amp up job satisfaction.

KLICK HEALTH (Klick Inc.)
Toronto | Digital tools for the health-care sector
FTE EMPLOYEES: 285 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Leerom Segal

26 Klick Health employees receive kudos on a weekly basis through a recognition program called Klickster. For going above and beyond, staffers can win such benefits as keys to a Porsche for a week, a \$500 shopping spree with a personal shopper and a catered meal at the CEO's home. The firm also recently opened a new on-site health club featuring workout equipment, fitness classes and showers, so employees can squeeze a workout conveniently into the workday.

OPTIMUS | SBR (Optimus SBR Inc.)
Toronto | Diversified management consulting
FTE EMPLOYEES: 57 | CHIEF EXECUTIVES: Kevin Gauci, John Whincup and Joe Oppedisano

27 Optimus | SBR was created when the owners of two consulting firms acquired SBR Global after its owner suddenly passed away. As a result, the combined firm faced the significant challenge of fostering engagement among the newly merged staff during a period of intense transformation. A key strategy has been giving staff autonomy; employees are encouraged to act independently, apply entrepreneurial thinking and challenge the status quo. The firm uses the same system for internal accountability that it recommends to its clients: requiring employees to identify how their roles contribute to the company's overall values and strategy, and to discuss their progress in achieving those goals in monthly meetings with colleagues.

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTIAL (Brookfield Residential [Alberta] LP) | Calgary | Residential and commercial property development | FTE EMPLOYEES: 347
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Alan Norris

28 In-house development of talent is a priority at Brookfield Residential. In 2010, the company launched a program that encourages leadership at all levels of the organization; to date, more than half of the employees have participated. In addition, the firm runs a one-on-one mentoring program that pairs senior management with younger staffers. The continuous-improvement ethos also applies to employee wellness: the company offers nutritious breakfasts and brings in a fitness instructor to encourage staff to exercise.

CAAT PENSION PLAN (Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Pension Plan) | Toronto | Pension plan for academic, support and administrative staff of Ontario colleges | FTE EMPLOYEES: 63 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Derek Dobson

29 This organization uses a variety of activities that, taken together, account for its high levels of employee engagement. A 360-degree

performance-review process allows staff members to evaluate their bosses at the same time as staff receive their assessments. Monthly staff-led lunch-and-learn sessions are attended by employees at all levels—including the CEO—and cover topics as diverse as new workplace technology and the benefits of a better diet. Staff birthday celebrations and extracurriculars, such as a popular Toastmasters Club, boost morale and foster camaraderie. And the CEO briefs staff after each board meeting to make sure nothing is hidden behind closed doors.

CONCEPT GROUP (Concept Electric Ltd.)
Calgary | Diversified building installation and maintenance services | FTE EMPLOYEES: 439
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Dave Kinley

30 How do you keep skilled tradespeople happy and engaged? Concept Group uses several strategies. The firm strongly believes in—and supports—career progression for its technicians, offering internal training programs to develop foremen and other leaders. The firm also encourages staffers to transfer between divisions in order to gain different experience and add to their skill rosters. In addition, Concept Group provides apprenticeship training and covers the administrative burden of enrolling in courses. Competitive compensation and a family-style environment help seal the deal for workers.

PRAIRIEFYRE SOFTWARE INC.
Ottawa | Telecommunications software | FTE EMPLOYEES: 123
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Chris Courneya

31 Managers and HR reps meet with each PrairieFyre employee at least quarterly to ensure individual development goals and career objectives aren't forgotten in the tussle of the workday. New employees are introduced to the team and top management on their first day; meet with HR after one month to get a clear sense of the company's goals; and check in with their manager after two months to ensure they are integrating well. All parties connect after three months to confirm a successful probationary period. The company also pays attention to the small stuff, using surveys and focus groups to get employee input on important initiatives, such as improving efficiency. Managers conduct joint planning sessions to gain employee input into company goals and work together to create departmental and individual objectives.

CST CONSULTANTS INC.
Toronto | Group education-savings plans
FTE EMPLOYEES: 122 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Sherry MacDonald

32 CST views continuing education as a means of keeping its staff both productive and happy. The firm has an in-house team devoted to creating and delivering customized learning programs. The company also pays for staff to take external courses. In addition, a companywide wellness program initiated in 2011—which includes health and fitness challenges, walking groups, exercise classes and a

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fair, all organized by an on-site wellness co-ordinator—has resulted in significantly higher employee engagement scores.

NATIONAL LEASING (National Leasing Group Inc.)

Winnipeg | Financing for business equipment

FTE EMPLOYEES: 282 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Nick Logan

33 National Leasing includes all its employees in the strategic-planning process. The purpose isn't just to inform everyone of the firm's direction but to capture staffers' ideas for improving processes and generating new revenue. Leadership-development programs help every worker map out a career path that provides opportunities and rewarding challenges. The company also treats "assimilation" as a dirty word: instead of making employees conform to set criteria, the firm tries to accommodate different experience and mindsets, allowing individuals to feel comfortable and respected.

FORENSIC TECHNOLOGY (WAI) INC.

Montreal | Forensic ballistics and firearms-identification

technology | FTE EMPLOYEES: 199

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Robert Walsh

34 When it comes to developing HR policies, Forensic Technology does a lot of listening; employees are heavily involved in the design of all staff-related programs. They also are encouraged to strive beyond their roles by enrolling in company-sponsored training. Other measures aim to boost employee pride in the organization, such as a peer-recognition program and a "CSI for a Day" outreach initiative, which sends staffers to secondary schools with high dropout rates to teach students about careers in forensic science.

INNOVATION PLACE (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corp.)

Saskatoon | Technology parks in three

Saskatchewan municipalities | FTE EMPLOYEES: 112

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Douglas Tastad

35 Internal communication is a huge community-builder engagement driver at Innovation Place. A comprehensive intranet is updated throughout the week with information of interest to employees and contains links to relevant reports, surveys, memos and training resources. The intranet also contains a corporate photo album, an employee directory—complete with a short profile of each staff member—and a section in which people can post anything from vacation photos to items for sale. In addition, the system enables employees to pose questions anonymously—big and small—to the president.

GEO. A. KELSON CO. LTD.

Newmarket, Ont. | Mechanical construction for the industrial,

commercial and institutional sectors | FTE EMPLOYEES: 409

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Michelle Kelson

36 This company tries to tap the problem-solving abilities of its employees by challenging staff to come up with solutions to the challenges of their work. An employee-innovation program rewards

KILLER CROWDSOURCING

To give staff more agency, **InteleX Technologies Inc.** (No. 10) crowdsources its strategic plan. Every year, each employee shares their top priorities for the year, along with their ideas to achieve them. Management then aggregates the data and uses the common ground to set corporate goals. "We have 13 goals for 2013, and they're all drawn from employees," says president and CEO Mark Jaine. "Everyone in the firm can see their ideas captured in the plan."



those who show creativity and innovation. Plenty of professional-development opportunities and access to state-of-the-art technology keep staffers sharp and excited about their work. And a special training program for young executives gives promising new talent the opportunity to plot out a career with the company.

NORWEST CO-OP COMMUNITY HEALTH

(Nor'West Co-op Community Health Centre Inc.)

Winnipeg | Co-operative health-care services

FTE EMPLOYEES: 57 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Nancy Heinrichs

37 Many employees at NorWest participate in cross-departmental committees and projects, which helps to build an environment of collaboration and trust while improving the participants' knowledge and skills. The firm maintains an open-door management policy, and managers regularly check in with staff to ensure concerns are promptly addressed. To foster continuous improvement, the company offers job shadowing and cross-training. A systematic knowledge-transfer process also keeps staff informed and empowered.

BEERBISTRO (99 Bottles Inc.)

Toronto | Restaurant | FTE EMPLOYEES: 47

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Brian Morin

38 At a restaurant dedicated to beer and beer-infused cuisine, an appreciation for suds is a definite prerequisite. Beerbistro takes things a step further by indulging employees' natural love of the brew with some serious hophead train-

ing. The company sends staffers across Europe and North America to visit unique breweries and attend festivals. Back home, it runs regular beer schools for employees. Beyond the bar, the firm offers medical benefits and an RRSP savings plan—both rarities in the restaurant industry—which further ratchet up employee appreciation.

TIC TRAVEL INSURANCE

COORDINATORS LTD. | Toronto | Travel insurance

FTE EMPLOYEES: 228 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: David Hartman

39 TIC administers internal surveys on a regular basis to make sure it's being responsive to the needs of its employees. As a result, the company has developed a list of policies and programs that match its staff's preferences. Like many employers, the firm offers strong wellness, benefits and pension plans. However, TIC also provides a popular work-from-home program and subsidizes the purchase of public-transit tickets to promote environmentally sustainable commuting.

STARTECH.COM LTD.

London, Ont. | Information-technology parts and accessories

FTE EMPLOYEES: 194 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Paul Seed

40 StarTech flies in employees from around the world for its annual One Team conference, at which employees at all levels gain an understanding of the firm's strategy and its successes. The event also gives everyone a chance to share ideas and criticism, all while building relationships with each other. A bonus: since the conference takes place on a Saturday, everyone is paid time and a half for the day and given another full day off in lieu. But that's just one day a year. The rest of the time, the manager of internal communication and employee engagement strives to keep staff informed and inspired.

(TIE) QUADRA CHEMICALS LTD.

Vaudreuil-Dorion, Que. | Chemical and ingredient distribution

FTE EMPLOYEES: 221 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Tony Infilise

41 Every year, Quadra employees help to set the firm's strategy and goals, then receive regular updates on the company's progress in achieving those goals. This way, staff feel involved in the process while being reminded of the larger purpose of their efforts. But the business does not rest on its engagement laurels. When a survey highlighted some employee concerns last year, the company set about tweaking its recognition programs, work processes and career discussions with employees.

(TIE) RÉAL HUOT INC.

Quebec City | Wholesaler of waterworks and sewer

systems | FTE EMPLOYEES: 52

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Sylvain Vachon

41 Réal Huot operates under the principle that every employee makes a difference. The firm employs many measures—including a kaizen-based decision-making process—to make sure everyone knows their individual role in achieving

company success. Furthermore, the company invites individuals with special strengths to participate in structuring the business plan. A professional-development program that involves annual training in both hard and soft skills, as well as a customer-service strategy that positions every staffer, regardless of position, as an ambassador of the company, makes employees feel empowered and engaged.

FURLANI'S FOOD CORP.

Mississauga, Ont. | Garlic bread for grocers and restaurants

FTE EMPLOYEES: 197 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Paul Kawaja

42 Furlani's encourages its employees to share their ideas in many ways, including internal focus groups, suggestion boxes and companywide meetings. Moreover, managers consistently remind their reports that employee input should be not only welcomed but sought out. And everyone in the company is encouraged to think about more than the bottom line: all decisions, no matter how minor, must factor in the personal, family and cultural issues of those affected by them.

DAVIS AUTOMOTIVE GROUP (Davis Properties

Ltd.) | Lethbridge, Alta. | Automotive dealerships

FTE EMPLOYEES: 369 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: John Davis

43 Davis Automotive Group has designed many initiatives to make sure leadership listens to staff concerns—not just the reverse. The annual employee-review process is structured to accept feedback from employees as much as it is to rate their performance. And the recent addition of an intranet program that allows employees to share information with their colleagues throughout the dealership chain has been a hit with staff and management alike. Engagement is high, but the firm keeps trying to raise the bar—it currently is reassessing its employee-recognition program to make it more meaningful for the recipients.

VISTA PROJECTS LTD.

Calgary | Engineering and procurement services for the

oil and gas sector | FTE EMPLOYEES: 354

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Alex Campbell

44 Work/life balance is a big deal at Vista Projects. Every Friday is a half-day so that staffers get more time with their families, and everyone is entitled to \$1,500 annually to further their education. The firm fosters a fun, social environment, supporting such employee-run initiatives as a charitable program for the needy and a shinny hockey team. And while staff are on the clock, they have incentive to excel: all-star performers are rewarded with leadership opportunities and shares in the company.

DESIRE2LEARN INC.

Kitchener, Ont. | Educational software

FTE EMPLOYEES: 581 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: John Baker

45 Desire2Learn employees are left with little doubt about why they do their work. New hires learn from the beginning about how what

they do affects learning around the world, and the employee-assessment process is based on linking individual performance with corporate goals and values. The workplace is friendly and stimulating; Desire2Learn did extensive planning to ensure its Kitchener headquarters is conducive to staff interaction and co-operation. The result is a modern, open-concept office that staff love working in, complete with lounges and cafeterias stocked with free, nutritious snacks.

NORTH SHORE CREDIT UNION

North Vancouver, B.C. | Financial services | FTE EMPLOYEES: 291

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Chris Catliff

46 This credit union has created a program to ensure new employees feel valued and engaged right from the start. It includes a two-day orientation and an "onboarding map" that outlines in detail expectations for new hires' first 90 days. In addition, rookies receive loads of training, delivered via classroom, computer and one-on-one sessions with more senior "peer trainers." NSCU also encourages everyone to recognize good work. One method that has proven very successful is an on-the-spot rewards program that allows employees to give their colleagues kudos for accomplishments large and small; the nominated employee immediately receives a \$15 gift card or a voucher for an hour of free time while on the clock.

SASKTEL INTERNATIONAL (Saskatchewan

Telecommunications International Inc.) | Regina | Software

and consulting services for telecommunications firms

FTE EMPLOYEES: 150 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Steve Sousa

47 SaskTel International gives its employees a tremendous amount of agency to shape the company. For instance, staffers who have worked on developing a new piece of software also get to name it, which fosters both pride and a sense of ownership. When any employee travels to meet with a client, he or she is given full autonomy to represent the firm. And staffers are heavily involved in organizing charitable endeavours. For example, when the firm sent a container of medical supplies to the island of Dominica, that was a staff-run initiative from concept to execution.

TESHMONT CONSULTANTS LP

Winnipeg | Electrical engineering services | FTE EMPLOYEES: 68

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Ralph Kurth

48 Supporting staff development is a priority at Teshmont. If a course or training program is in high demand, the firm pays to have it offered in-house. Employees enrolled in external courses benefit from financial support and related on-the-job training. Staff even can use their time in the office to work on training-related papers and assignments. In addition, 31 languages are spoken within the company, thanks to a progressive recruitment strategy built on an employee-referral plan and aggressive international searches.

PINCHIN ENVIRONMENTAL LTD.

Mississauga, Ont. | Environmental and health and safety

solutions for property owners and managers

FTE EMPLOYEES: 298 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Don Pinchin

49 At Pinchin, employees share the wealth. For more than 10 years, the firm has granted share ownership to staff based on individual contributions to its success. Today, almost 20% of employees are co-owners; these individuals are considered essential and tend to be company veterans. But this perk doesn't mean the rest of the staff are left out: non-owners are part of a profit-sharing plan that offers an annual payout. Frequent staff-appreciation events (including paintball excursions and spa visits) further improve satisfaction.

PHONAK CANADA LTD.

Mississauga, Ont. | Hearing instruments and clinics

FTE EMPLOYEES: 181 | CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Steven Mahon

50 Phonak Canada places a strong focus on identifying star players and developing their talents. Management maintains high expectations: employees must demonstrate strong performance and a commitment to continuous learning. In exchange, the firm will help staffers fulfil their career plans by supporting their professional development. This, coupled with a progressive organizational structure with rapid decision-making and flat hierarchies, keeps staff performance up and turnover low. ■

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