

# Creating worker loyalty presents new challenges

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A good job isn't always about the size of a pay cheque.

The companies that have earned a place on Canada's Top 100 Employers list offer a range of incentives that make their workplaces great, from simple touches such as fresh fruit in the morning to less tangible but even more important considerations — like an atmosphere where all voices are heard, respect is paramount and team strategy replaces rigid hierarchy.

It could be taking a break to watch a movie at Victoria's Abebooks; it could be a chance to skip out from the day's chores at Ecotrust Canada to catch fresh snow on the mountains; it could be catching a yoga class led by an executive vice-president at MacDonald Dettwiler and Associates; or practicing for a weekend gig at Radical Entertainment's onsite rehearsal space.

Canada's employers of choice share an innovative approach to attracting new employees and keeping the ones they have happy and performing at the top of their game.

"As it becomes more difficult to attract the kind of people you want, it is much more important from an employer's point of view to be seen as an attractive employer, an employer of choice," said Richard Long, professor of human resources at the University of Saskatchewan, author of *Strategic Compensation in Canada: Strategy, Practice, and Issues*, and a member of the academic advisory board for the CT 100 project.

It is not only about recruitment, it is also for their staff," said Long, who is currently on sabbatical at the University of Warwick in England.

"They are trying to create an atmosphere where their own staff can appreciate what they have and they can take pride

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Nina Cole, Ryerson University

in their company."

Long said being named as one of Canada's top 100 employers also improves a company's public image.

"For the general public, when they see a company is among the top 100 employers, the company is saying, 'we are a company you should do business with because we treat our employees well,' and as a business partner, they are saying, 'we are a straight shooter, a company that wouldn't have shady dealings.'"

As aging baby boomers are retiring, the succeeding generations that are filling their jobs don't share the corporate loyalty that may have marked their predecessors — a loyalty that survived only until the era of downsizing and restructuring.

"There is a new reality with the generations entering the workforce today," said Nina Cole, a professor in the School of Business at Ryerson University and a member of the CT100 academic advisory board. "They are a completely different group in terms of loyalty.

"All loyalties disappeared in the 1990s with downsizing. Some of the young peo-

ple coming into the workforce today saw their parents laid off after years with the same company. The next generation is saying, 'forget it, why should I be loyal — look at what companies do to people.'"

Job mobility is increasing as the demand for workers increases. Some sectors are harder hit than others.

"Call centres for example are working at being employers of choice," said Cole. "They have a very high turnover, people will move jobs at the drop of a hat.

"There is no inclination to be loyal and that is the reason companies are trying to be employers of choice."

At one time, employers didn't have to worry about such issues. There was always a lineup of talented people at the door, waiting for job openings. Now, depending on the sector, those openings may be going unfilled.

"When there were so many boomers in the workforce, employers didn't have to be on top of human resources issues," said Cole. "If someone didn't work out, there were a lot of people around.

"Now that situation is changing and companies have to take more seriously how they are going to retain people. It is not just about getting them, it is how to retain them."

The experts agree that monetary compensation isn't the overriding incentive. Employers of choice tend to pay in the top third of the average scale, but they aren't necessarily at the top.

"You can't retain someone with compensation for any length of time," said Cole. "It is more the experience they have day to day, their relationship with co-workers, particularly with their boss."

Kerry Jothen, a human resources analyst, said it remains to be seen whether the trend to employers of choice will outlast the current talent shortages facing many sectors of the economy.