

We're home to best employers

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Just as there is no one path to heaven, there is no one way to create the kind of energized corporate culture that engages employees and puts a company onto the 50 Best Employers in Canada List, organized by Hewitt Associates.

We discovered this by looking at three Mississauga-based companies that made the list this year.

You might think you have a good work ethic and a good attitude, but if your job was washing or delivering uniforms, would you be enthused about it? And the company that paid you?

Those aren't exactly the jobs that kids dream about landing when they grow up.

But the hundreds of people who do those jobs for Cintas Canada Ltd. do those jobs with great enthusiasm and identify strongly with their employer. This year the uniform supply company topped the list of Top 50 Employers put out by Hewitt Associates, a leading global human resources outsourcing and consulting firm.

Cintas has often made the Top 50 list since it began seven years ago, and that comes as no surprise to Regional Human Resources Director for Cintas, Angela Aubry.

"This business isn't sexy or exciting," says Aubry, "but people who work for Cintas are very excited about their jobs and this company."

Cintas employees are referred to as 'partners', and Aubry believes Cintas partners don't see their jobs as washing and hanging garments, they see themselves as serving customers.

The irony is that those partners doing the washing and hanging never come into contact with their ultimate customers. It is the corporate culture that makes that connection.

New hires are introduced to that corporate culture with training and orientation. Themes like respect, focus on the customer, celebrating success and communication are constantly reinforced. And when Cintas buys an existing company, those employees are given the same orientation as a new hire.

Cintas pay scales are above the industry standard, and the company matches employee RRSP contributions up to 20 per cent. But the money factor doesn't grab the hearts and minds of partners as much as the spirit of the company.

There are frequent meetings, and celebrating achievement is the norm throughout the 17 locations and among the 1,585 Cintas partners in Canada. (There are two facilities in Mississauga that have a combined workforce of about 200.)

All managers have to fulfill an annual customer awareness duty that has them working on delivery trucks and on the plant floor. It is also a way of keeping managers visible and in touch with front-line partners.

And finally the company tracks how well they are doing with customers and within the organization, ranking locations and service.

"We focus a lot on metrics," says Aubry. What doesn't get measured doesn't get done. And ultimately we all know that if we serve the customer well, we make a good living. Without the customer there is nothing. What we do is all very basic, but by keeping it simple, we do better."

It must work: what started as a small rag-cleaning business in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1929 has grown into North America's largest uniform supplier. Cintas has had 37 consecutive years of growth.

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has made the Top 50 Employers list for five consecutive years in part by how they address employees' issues of work/life balance.

GSK's latest initiative is bringing in a program called Generations at Work that includes Eldercare. Who better than a pharmaceutical company to understand the pressures of the 'sandwich generation' who are caring for aging relatives at the same time they are raising their own children and pursuing careers?

Aimee Israel, co-founder of LifeSpeak Inc. that creates the programs, says Top 50 employers like GSK understand that employees' personal lives don't end at their desks.

"Employers know the issues that affect their employees," says Israel. "Looking at corporate demographics shows whether they need help balancing parenting programs or eldercare programs. Employees are very appreciative of programs like Eldercare because they realize they're not the only ones going through this."

Helping employees understand that others are in the same boat is the first step, but Israel says this kind of program helps to foster a network of support among co-workers. That is just as important as the program's educational component.

GSK pays an annual fee to LifeSpeak which designs and executes a series of workshops for the company that include bringing in top speakers.

Investment company Edward Jones has made the Top 50 list for the past four years by encouraging career development. With employees spread across the country in hundreds of offices, the company has created a program of promoting employee engagement through career opportunities and training. Partnership and profit-sharing opportunities combine with a comprehensive program of training and technology investment to make sure everyone is enthused about what they do and the company that offers them the opportunities to advance.

"The consistency of achieving this honour year after year speaks volumes to the Edward Jones environment that gives associates a sense of achievement and fulfillment," says Chris Gordon, the Clarkson Village, Mississauga Edward Jones investment representative.