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Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures

Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures honourees for 2022. See FP11.
CEO honourees: Leading with purpose. See FP10.
Building an organization’s high-performance culture. See FP11.

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Cineplex team members, photo above; JAM staff, photo below: members of two of Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures, 2022. SUPPLIED

HARNESSING THE POWER OF PEOPLE AND PURPOSE

MARY TERESA BITTI
Postmedia Content Works

As Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures Awards celebrates its 19th year, a growing body of research is catching up to what leading organizational cultures have long understood: purpose matters.

“Purpose and culture have always impacted people and business, but the disruption of the last three years has magnified its importance,” says Marty Parker, president and CEO of Waterstone Human Capital and the founder of Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures awards.

On an individual level, purpose supports wellness. People with a clear sense of purpose are healthier, happier, and live longer.

On an organizational level, Harvard Business Review reports that 52 per cent of companies that align around purpose experience more than 10 per cent growth compared with 42 per cent of non-purpose-driven companies. They are more likely to grow globally (66 per cent versus 48 per cent) and launch more products (56 per cent compared with 33 per cent). Purpose-driven companies are also much more successful when executing transformation initiatives (52 per cent compared to 16 per cent).

“This year’s honourees are thriving in the face of uncertainty, economic and existential challenges and an evolving definition of work because they are focused on their people and their purpose. This isn’t necessarily about wanting to do good – although that’s part of it. The 2022 award winners have identified and clearly articu-



lated their organizational ‘why’ and they’ve aligned their people to it,” says Parker. “At the same time, people are in a period of reassessment, they want more meaning in their lives. They want to work with people who share their interests and values. They want a sense of community. What we’re seeing is that driving alignment through purpose leads to powerful outcomes.”

Here’s how this year’s winners are connecting people to purpose — and driving performance.

PRIORITIZING PEOPLE

When Todd Coleman first started thinking about building eStruxture Data Centers, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) was not something many people in the internet infrastructure world were talking about. For Coleman, it was fundamental.

“Even though we are infrastructure-oriented, this business is built on human relationships. I knew if we made people and culture core from the beginning and had people who don’t look like me or talk like me or come from the same background we would have more diverse perspectives, better conversations,

and ultimately better outcomes.” He was right.

Since its launch in 2017, eStruxture, one of this year’s Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures Mid-Market category winners, has grown into the country’s largest data center platform. In the past six years it has acquired and integrated six companies and achieved 10x growth.

Today, about 50 per cent of eStruxture’s executive team are women and about 55 per cent of the entire employee base are considered diverse.

Prioritizing people starts with the recruitment process. “We lead with culture. We are going to tell you what we’re good at, bad at, and what a day in the life looks like here: We let people make mistakes, everyone is a decision maker, we want them to bring their individuality.”

Formal and informal mentorship, support in achieving professional certifications, individualized career development, promoting from within and ongoing recognition are all helping people and the company grow.

BUILDING CONNECTION

Kristi Herold founded Emerging category winner JAM in 1996 to help people

connect through play. She has since grown the company into North America’s leading provider of adult recreational sports leagues and corporate team-building events.

At JAM, living its purpose means injecting playfulness and fun into everything it does. This includes how it communicates (e.g., fun job postings, Microsoft Teams “Banter” and “Shout Out” channels) welcoming new hires with a high-five welcome tunnel and swag, a daily seven-minute team huddle with each member of the 40-person team given a turn to lead, a company book club, quarterly elections of a company mayor responsible for creating social events, a flexible benefits package that allows people to invest in healthy activities, a monthly peer-voted core value award (an 18-inch bronze apple core trophy), company sports teams, monthly virtual events, loyalty celebrations, and more.

“Adding a playful element to real life work helps you get to know people as friends in the workplace. When you work with friends you are much more willing to be trusting, to be vulnerable, to ask for help, to be innovative.”

Over the past two years, Herold has expanded JAM’s

purpose to help companies connect their people and profit through play, just as JAM has done. Now, she’s on a mission to help every “workplace” become a “work-PLAYce” by sharing the behaviours that have set JAM apart. She’s even written a book: It Pays to PLAY – How Play Improves Business Culture.

LEADING WITH HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY

How do you get 10,000 employees across North America in a 100-year-old-plus company in a fast-evolving industry to move together to become Canada’s entertainment destination? At Cineplex, one of this year’s Enterprise category winners and a Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures Hall of Fame inductee, you bring like-minded people together, you are honest with them, and you build and breathe the One Cineplex culture.

“We treat ourselves as a family working together. It’s not about hierarchy. It’s about treating people how you would like to be treated,” says CEO Ellis Jacob. “That applies to all of the different areas of the company.”

At Cineplex, this takes the form of an open door to leaders, asking for and listening to input from people at all levels of the organization, regular town halls, theatre visits to meet with general managers and staff, and a rigorous recruitment process that includes having candidates meet with senior leaders as well as the individuals they will teaming up with so they get a good feel for the organization.

See CULTURE, page FP11.

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We Build High Performance Cultures

Corporate culture drives performance – it’s your company’s greatest asset. At Waterstone Human Capital, our team of high performance culture and human capital search leadership advisors offer services designed to meet your leadership training, recruitment, and culture and engagement measurement and assessment needs. On behalf of Waterstone, congratulations to this year’s Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures™ and Canada’s Most Admired CEO™ award winners.

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“THIS YEAR’S COHORT OF CANADA’S MOST ADMIRED CEOs COME FROM DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIES, INDUSTRIES AND BACKGROUNDS BUT THEY BELIEVE THAT HOW YOU DO THINGS DRIVES THE WHAT, AND THAT PURPOSE, CULTURE AND DOING SOCIAL GOOD IS A DIFFERENCE-MAKER. THEY ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT HELPING CANADA THRIVE AND THEY ARE SHOWING US HOW TO SET UP A MORE PURPOSEFUL AND SUSTAINABLE COURSE FOR THE FUTURE.

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CANADA’S MOST ADMIRED CEOs: LEADING WITH PURPOSE

MARY TERESA BITTI
Postmedia Content Works

Catastrophic weather events, COVID, social inequities, economic uncertainty. Today’s challenges are leading people and organizations to rethink priorities and seek more meaning and purpose in what they do.

“The world is checking itself. We know if we continue to live and work the way we do we are not going to have the same quality of life and so we are now asking ‘What’s important?’” says Marty Parker, president and CEO of Waterstone Human Capital and chair of the Canada’s Most Admired CEO awards program.

“This year’s cohort of Canada’s Most Admired CEOs come from different geographies, industries and backgrounds but they each believe that how you do things drives the what, and that purpose, culture and doing social good is a difference-maker. They are passionate about helping Canada thrive and they are showing us how to set a better, more purposeful and sustainable course for the future.”

Here, Canada’s Most Admired CEOs of 2022 share their thoughts on culture and leading with purpose.

PATRICK DOVIGI,
FOUNDER
AND CEO, GFL
ENVIRONMENTAL
INC.: ENTERPRISE
CATEGORY WINNER

What role does purpose play at GFL?

We founded the company in 2007 to be Green for Life. Our services include diversion of waste from landfills, recycling initiatives, creating a circular economy and sustainable environment for ourselves, for our kids and grandkids. Sustainability and sustainable initiatives are near and dear to our hearts and a key component of our executive employees’ compensation. We’ve grown into a North American leader in recycling, organics recycling, used water and oil recycling, with almost \$7.5 billion in revenues.

As a leader, what’s your role in crafting, building and promoting corporate culture?

We have 20,000 employees. I’m the cheerleader, supporting the individual groups across the company. I had a vision and it’s up to the team to buy into that vision, create a shared vision, and execute. The guiding principle here is to empower people to make decisions.

What critical aspects of culture are you focused on for the future?

Right now, 40 per cent of our executive team are women but on the driver side, it’s only about five per cent. This compares to two per cent for the industry as a whole. We are focused on attracting more women in the space. How do we create a supportive environment for women as well as men? How do we make sure they have uniforms that are made to fit them? We think we should be able to grow from five per cent to a minimum of 15 per cent in the next three to four years.

What is your best advice to leaders on building a high-performing culture?

Listen to the people in the field. They are the ones most impacted by decisions made in the executive office. Be adaptable. This will lead

to new ideas, brainstorming and making material change. **What’s inspiring you?**

I think we have the ability to be the best, most profitable, most sustainable environmental services company in North America. I’m not going to stop until we get to that point.

DONALD CLOW,
PRESIDENT AND
CEO, CROMBIE REIT:
MID-MARKET
CATEGORY WINNER

How have you built a culture of innovation and transformation?

We are committed to a culture of learning and development, which in turn enables innovation and transformation. Crombie is guided by a set of values, developed by our internal “Culture Club”, that include outperforming expectations, embodying integrity, caring passionately, delivering excellence together, and empowering one another. We have honest, robust conversations, and we encourage our teams to speak directly and respectfully with each other. Our teams build individual annual balanced scorecards, and Crombie invests time and money to help people grow as individuals. Our DEI initiatives focus on creating a space where everyone feels a sense of belonging, and we encourage diversity of thought throughout the organization.

How is your culture driving results?

Over the last decade, we’ve encouraged our teams to be visionary, and have delegated authority across the organization. Our culture of trust is further strengthened by hiring smart, ethical people, and further building their skills through education and development. The results driven by this team speak for themselves: we’ve outperformed peers in terms of total unit holder return over five-, 10- and 15-year periods. Thirteen years ago, Crombie was a \$1.5 billion enterprise; today’s enterprise value is approaching \$6 billion. Our team, culture, and guiding values have enabled this strong performance.

What is your best advice to leaders on building a high-performing culture?

Humility is more important than you think as a leader. Listen to your team. They are going to define the culture. Two of our core values are to outperform expectations and care passionately about others. It’s inherent in our team and is part of what they do and how they think.

What’s inspiring you?

Most recently, during Hurricane Fiona, some areas in Nova Scotia were without power for 14 days. Our offices ran off of generators and the team came up with the idea to open the facilities to the Crombie community. Families came in to have hot meals, showers, power up their devices, and spend time with their colleagues. In the long-term, people stay with an organization when they see the guiding values in action. The everyday actions of our leaders and employees have a meaningful impact on our team’s overall engagement, and that is inspiring to all of us.

BRENDAN KING, CEO,
VENDASTA: GROWTH
CATEGORY WINNER

As a leader, what is your



role in crafting, building and promoting corporate culture?

Culture is what you are versus what you want to be. Our culture matches our four core values: Drive, innovation, respect and agility. We have a lot of fun as we fulfill these. If you’re not good with change, this is probably not the right place for you. As a leader of a 700-person-plus organization, you can’t do everything yourself. I make sure the company has enough resources to execute the mission and live up to its leadership principles and values. I’m a big recruiter. Most importantly, I work on organizational clarity and alignment. We know where we are going to be today, but we also know where we are going to be next year, in three years, in 10 years, how we’re going to get there and how that helps our customers. I’m always communicating that.

What does high performance look like at Vendasta?

There are three things we look at: How much value do you deliver to the customer? How much value do you deliver to your team? And what skills do you apply to do that? We want to grow 40 per cent each year organically so we need our people to grow that same amount by always improving. People want to work with smart, driven people, and they want to grow together.

How is your culture driving results?

We have a very focused team. We’re all pulling in the same direction, and it shows in our results. People are excited to come to work every day. If I look back at our 10-year plan from 10 years ago, it was to get to \$100 million in sales. We’ve achieved that. In this last year, we grew revenues 50 per cent.

What’s inspiring you?

My latest memo to the team was about Amara’s Law, which says technology is often overestimated in the very short term but drastically underestimated in the long term. AI is now at the point where it’s going to be useful and change everything. I’m excited to see how it can help us deliver more value to our customers.

MUNI BOGA,
PRESIDENT AND CEO,
KUDOS: EMERGING
CATEGORY WINNER

What role has purpose played in building a high-performing team at Kudos?



When we first started, we wanted to make the world a better place with one thank-you at a time. As we dug into that concept, it became more about how do we enable people to become the best version of themselves and how do we allow them to grow and have a sense of belonging inside of organizations? We are an employee recognition company. Our team sees the impact that recognition has on our clients and they feel the impact of recognition themselves. They connect with that purpose; they believe in it.

How is your culture driving business results?

The way we work together is critical. When I think about our goals and what we are trying to achieve over the course of the year, we don’t just think this is the objective, this is the business strategy. But how we get there is defined by our values and our culture. They aren’t a placeholder or something that looks good on our website. They are something we use every day to help us work together. Before the pandemic, we were about 25 people. We’re about 70 people today. We typically achieve high-double-digit revenue growth each year.

What critical aspects of culture are you focused on for the future?

We’re always searching for new ways to add value. We do that by openly discussing our culture and listening to what our team needs in order to achieve their goals. In the past, culture just happened by default. The culture of the future is by design. But, it’s not a top-down mechanism, it’s about creating a leader in everyone and everyone represents the culture.

What is your best advice to leaders on building a high-performing culture?

Think about who you want to be to your people. That connection then goes back to the organization and its purpose and its values. Continue to build from there. When your people feel valued — appreciated, heard, and enabled — they have a true sense of belonging. Don’t stop listening.

What’s inspiring you?

My people inspire me. I see them grow and change and I see them learn and become the best version of themselves. When I see those moments, it means we’re doing the right thing.

ZAHID SALMAN,



PRESIDENT AND CEO,
GREEN SHIELD
CANADA (GSC):
BROADER PUBLIC
SECTOR CATEGORY
WINNER

What role does purpose play for you as a leader?

In 1957, a mother entered William Wilkinson’s Windsor, Ont. pharmacy with two prescriptions: one for herself and one for her daughter. When she could only afford one, she sacrificed her own health to care for her daughter. This led William to establish Green Shield as North America’s first prepaid drug plan and a not-for-profit social enterprise, with earnings reinvested to support ‘Better Health For All’.

This mission still guides us today. Nurturing this commonality among our employees is critical to drive organizational performance because giving back is more than what we do ... it’s who we are.

As a leader, how do you enable culture as a lever for growth?

Our culture is uniquely aligned with our purpose: the better we perform financially, the more we can reinvest to positively impact the health and wellbeing of Canadians.

We’re diversifying into an integrated health services organization — the first company in Canada to be a payer (offering insurance, administering benefits, and paying claims), and a provider (offering medical, mental health, and pharmacy services). This requires that we strengthen our commercial mindset, speed and agility and show employees how our earnings advance our social mission to foster the cultural connection to our purpose.

How is your culture driving results?

Our culture is characterized by a drive for strong business results, to fuel our social mission. Since launching our strategic plan in 2019, our gross revenue has increased over 50 per cent and our operating margin has increased over 500 per cent. Our ultimate measure of success, however, remains our impact, and we’re ahead of our target to invest \$75 million to improve the lives of one million Canadians by 2025.

Our success has been strengthened, in part, by the eight acquisitions we have made since 2021. These acquisitions enable us to directly offer our wholly owned health-care services, in addition

to our longstanding financial contributions, to support under-served populations.

What’s inspiring you?

Improving access to health care. We now have the means to greatly expand access (i.e., who can tangibly access the health-care services they need) via virtual care services. When we improve access, we lift the most vulnerable people in our population and enable Better Health For All.

Beyond access, as Canada’s first integrated health service organization, Green Shield is creating a new patient experience that puts the patient at the centre to promote better health outcomes. Health care is at a key inflection point and being at the forefront of an industry is inspiring.

JOHN RISLEY,
CHAIRMAN AND CEO,
CFPI VENTURES INC.:
LIFETIME
ACHIEVEMENT
WINNER

What role has purpose played in your career?

I didn’t start with some predetermined notion that what I was going to do was good for the world. The business (Clearwater Fine Foods) led us to social purpose. We were the first seafood company in Canada to embrace the sustainability label. This was an opportunity to be different and it was a huge advantage for us. If you think about our portfolio of businesses now, every single one has a social purpose. It helps us hire really good, smart young people who are very concerned about the output of their work.

As a leader, what’s your role in crafting, building and promoting corporate culture?

If you work in the business every day you set an example, and people tend to follow that. When it grows to 100 or 200 people and you’re not interacting with those people, the culture has already been established. You have an esprit de coeur that can be good or bad. If you think about all the businesses we started, Clearwater Fine Foods, Ocean Nutrition, or Columbus Communications, all those companies were pioneers in their field.

By definition, that means you are going to make mistakes and you have to empower people to take risks, make decisions, be accountable and move on.

What is your best advice to leaders on building a high-performing culture?

Surround yourself with the best people you can find and always be thinking outside the box. The greatest thing that happened to my brother-in-law and I when we started Clearwater was that we knew nothing about the industry. We were the first Canadian fishing company to ever hire a marine biologist. We looked at that not as a cost but as a way to better manage the species with which we were working.

What’s inspiring you?

There is so much to do. Climate change, the growing wealth gap — these are huge challenges with enormous opportunities. If you can make a contribution towards a solution, you’ll build an important business. Government can’t do this on its own. It can be an enabler, but it’s not a doer.

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Leveraging your organizational ‘why’ to build a high-performing culture

MARY TERESA BITTI
Postmedia Content Works

More than ever, people want an emotional connection to the work they do. They want to know they are doing something meaningful; that the tasks they carry out each day have an impact beyond achieving organizational KPIs and financial objectives.

And they want to be part of a community helping each other to make a difference.

In this new distributed world of work, purpose is the epicentre of culture. It is the bridge that connects strategy to results. And it's up to leaders to connect people to organizational purpose.

“Organizations have to ask: who can we be? What is the best version of ourselves and how can we craft our culture to help us get there? That has to be planned and purpose is a core part of that,” says Marty Parker, president and CEO, Waterstone Human Capital and founder of the Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures and Canada's Most Admired CEO awards programs.

“When people are aligned around purpose — and this speaks to employees as well as customers — they are less likely to leave. When you have alignment around your culture and purpose, when you're focused and working on it, you will achieve greater retention, higher outcomes, greater engagement, because people will have implicit joy in what they're doing.”

Purpose is the organization's “why” and it is increasingly becoming the key to



Marty Parker, above left, Nicole Bendaly, Lyn Currie, Waterstone Human Capital. *SUPPLIED*

attracting high-performing talent.

“Despite a softening of the economy and accelerating immigration, we are seeing a shortage of high-performing talent across the board. Great candidates are still entertaining multiple offers,” says Lyn Currie, managing director, executive search, at Waterstone Human Capital.

“Candidates are asking about purpose in the first meeting and winning companies are making it a key part of the recruitment process,” she says.

For example, job descriptions are shifting to purpose descriptions, i.e., why this job exists as opposed to what this job does. “People want to understand the impact they will create through their work, and want to ensure the impact will be meaningful and valued,” says Nicole Bendaly, executive director, Waterstone Culture Institute.

This doesn't stop when they're hired.

“Leaders need to lead from a place of wanting to understand what's meaningful to each of their team members, and creating a more meaningful experience and joy for them at work,” she says.

Here are five best practices to make a purpose-driven culture your differentiator:

■ Develop a compelling, authentic and honest value proposition that is well-articulated and on display through the recruitment process.

“Share your organization's why and how the role will help achieve the bigger purpose. Ask questions to determine shared values and characteristics that align to purpose,” says Currie. “Give candidates an opportunity to experience your culture by having them meet different people throughout the organization.”

■ Evaluate and assess how employees are adding value to the culture in the performance review process.

“At Waterstone we have a qualitative aspect of our own performance review process focused on assessing how we are living the values of the organization,” says Currie.

■ As a leader, make it a priority to understand what's meaningful to each team member. “Take the time to get to know team members and what gets them up in the morning, what they're excited about with respect to the impact they have through their work and how they see it contributing to organizational purpose,” says Bendaly.

■ Recognize, celebrate and reinforce purpose. “Be intentional. Start monthly team meetings by coming prepared with examples of how teams or individuals are contributing to the organization's purpose,” says Bendaly. “Share and celebrate these contributions. When we can see and feel that we're having a meaningful impact and that we're valued for it, that will drive engagement and

retention.”

■ Reinforce purpose in engagement surveys and stay interviews. A key aspect of purpose is open, honest communication and this should be exemplified in regular engagement surveys and stay interviews. Ask employees questions such as, In what ways are we currently living our values as a team? What can we do better? What's most meaningful to you about the work you do? What makes a great day at work for you? When people are aligned to a common purpose, the benefits cascade. You get more clearly articulated objectives, people are motivated, they feel valued, they know how they are making a difference and they work more effectively together.

“This doesn't happen by accident,” says Parker. “You can't be something that you're not, but if your purpose and culture are clear, you can be something you aspire to be.”

Living the values of teamwork, innovation and excellence

CULTURE

Continued from FP9

Most importantly, it's about living the values of teamwork, innovation and excellence.

“Culture is our differentiator,” says Jacob. “It helped us compete against VHS and DVDs when they first entered the space and it's helping us compete against streaming services. Now at Cineplex you can see a movie eight different ways. We are able to continue to innovate and evolve because of our focus on people and making sure things happen in the right way.”

CHAMPIONING EVERYONE TO BE THEMSELVES

Metrolinx, a 2022 Broad- er Public Sector winner and Canada's Most Admired Hall of Fame inductee, is more than just transit, says chief human resources officer Ramneet Aujla. “We feel that individual differences and unique stories are at the core of an innovative culture and positive employee experience. For us as an organization, it's important that staff feel safe and comfortable to be themselves and bring their whole selves to their role every day.”

To that end, the Govern- ment of Ontario agency responsible for co-ordinating and integrating public transit across the province has a very clear employee value proposition: “We are dedicated to bettering the lives of our team members.”

Day to day, Metrolinx is focused on ensuring employ- ees are supported in finding balance and wellbeing on and off the job and achieving their

personal and professional goals. In addition to provid- ing a wide range of health and wellness programs, child- care and elder care, tuition reimbursement, a compre- hensive suite of courses and leadership development pro- grams and employee resource groups, last year Metrolinx introduced a chief inclusion officer and built an inclusion team to actively support its diverse workforce.

“We know we can't just ad- vocate for equity-deserving groups. Actions and account- ability are important,” says Aujla.

In 2022, Metrolinx met its gender balance targets and in its most recent employee sur- vey, 80 per cent of employees reported they felt they can be themselves at work.

LINKING INDIVIDUAL MEANING TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL WHY

Make it Better. These are the first words you see when you walk in the door at well- ness product innovator Or- ganika Health Products Inc., a 2022 Growth category win- ner. “People don't just want to do their job well. They want to help make the world a better place. Our ‘why’ is to help people live health- ier,” says CEO Aaron Chin. “That resonates with every- one who works here and it's something we constantly re- inforce.”

Organizational objectives and key results allow every- one to understand Organika's priorities and see what every- one is working on, fostering a team dynamic of wanting to do well for each other. In 2021, Organika became cer- tified as a ‘Diverse, Equal and Inclusive’ workplace by the



Diversity for Social Impact group.

Company-wide personality profiles are available to all so everyone better understands how to best work with each other.

Chin gets to know each person at the organization through “coffee chats”, town halls, and weekly organiza- tional meetings to connect back to Organika's purpose. Achieving audacious goals, he has designed a positive environment to acknowledge the team's efforts with paid days off, improved benefits, team events and more.

Another key aspect of pur- pose: giving back. Organika offers paid time off to volun- teer. It has a corporate social responsibility committee that includes representatives from each department who host six to eight fundraising events each year in support of a number of local charities. Last year it launched a pen-



Celebrating Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures, 2022 honourees: Organika Health Products Inc., top, eStructure Data Centers, centre, Metrolinx GO employees, above. *SUPPLIED*

pal campaign connecting the team to seniors in retirement homes.

Chin draws a straight line from Organika's pur- pose and people to perform-

ance. “We're one of the fast- est-growing companies in North America. We own the number one market share for six different categories. Our culture is everything.”

CANADA'S MOST ADMIRABLE CEOS AND CULTURES OF 2022

CEOS

Enterprise Patrick Dovigi, Founder and CEO, GFL Environmental Inc. (Vaughan, Ont.)
Mid-Market Donald Clow, President and CEO, Crombie REIT (New Glasgow, N.S.)
Growth Brendan King, CEO, Vendasta (Saskatoon)
Emerging Muni Boga, President and CEO, Kudos (Calgary)
Broader Public Sector Zahid Salman, President and CEO, Green Shield Canada (Toronto)
Lifetime Achievement John Risley, Chairman and CEO, CFFI Ventures Inc. (Bedford, N.S.)

ENTERPRISE

■ Cadillac Fairview Corpora- tion (Toronto)
■ Capital Power (Edmonton)
■ Cineplex (Toronto)
■ Definity (Waterloo, Ont.)
■ OMERS, including Oxford Properties (Toronto)
■ The Oppenheimer Group (Coquitlam, B.C.)
■ Paladin Group of Compan- ies (Burnaby, B.C.)
■ Reliance Home Comfort (North York, Ont.)
■ Sleep Country/Dor- mez-vous (Brampton, Ont.)
■ TD Bank Group (Toronto)

MID-MARKET

■ Boston Consulting Group (Toronto)
■ Cactus Restaurants Ltd. (Vancouver)
■ eStructure Data Centers (Montreal)
■ HomeEquity Bank (Toron- to)
■ Klick Health (Toronto)
■ Pizza Pizza Ltd. (Toronto)
■ SmartSweets (Vancouver)
■ UNI Financial Cooperation (Caraquet, N.B.)
■ Wave Financial Inc. (Toronto)
■ Weston Forest (Mississauga, Ont.)

GROWTH

■ Active International (Markham, Ont.)
■ Alida (Toronto and Vancouver)
■ Dejero Labs Inc. (Waterloo, Ont.)
■ Entuitive (Multi-city)
■ Fengage Asset Manage- ment (Toronto)
■ Optimus SBR (Toronto)
■ Organika Health Products Inc. (Richmond, B.C.)
■ Scott Construction Group (Vancouver)
■ Vena Solutions (Toronto)
■ Zulu Alpha Kilo (Toronto)

EMERGING

■ Calvert Home Mortgage Investment Corporation (Calgary)
■ Isaac Operations (Toronto)
■ JAM (Toronto)
■ Jarvis Consulting Group (Toronto)
■ Juno College of Technology (Toronto)
■ Oak Bay Marine Group (Victoria, B.C.)
■ Orium (Toronto)
■ Ottawa Sports & Entertain- ment Group (Ottawa)
■ POD Marketing Inc. (Calgary)
■ Trend Hunter (Toronto)
■ Ultra Shine Group (Edmonton)
■ Vention (Montreal)

BROADER PUBLIC SECTOR

■ Arthritis Society Canada (Toronto)
■ CAAT Pension Plan (Toron- to)
■ Canadian Mental Health Association, York & South Simcoe (Newmarket, Ont.)
■ Daily Bread Food Bank (Toronto)
■ Fairview Parkwood Com- munities (Cambridge and Waterloo, Ont.)
■ Green Shield Canada (Windsor, Ont.)
■ McGill University Health Centre Foundation (Mont- real)
■ Metrolinx (Toronto)
■ Michael Garron Hospital/ Toronto East Health Net- work (Toronto)
■ Second Harvest (Etobicoke, Ont.)

CANADA'S
MOST
ADMIRABLE
CEO

CANADA'S
MOST
ADMIRABLE
CORPORATE
CULTURES

THANK YOU TO
the Canada's Most Admired
Board of Governors

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Marty Parker, President & CEO, Waterstone Human Capital

Vice-Chairs

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Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures™ Board

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Inspiring Organizations to Build
High Performance Cultures

Waterstone Human Capital is a leading cultural talent management professional services firm for organizations across North America that see culture as their single greatest asset.

We work with leaders from entrepreneurial-minded, high-growth organizations who see culture as their single greatest asset.

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“WHEN YOU HAVE OPEN AND HONEST COMMUNICATION, YOU CAN BETTER DEFINE HOW SUCCESS WILL LOOK GOING FORWARD, THEN DELIVER THE TOOLS AND MEANS TO ENSURE THE TEAMS CAN ATTAIN THEIR GOALS. WHEN YOU LINK THAT TRANSPARENCY AND CANDOUR TO FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING, THE RESULTS HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT. – ROBERT MOREAU, PRESIDENT & CEO, UNI FINANCIAL COOPERATION

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Employees in UNI's new Moncton, N.B. location that promotes environment-friendly consumption. UNI FINANCIAL COOPERATION PHOTOGRAPH

SOLIDARITY, RESPONSIBILITY, COURAGE

UNI FINANCIAL COOPERATION

KATHRYN BOOTHBY
Postmedia Content Works

UNI Financial Cooperation is an active contributor to a thriving and growing economy across New Brunswick and beyond. With values of solidarity, responsibility and courage, UNI helps deliver financial security and sustainable prosperity for the organization and its members and clients.

UNI's purpose as a financial cooperative depends on the ability of its people to deliver. Founded over 85 years ago, it is also imperative that the cooperative and its services remain relevant in a constantly changing world. A recent transformation within the organization is allowing UNI to fulfill both of those mandates. It is a transformation that has not only built a stronger, more resilient and agile organization, but one with a best-in-class culture. UNI has been recognized by Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures of 2022 in the Mid-Market category.

Transparency, candour and belonging are the watchwords for a winning culture, says Robert Moreau, president and chief executive officer. "When you have open and honest communication, you can better define how success will look going forward, then deliver the tools and means to ensure the teams can attain their goals. When you link

that transparency and candour to fostering a sense of belonging, the results have a significant impact."

UNI's recent transformation was a factor of evolving client expectations, explains Moreau. "As an organization, we must adapt to our members and clients, not the other way around. Understanding their needs of today and tomorrow is a fundamental principle of success. Part of that means having the right people in the right place and delivering modernized services in the right way. Once you get the human capital component right, the rest fall into place: vision, orientation and the how. It's also about putting those people first so they can provide the level of service expected by current and future clientele."

To that end, UNI has developed a corporate culture that motivates talent to engage, collaborate and live up to its values every day. By doing so, it reinforces its commitment to modernize the network continuously and to stay relevant for the future, as did previous generations.

Through its cooperative mission, UNI encourages and promotes citizen participation by supporting organizations that care about the region's arts, culture, sports, education and socio-economic wellbeing. It is a story of determined and driven founders and devoted people, shaping its employee experience with a focus on engagement, mobilization, learning and talent development.

"At UNI we have a

people-centric leadership, ground-up model, where employees come first. They are invited to participate in our vision of U-N-I (you and I) and working together in UNItY. We are also resilient and constantly moving forward, with entrepreneurial spirit and a strong commitment to the communities that support us," explains Moreau.

Redefining the organization, with employees fully involved in the process, led to UNI's values of solidarity, responsibility and courage. The buy-in to these values is strong, because they are representative of everyone in the organization — they came from within, notes Moreau. "These are the values that guide us and give us strength to challenge the status quo, and help us ensure growth both in our business and in ourselves."

To further solidify these values, and its people-centric approach, UNI invests heavily in talent and in growing the leaders necessary for cultural success from within.

"Being people-centric means focusing on learning, growing and emotional engagement. The primary contributors are leadership and values alignment," says Mario Patenaude, vice-president of talent management. "We are a great place to work, with an enviable culture — that's all about people. We treat our talent very well; in return, they perform well. We are a high-performance organization — our expectations are high — but the rewards are great. To ensure that con-

tinuity, we must first retain the great talent we have, then attract more. As we change and grow rapidly, it's the same with clients: retain, then attract. It is important to maintain that order."

On the retention side of the equation, UNI keeps the best people by remaining true to a mission anchored in the Acadian culture, while innovating and remaining competitive in the financial services industry. It has created a formula for success that has gained the organization its employer of choice status.

UNI employees have a host of opportunities to grow in their careers while maintaining work-life balance. LinkedIn Learning provides access to over 12,000 online courses; an in-house training portal allows for regulatory training, such as anti-money laundering and IT security; assistance in creating a career development plan helps employees pursue a wider range of positions within the organization, including content expert, team leader, and beyond. Leaders also have the ability to grow through Coaching Ourselves workshops, special guest speakers, and coaching sessions with UNI's dedicated in-house executive advisor, leadership development and coach.

Additional education incentives include subsidies for external courses directly and indirectly related to their role, as well as financial incentives for completing their courses and certifications.

With a small local talent pool, attracting great people to an organization can be

challenging; however, with the changing dynamics of an increasingly hybrid workforce, UNI is now able to reach farther to find great talent for its business. That said, it also competes for talent with credit unions, insurance companies and Canadian banks. To attract high-energy, high-quality employees, the total rewards package must continue to be competitive and equitable. With a vision to leverage their federal charter to its next evolution across Canada, that imperative becomes even clearer, notes Patenaude.

UNI fully understands the benefits of referral to help identify the best talent available in the employment market. As such, the organization offers generous referral incentives to existing employees, because high performers naturally attract other high performers who share the same values.

A central part of UNI's make-up is giving back, which has been in its DNA since the organization was founded some 85 years ago. A wealth of programs helps support causes and projects that create social, economic, environmental and cultural value for the exclusive benefit of New Brunswick's citizens and business community. Each week, several thousand dollars are redistributed as donations and sponsorships.

In 2021 alone, UNI gave back over \$2.5 million to more than 600 organizations to inspire, support and finance activities and projects contributing to the collective prosperity and wellbeing of



the province. In addition, the Voilà! Contest was created to encourage and support local organizations in the drive for change and wellbeing in New Brunswick communities, with close to \$300,000 awarded.

In 2022, 84 students benefited from UNI scholarships with more than \$80,000 awarded to support New Brunswick's students pursuing post-secondary education. UNI also contributed to L'Atelier des Copains Co-op Ltée, a non-profit organization that provides employment to more than a dozen people with special needs, helping to increase their work to recycle materials and help the environment.

Collaborative, engaged and adaptable. These words exemplify the people of UNI. "We have a wonderful team who work hard, give generously, and have a lot of fun. We are a family that shares in our beliefs, and boasts strong ties. As we continue to change exponentially along with the workplace, the industry and the world, our goal is to protect our culture along with our Acadian roots. It is our passion, our differentiator and our award-winning recipe for success," notes Patenaude.

"The Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures award reflects the engagement of our committed staff by demonstrating their constant leadership effort towards organizational development and talent management. A true honour to be part of this great team," concludes Moreau.

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Our employees, members and clients are at the core of our success!

THANK YOU for your commitment and trust.




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“YOU CANNOT BE A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL ENTERPRISE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE. AND YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND PEOPLE IF YOU DON’T ENGAGE, MOTIVATE, RESPOND TO AND CHALLENGE YOUR OWN TEAM MEMBERS. OUR CULTURE IS THE SUM OF OUR PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER TO EXPAND OUR SOCIAL IMPACT.

– ZAHID SALMAN, PRESIDENT & CEO, GREEN SHIELD

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The Green Shield executive committee (left to right): Scot Hopkins, Mila Lucio, JP Girard, Mark Rolnick, Zahid Salman, Joe Blomeley, Anela Nikic and Brent Allen, standing with over 200 care packages assembled by employees during a recent corporate training event in support of Hiatus House, a Windsor-Essex emergency shelter for women and children faced with domestic violence and abuse.

GREEN SHIELD PHOTOGRAPH

GREEN SHIELD CHAMPIONS BETTER HEALTH FOR ALL

GREEN SHIELD

DENISE DEVEAU
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Green Shield has always been driven by a social mission to champion “Better Health For All” and by a unique culture that emphasizes social impact over all else. Green Shield offers meaningful work that is a force for good, and with a culture rooted in social impact, it’s no surprise that the organization has once again been recognized as one of Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures.

BETTER HEALTH FOR ALL

Green Shield’s origins go back to 1957, when a mother entered Green Shield founder William Wilkinson’s Windsor, Ont. pharmacy with two prescriptions: one for herself and one for her daughter. She could only afford one and sacrificed her own health to fill her daughter’s prescription.

The desire to provide affordable access to pharmaceuticals led William to establish Green Shield as North America’s first prepaid drug plan. To extend Green Shield’s positive impact beyond its direct customer bases, the company was founded as a not-for-profit social enterprise, with earnings reinvested to provide increased access to health care services for local communities and underserved populations.

This mission still guides

Green Shield today and is why Green Shield attracts employees the company affectionately refers to as “noble challengers” — employees who are purposeful, ambitious, and focused on growing the business to fuel and accelerate its social impact efforts. Quite simply, giving back is more than what Green Shield does ... it’s who Green Shield is.

REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF CARE

After decades of establishing itself as one of Canada’s largest health and dental benefits providers, Green Shield’s culture is becoming even more admirable. Under the leadership of president & CEO Zahid Salman (winner of Canada’s Most Admired CEO in the Broader Public Sector category) and fuelled by the eight acquisitions made in the past two years (via Green Shield Holdings Inc.), Green Shield has doubled down on its commitment to health care by reimagining the health care experience, with the end user at the centre.

Now, as the only organization in Canada to be both a payer (offering insurance, administering benefits and paying claims) and a provider (offering medical, mental health and pharmacy services), Green Shield has created a new model of care built around the needs of their members to simplify their health journey and maximize health outcomes. This innovative payer-provider model unlocks the concept of “whole health,” connecting all the pieces of their members’ health care experience.

“As we build a new standard of care focused on the unique needs of our individual members, providing greater access to care for Canadians requires us to understand the unique needs of our customers, and apply a micro lens even as we expand our offerings nationally,” says Salman.

This new standard of care will create a simplified health care journey via a platform with unprecedented levels of integration, with services that talk to each other, where users can access their benefits administration and health care services effortlessly, anywhere, anytime.

“Our innovative approach to health care will enable Green Shield to provide greater access to convenient virtual health care solutions, creating a more integrated, efficient and seamless user experience,” says Salman. “Ultimately, the data and insights gleaned will lead to improved health outcomes for individuals and organizations, leading to improved employee productivity and quality of life.”

SOCIAL IMPACT AS THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Green Shield’s evolution has also enabled the organization to directly offer their new wholly owned health care services — in addition to their longstanding financial contributions — to support underserved populations. Green Shield’s free women’s mental health program leverages its online mental health offerings and has positively im-

pacted over 20,000 Canadian women. And, their oral health care program has positively impacted over 35,000 Canadians who struggle to access or afford dental care.

Green Shield is already ahead of its ambitious target to invest \$75 million and positively impact over one million Canadians by 2025, including a recent commitment to invest an additional \$10 million, for a total of over \$20 million over seven years, to boost access and coverage for oral health care for low-income, underserved communities across Canada.

“Social impact is our business,” says Salman. “An integral part of that is creating and sustaining a culture that prioritizes our social mission, because our main measure of success is the amount we reinvest and the number of lives we positively impact. The better we perform and the more successful we are as a business, the more we can reinvest and the greater impact we can have on the health and wellbeing of Canadians.”

Green Shield understands that its employees are motivated by more than earnings and revenues. Nurturing this shared ambition and purpose has been an imperative for leadership, because what truly unites their employees is the opportunity to contribute to meaningful work and be a force for good. To contribute to something bigger than oneself. To do what’s right, not what’s easy. All in service of Better Health For All.

“You cannot be a successful social enterprise without understanding people. And you cannot understand

people if you don’t engage, motivate, respond to and challenge your own team members,” says Salman. “Our culture is the sum of our people — in our head office, our regional offices, and our newly acquired businesses — working together to expand our social impact.”

CULTURAL EVOLUTION

To foster this connection to the organization’s values and social mission, employees are encouraged to actively support their local communities through in-house programs including an employee-giving platform where their donations and volunteer hours are matched by up to \$2,000 respectively. A coveted annual corporate award directs an additional \$2,500 toward the charity of choice for the employee who best personifies Green Shield’s culture of social impact.

Green Shield is equally committed to the growth and professional development of their employees. Green Shield’s training and support programs are designed to encourage personal and professional growth and optimize employee talents. Each year, employees are provided \$2,000 toward educational and developmental opportunities of their choosing, among other resources and tools.

In addition, the company has created a dedicated multi-year individual development program to maximize the potential of employees who have been identified as emerging top talent.

And further, the organization has made firm commitments to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion internally, most notably with a goal of 50/50 gender balance and a minimum commitment of 30 per cent of its leadership team reflecting its diverse values. “We walk the talk when it comes to inclusion and diversity by taking concrete action, while understanding the job can never be fully satisfied. More must, and will, be done,” says Salman.

Green Shield is now focused on preserving the best elements of its culture (purposeful, collaborative, customer-obsessed) with newer competencies that will enable growth such as a commercial mindset, speed, and agility.

“In the past two years, we have acquired multiple startups and have embedded their speed, agility and entrepreneurial spirit to our established culture to provide the best of both worlds: a startup mentality with the available resources of an established organization,” says Salman. “Other companies say they are different. We really are. There is no other payer-provider in Canada, and no organization in our industry that measures success by social impact. Green Shield’s longstanding innovative spirit and deeply ingrained altruism, combined with newer muscles of speed, agility and entrepreneurship will enable us to grow our business and reimagine the future of care while remaining committed to our social mission of Better Health For All.”

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Green Shield employees are **united** by our social mission:

Better health FOR ALL.



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2022

greenshield.ca

“EVERYTHING IS ROOTED IN OUR VALUES, ETHICS AND PURPOSE ‘TO POWER A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET’. THIS CULTURE OF CARING TOUCHES SO MANY ASPECTS OF OUR PROGRAMS AND SHAPES OUR OVERALL APPROACH TO CRAFTING OUR EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE. – JACQUIE PYLYPIUK, SVP, PEOPLE, CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY, CAPITAL POWER

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CULTURE-OF-CARING JOURNEY

CAPITAL
POWER

DENISE DEVEAU
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For Capital Power, a winner in the Waterstone Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures Awards Enterprise category, evolution is integral to maintaining a successful corporate culture. Whether looking at safety and wellbeing, career growth or work environment, its focus has been on maintaining a culture that resonates with its employees and the times we live in.

For years, Capital Power has prided itself on fostering a culture of caring. It is a culture that values inclusion and diversity, listening with open minds, and treating all people with respect.

“Everything is rooted in our values, ethics and purpose ‘to power a sustainable future for people and planet,’” says Jacquie Pylypiuk, senior vice-president, people, culture and technology. “This culture of caring touches so many aspects of our programs and shapes our overall approach to crafting our employee experience.”



Photo above, staff at Capital Power’s head office in Edmonton; photo below, at its Goreway Power Station in Ontario. CAPITAL POWER PHOTOGRAPHS

Capital Power is a growth-oriented independent power producer headquartered in Edmonton that builds, owns and operates high-quality, utility-scale generation facilities in Canada and the U.S. It’s focused on creating innovative solutions to electrify the world reliably and affordably, while protecting the planet for future generations.

Committed to being net zero by 2045, the company is making investments in carbon capture, utilization and storage to achieve near-zero emissions from natural gas generation, and it is expanding its renewables portfolio.

Capital Power’s culture of caring has been integral to the company’s continued success through good times and challenging ones, says Pylypiuk. “Our people are at the heart of our organization and are critical to delivering on our strategy and ultimate success. It’s no longer about the employee or worker. It’s about the person. Our culture has allowed us to develop high-performing and innovative teams that are committed to delivering results, and setting ourselves up for success in the long term.”

Focusing on the right thing to do has always been core to the company, she adds. “We don’t just do what is required by law or regulations. We go above and beyond. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, we looked closely at the health and safety of our workforce and implemented procedures that were over and above government and

health organization requirements.”

Capital Power actively engages its employees to understand their priorities and wellbeing. It also keeps its finger on the pulse of the dynamic internal and external forces shaping the modern workforce and workplace. As such, it frequently reviews and updates its employee value proposition to ensure its adapting to an ever-changing world, whether it’s the transition to clean energy or innovating its processes and equipment to support a hybrid work environment.

Flexibility at Capital Power has been a priority, says Manish Neupane, director, IS infrastructure and operations. He joined the company 10 months after graduating from university in 2004.

“Accommodating employees to allow that flexibility provides a great culture for us. Spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, we focused on setting up every employee for success. Today, the hybrid work environment works extremely well. To support that, everyone has a parallel set-up of laptop docks, headsets and monitors at home.”

The collaborative spirit is also extremely high, says Neupane. “At our Calgary office there are multiple business areas. We have a monthly standing breakfast where we can get to know our peers on a more personal level. Taking care of our employees has definitely paid dividends and delivered long-term benefits for all of us.”

“These are the experiences we support throughout our



employees’ journeys with us that leave a lasting impression,” says Pylypiuk. “We want employees to feel like they belong and that they can be their authentic selves in the workplace.”

Capital Power’s interactive Strong Start onboarding program is equally supportive in helping new employees set themselves up for success through e-learning activities, and interactions with senior executives — all of which helps them connect with the culture.

A new addition to the Strong Start agenda brings in external speakers from Nahayawin to provide Indigenous culture and awareness training.

Once fully on board, Capital Power’s talent development program provides succession planning and career

development tools to support growth and development opportunities aligned to their career paths. This is augmented by a range of coaching and mentoring programs, including a partnership with the Prosperity Project and its Rosie Initiative, supporting and mentoring Canadian women in the workforce.

The company is also setting goals to improve the diversity of its workforce. “We recognize that the power industry is male-dominated at every level,” says Pylypiuk. “We also realize the need to do more throughout the organization in hiring diverse candidates.” To date it has achieved 43 per cent women representation at the executive level and plans to increase the number of women in leadership and overall diversity, which will be measured as part of its long-term incentive program.

Another important element of the Capital Power culture is its commitment to community partnerships and corporate giving programs that focus on improving the quality of life where employees live and work. In 2022, the company contributed \$5.4 million in community support, with a focus on equity and culture, wellbeing and climate action.

It also has employee programs such as Empower Hours, which provides donation grants for their volunteer time, as well as programs for up to eight hours of paid volunteer time, and unlimited charitable donation matching per employee annually.

Never ones to settle for the status quo, Capital Power continues to provide mul-

multiple channels for employees to express their concerns and ideas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it hosted listening sessions where employees could dial in anonymously to answer questions and respond to polls. “They appreciated the opportunity to speak their minds, so it’s something we want to keep doing as the information we gathered was so rich,” says Pylypiuk. “That type of collaboration is what we really want to continue and be authentic in how we approach our teams and the work they do.”

Everything ties back to the company’s purpose and values, she adds. “Our people are embedded in our purpose — to power a sustainable future for people and planet. With each person’s employee experience, we want them to know and feel that they are at the forefront.”

“Our sustainability focus is something that is extremely important for me personally,” says Neupane. “I look at sustainability in how I conduct my day-to-day life in what I buy, who I support, and how I help my neighbourhood. Working here, I see an extension of that at a larger societal level. For me, this is a great foray into what the future holds in becoming net zero by 2045.”

Pylypiuk notes that the corporate culture journey has been at the heart of discussions over the past seven years and will continue to be moving forward. “Our culture of caring continues to evolve with the environment we are in. We take that responsibility seriously.”

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“WE EXIST TO HELP OLDER CANADIANS STAY IN THE HOMES THEY LOVE. OUR 300-PLUS EMPLOYEES FEEL PASSIONATE ABOUT THAT PURPOSE AND CAN GET BEHIND IT. ON OUR LAST TWO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEYS, THE HIGHEST-SCORING QUESTION WAS: ‘ALIGNMENT: I UNDERSTAND HOW MY JOB SUPPORTS THE COMPANY’S VISION OR PURPOSE.’ – SHERRY DONDO, HOMEEQUITY BANK

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CULTURAL ALIGNMENT TO PURPOSE CREATES THE WINNING FORMULA

HOMEEQUITY BANK

DENISE DEVEAU
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For HomeEquity Bank (HEB), a successful corporate culture is one that aligns its people with the work they do. That alignment has been a cultural hallmark for this winner in the Canada’s Most Admired Cultures Mid-Market category.

HEB has been widely recognized for its culture and performance through awards such as the Canadian Mortgage Professional (CMP) Best Employers Award 2021, the Wealth Professional Employer of Choice Award 2022 (as an Excellence Awardee), and a 5-star Mortgage Employer Award 2022 by Canadian Mortgage Professional.

For over 35 years, HomeEquity Bank has been the leading national provider of reverse mortgages to Canadians aged 55-plus. The company originates and administers Canada’s largest portfolio of reverse mortgages under the CHIP Reverse Mortgage brand.

Providing financial solutions to Canadians 55-plus has been a compelling cultural driver for employees since the company’s inception, says Sherry Dondo, senior vice-president and chief human resources officer. “We exist to help older Canadians stay in the homes they love. Our 300-plus employees across Canada feel passionate about that purpose and can get behind it. In fact, on our last two employee engagement surveys, the highest-scoring question (at 91 and 93 respectively) was: ‘Alignment: I understand how my job supports the company’s vision or purpose.’”

A recent interactive core values exercise reflected a passion for this purpose, culminating in five statements that capture the company’s commitment to excellence and the customer experience: 1. Customer-Focused. Passionate Advocates. 2. Courage to Act. Do the Right Thing. 3. One Team. One Vision. 4. Think Long-Term. Ever-Evolving. 5. Be Exceptional. Inspire Greatness. “Over the last few years we have dedicated a lot of time to articulating our values and embedding them across employee programs and communications,” says Dondo.

Since the pandemic, the bank’s work has become even more important to Canada’s aging population, as 93 per cent of Canadians 55 and up say they want to age



Photo above: members of HomeEquity Bank’s sales/marketing team; below, project management team. HOMEEQUITY BANK PHOTOS

in place. As a result, over the last two years HEB reported milestone results, experiencing a 30 per cent year-over-year increase in mortgage originations in 2022 alone.

“Our commitment to purpose was clearly evident during the pandemic,” says Dondo. “Despite dealing with their own personal challenges our employees really rallied together, making regular calls to clients to make sure they were safe and healthy, demonstrating that we are a caring and compassionate organization.”

2021 was a significant turning point as the first year HEB achieved over \$1 billion in reverse mortgage originations. It exceeded the numbers in 2022. In June of that year, the acquisition of HomeEquity Bank by the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan Board was completed. “That was a testament to the strength of our organization and our shared vision of enhancing the lives of retired Canadians,” she adds.

The company’s strong culture of care and respect for others has been driven from the top down by president and CEO Steven Ranson and senior leaders, who make a point of being visible, accessible and approachable. Ranson, for example, hosts monthly virtual town halls, where he personally reads out each recognition award.

Its “Be Exceptional. Inspire Greatness” core value is reflected in its strong culture of appreciation and recognition. In addition to a pay-for-performance culture, it offers a range of highly-valued formal and informal recognition programs



at the peer-to-peer, leader, department and corporate levels, as well as through an online social recognition platform called Appreciate!.

HomeEquity Bank has also transformed from a primarily in-office culture to a hybrid working model that values flexibility. “We embrace a culture of flexibility where employees can integrate their work and personal lives in a way that suits their needs,” says Dondo.

The model has been key to designing a brand-new head office in the Royal Bank Plaza at the heart of Toronto’s financial district, scheduled to open this summer. The new space incorporates a “res-imercial” vibe with a variety of functional workspace and collaboration areas that support new ways of working. “Our teams provided invaluable input in its design,” says

Dondo. “We surveyed them about their needs and desires, and how they wanted to work in the space.”

The downtown move is an exciting development, she adds. “The design is supportive of our hybrid work model. It’s dynamic and collaborative in a way that accommodates different work styles. It also provides a compelling reason for people to come together and will help attract future talent.”

As a relatively small group, it is essential to preserve HEB’s sense of community, collaboration and inclusion, she adds. “There has always been a feeling of inclusion despite people having been remote during COVID.”

HomeEquity Bank offers a holistic approach to its people programs that focus on employees’ physical,

mental, social and financial health.

Among its many wellbeing initiatives, HomeEquity Bank has recently introduced additional coverage for mental health, a wellness spending account, as well as brought in programs such as Bright Breaks, a virtual self-care offering that provides live and on-demand sessions around health and wellness.

HomeEquity Bank is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion to ensure all employees feel a sense of belonging, says Dondo. “Our voluntary DEI Council has established measurable mandates and is doing more each year to elevate education and awareness. We are always looking for new ways to engage our employees.”

Performance and professional development are

also integral to HEB’s cultural success. Expected behaviours that drive results are aligned to its value statements, and measured through an innovative performance management model, “Continuous Conversations”.

The discussions help drive performance, coach and motivate, as well as serve to gauge an employee’s personal wellness. “The model is based on shared accountability, where both leaders and employees provide feedback to each other in quarterly surveys,” says Dondo.

Attraction, recruitment and onboarding at HomeEquity Bank are also very much reflective of its culture. “Employees are our best source of advertising,” says Dondo. The company introduced an additional “booster” referral bonus of \$2,500 to help attract candidates for urgent or hard-to-fill roles. In 2022, close to 20 per cent of positions were filled through employee referrals. All new hires are invited to a round-table with the executive team within their first three months, where they have an opportunity to learn and engage in an open and honest conversation.

HomeEquity Bank sponsorships also align with its purpose. It has ongoing involvement with the Royal Canadian Legion, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (C.A.R.P.), and the YMCA of Greater Toronto’s Bright Spot initiative, which helps older adults overcome isolation and loneliness through virtual community connection programs. In addition, HEB launched the first-ever Home Care Heroes Award in celebration of Personal Support Workers Day in 2022.

The company also donates to causes in response to employee feedback. For example, it created corporate Red Cross donation campaigns with employee matching to support the India COVID-19 Appeal, BC Floods & Extreme Weather Appeal and the Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Appeal. It further supports employee-driven community and charitable efforts through community volunteer days, and a community leadership program.

Whether supporting the local community or helping ease the financial challenges for Canadians 55-plus wanting to stay in the homes they love, says Dondo, “It all comes down to our people feeling very aligned to our purpose. I have worked in different organizations, and this is the first place where I see all employees lining up behind such a strong, singular purpose.”

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2022

“WE HAVE EACH OTHER’S BACKS, AND ALONGSIDE THE CAMARADERIE THERE IS AMBITION, INNOVATION AND PASSION. SUCCESS CANNOT SIMPLY BE ABOUT PERFORMANCE METRICS. WE TRY, INNOVATE, AND SOMETIMES FAIL; THEN WE TRY AGAIN, INNOVATE MORE, AND WIN. WE LET OUR PEOPLE DO THEIR JOBS – WE WANT THEM TO UNLEASH THEIR CAPABILITIES. – PAUL GODDARD, CEO, PIZZA PIZZA

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RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

PIZZA
PIZZA

KATHRYN BOOTHBY
Postmedia Content Works

With a mantra of ‘Always our best food, made especially for you,’ Pizza Pizza has been delighting palates since 1967. Along the way, the organization has grown to more than 730 restaurants across Canada, and become a trusted brand and leader in the food-service industry. However, long before that familiar orange and white box arrives at the door, a diverse and talented team makes it happen with a recipe for success that continually moves the organization, its people and its products forward with innovation, passion and ambition.

At Pizza Pizza, high performance comes from strong leadership, industry-leading technology and meaningful learning opportunities that allow the entire team – from head office, to franchisee, to kitchen and delivery staff – to grow and reach for new opportunities. To that end, over the past five years Pizza Pizza has made a fundamental shift to deliver a culture centred on listening and purposeful change that is meaningful to its people and ongoing success.

The catalyst for that culture shift began at the top, building a winning leadership team with the ability to gauge the changing climate of the workforce and understand the steps necessary to move the organization forward.

True leadership means being visionary, empathetic and willing to do any and all of the jobs you ask of others, says chief executive officer Paul Goddard. “It’s about leading by example every day, being confident without arrogance, showing what you can do through quiet civility, and how you treat and bring others along with you. It’s about making the tough decisions when you have to, while being kind and principled, so the team understands why those decisions have to be made. And, it’s about growing a team of future leaders that will help take Pizza Pizza to the next level.”

Since 2015, the company has made serious strides in building that second generation of leadership. The energy and passion evident in the existing workforce led to a growth in leadership primarily through internal promotion. This signalled that Pizza Pizza was ready to promote from within and make dramatic changes to ensure its long-term viability. Those who had been with the organization for a long period saw broader opportunities for personal growth. That said, new skill sets from outside were



Above, staff at the Pizza Pizza head office in Toronto. Below, Pizza Pizza executives (from left) Amar Narain, Christine D’sylva, Adrian Fuoco and Chuck Farrell, in a mock restaurant at the company’s head office. *NICK KOZAK, POSTMEDIA*

needed in marketing and human resources to ensure the organization remains current, connected and relevant. A new chief operating officer role was also created. “By 2018, the culture had moved to a place where we could see excellent potential,” says Goddard.

Today, Pizza Pizza’s culture has gone beyond excellent potential to become a winner – as a recipient of Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures of 2022 Award, Mid-Market category.

That winning culture comes from an entrepreneurial and collegial environment, combined with a willingness to take calculated risks, notes Goddard. “We have each other’s backs, and alongside the camaraderie there is ambition, innovation and passion. Success cannot simply be about performance metrics. We try, innovate, and sometimes fail; then we try again, innovate more, and win. We let our people do their jobs – we want them to unleash their capabilities and know that their contribution is leaving a footprint on the organization.”

Pizza Pizza people are humble, hungry and smart, adds Amy Silverstein, senior director of people. “Humble because we employ a team-first mentality bound by integrity and respect; hungry because we are driven and innovative; and smart because we have a strong ability to take the pulse of what’s happening around us, think

about the next steps, and work together while sometimes having challenging conversations that can drive success. These three words are the key ingredients for the RECIPE principles and PIE objectives we embrace every day.”

- R: Respectful Relationships and Recognition
- E: Empowerment of Employees
- C: Communications and Community
- I: Integrity and Initiative
- P: Pride and Performance
- E: Enthusiasm and Enjoyment
- P: Profitability
- I: Innovation
- E: Engagement

Positive increases in Pizza Pizza’s annual employee feedback “PIE Talk” surveys can be attributed to prioritization of these principles and objectives over the past 12 months. “Engagement through PIE Talk has made the single biggest impact on our team members and has led to the implementation of other important programs, including leadership development and performance initiatives. An engaged workforce providing meaningful, actionable feedback is a win for everyone, and delivers an environment that we want to be a part of every day,” says Silverstein. “If engagement is our winning formula – whether times are successful or challenging – consistency is our secret sauce. We live our RECIPE principles, we set goals that drive our PIE objectives, and

we develop and help each team member succeed, one conversation at a time.”

As well as delivering a quality product across the country, Pizza Pizza is making a difference in communities, large and small, through a robust corporate social responsibility program.

Sustainability has always been front and centre. As a start, three wind turbines have been installed at head office, each generating 6kW of energy. Rooftop photovoltaic solar panels generate another 6kW. An 84-battery array stores these clean-energy sources to power the organization’s IT data centre backup system. Lighting in all corporate buildings has been retrofitted, reducing energy use by 75 per cent; and a highly reflective cool roof reduces summer air conditioning loads, thereby eliminating 4,200 kg of CO2 annually.

Not one to sit on its laurels, Pizza Pizza is determined to take sustainability to an even higher level with an integrated approach that prioritizes decarbonization, diversity and good governance. A recently formed committee is also working to deliver an ‘always on’ year-round strategy to support major ongoing initiatives.

Because pizza is a perennial family favourite, the company has long maintained a priority for giving back focused on the education, health and wellbeing of children.



Since 2008, Pizza Pizza’s Slices for Smiles Foundation has been contributing to local children’s hospitals through the Children’s Miracle Network and Canada’s Children’s Hospital Foundations. Since its inception, the organization has raised almost \$4 million to date.

The Michael Overs Memorial Scholarship promotes post-secondary education in honour of Pizza Pizza’s founder. This year, it has also joined the Merit Award Bursary Program, which provides financial awards to Grade 11 and 12 students who have been selected based on grades, work ethic, resilience, contribution to community and engaged learning. Franchisees support locally, or partner with head office, to co-fund or lend support to an initiative. A dedicated Pizza Pizza team member reviews submissions from communities, not-for-profit organizations, the general public or franchisees to determine eli-

gibility for donation or sponsorship.

Additional initiatives include: Movember; PRIDE Toronto; PRIDE Montreal; Second Harvest; and Salvation Army. Most recently, Pizza Pizza donated to flood relief in Pakistan, and worked through the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, donating to help affected populations in Ukraine, along with giving 900 iPads to Ukrainian families and schools.

How will Pizza Pizza’s corporate culture continue to grow?

“A company’s culture will never be perfect, but it can always get stronger,” says Goddard. “This award is our ticket to entry. Now the questions become: How do we get to the next level? What can we learn from our customers? How can we increase employee satisfaction? What more can we do in the community? We are jumping into the unknown, and that’s the fun part.”

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“WE ARE ALL COMMITTED – REGARDLESS OF SENIORITY OR TITLE – TO THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION, RESPECT, INCLUSION AND RESULTS ORIENTATION. IT’S A STRONG CONFIRMATION OF OUR VALUES AND CULTURE, AND A TESTAMENT TO THE INCREDIBLY TALENTED PEOPLE WE HAVE IN OUR COMPANY.

– FABIAN RICHENBERGER, EVP, COMMERCIAL INSURANCE & INSURANCE OPERATIONS, DEFINITY

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MAKING INSURANCE BETTER

DEFINITY FINANCIAL CORPORATION

KATHRYN BOOTHBY
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Canadians count on Definity and its family of brands to deliver during some of the most challenging times in people’s lives. The property and casualty companies operating under the Definity umbrella include Economical, Sonnet, Petline, and Family Insurance. Definity has also built a winning corporate culture, one that delivers for its employees and enables them to bring a superior experience to clients. It is a culture that has been recognized by Canada’s Most Admired Corporate Cultures of 2022 in the Enterprise category.

The greatest contributor to receiving this award, and the success of the organization, is a function of everybody recognizing and supporting the concept that insurance is a team sport, says Fabian Richenberger, executive vice-president of commercial insurance & insurance operations. “We are all committed – regardless of seniority and title – to the importance of collaboration, respect, inclusion and results orientation. It’s a strong confirmation of our values and culture, and a testament to the incredibly talented people we have in our company.”

Throughout the past couple of years, while working to maintain the financial health of Canadians and supporting 3,500-plus employees during a continuing global pandemic, the organization achieved some significant milestones. These included the 150th anniversary of Economical Insurance and the transition from a mutual insurance company to a public company, Definity Financial Corporation. The latter was achieved through the largest initial public offering (IPO) of 2021 and second largest in the history of the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX).

During this significant period of change (IPO, 150th anniversary, and COVID-19), Definity’s engagement index increased 26 per cent since 2019. “These colliding events offered a unique opportunity for us to build on an already collaborative environment and fully realize one of our key values: working together to win together,” says Marc Viola, vice-president of talent and culture. “That meant communicating purposefully not only about the journey, but what we each needed to do to reach our goals. By including employees in the vision for our future, listening, and building on their experience within the organization, we have created the buy-in and enthusiasm that will help us continue to succeed.”

Leading up to the IPO,



Photo above: Definity employees from personal insurance, translation, regional technical processing team, commercial insurance, and Sonnet, in the Montreal office. Photo below: Definity employees raise the flag for Pride Month at head office in Waterloo, Ont. *DEFINITY PHOTOGRAPHS*

Definity created the ‘Life as a Public Company’ campaign to inspire, engage and educate employees. Information primers, ask-me-anything sessions, town hall meetings and newsletters provided the opportunities necessary to understand the changes taking place, and what it would mean to everyone. By the time the IPO took place, fully 88 per cent of employees understood the rationale for demutualization, as well as what was required of them to succeed as a public company.

What’s more, all eligible employees became owners immediately when the company gifted each with \$500 worth of Definity shares upon their IPO. Then going forward, all employees can participate in a share-matching program. New employees joining Definity since the IPO are also invited to become an owner on their day one with a \$250 grant of shares.

Definity’s culture is centred around its North Star, which includes a purpose to help clients and communities adapt and thrive; the ambition to be one of the most innovative property and casualty insurers in Canada; a promise to make insurance better; and values that come from employee ownership, inspiring customer confidence and working together to win together.

The North Star and its values are brought to life internally through an employee promise based on CARE (Collaborative, Ambitious, Rewarding, Empowering). Brigid Pelino, SVP & chief people & culture officer, applies this to new ways of



working and adds, “We believe that a highly flexible employee experience creates a competitive advantage by supporting our culture of CARE and promoting our high-performance and high-engagement culture. We have the highest trust in our employees to work in a way that allows them the flexibility they need while maintaining our industry-leading work.”

Clearly, it’s working. In a recent employee survey, 90 per cent said they feel a real sense of purpose in their work.

In 2020, Definity launched CultureU to help employees feel connected to its values. Through this program, employees engage in a discussion with colleagues about culture and values, and share examples of how these can be lived day to day.

Culture Champions help individuals relate to their role and impact. “The business leaders selected as Culture Champions have the conviction to make a difference, courage to help change entrenched routines, and communication skills to clearly and persuasively articulate

why culture is so important. If we look at this holistically, it’s also an excellent leadership development opportunity,” notes Viola.

By the end of 2021, the program had seen 100 per cent completion to over 3,500 employees.

This is not a one-and-done exercise, however.

To recognize the exceptional ways in which employees exemplify these values while making insurance better for their colleagues, brokers, customers and communities, in 2022 Definity initiated the CEO Awards. Says Nan Oldroyd, associate vice-president of employee experience: “I was filled with pride to discover, as I read each one of the 200-plus nominations we received, how employees are exhibiting our values and making a difference inside and outside of the organization every day.”

Individual and team awards included recognition for the winners and also for a chosen charity, aligning its values of rewarding high performance and also engaging in supporting the communities.

Definity’s commitment to environment, social and governance (ESG) is equally strong, with the company’s first ESG report being released in 2022. The program is driven by three guiding principles: to act sustainably; activate employees; and inspire positive change. Public commitments have been made that align with these principles, under the banners of people, communities, and the environment. They include:

■ At least 30 per cent women and 15 per cent Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, LGBTQ+, and/or persons with (dis)abilities at the vice-president and executive leadership team levels by 2026;

■ To achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in the operations and investment portfolio by 2040 or sooner.

With a clear understanding that diversity makes everyone stronger, Definity is focused on building a dynamic, high-performance culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging. The organization aims to attract and nurture the best and brightest

from a wide variety of backgrounds and lived experiences. A commitment to IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility) is demonstrated by the ongoing involvement of senior executives, led by president and CEO Rowan Saunders. The members of the IDEA advisory committee (IDEAAC) reflect diversity across positional levels, business units, regions and backgrounds. All executive leadership team members play a sponsorship role with IDEA.

“IDEA was an initiative that needed no business case for the leadership at Definity. It was immediately embraced with passion,” notes Oldroyd, who leads IDEA at Definity. “There is a profound commitment from the company to create an environment for the equitable development and growth of talent, as evidenced by our publicly shared goals.”

The work continues. Definity aspires to be a leader in ESG and IDEA. Lessons learned from the pandemic have also given Definity another target, Oldroyd says. “We are working to really get hybrid right to have meaningful moments in person and flexibility to work remotely.”

Culture is not a human resources program – it must be viewed as a business initiative, states Viola. “That is the level of thinking which has supported our journey and led to the recognition we have recently received. We know that as a team, we’re doing something very special at Definity. That includes caring deeply about our employees and empowering them to win.”

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“YOU HAVE TO DEDICATE A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY TO MAINTAINING A CULTURE. AT THE SAME TIME, WORKING IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY IS MEANT TO BE FUN. WE PUT A LOT OF EMPHASIS ON THAT. YES, WE WANT TO SCALE THE BUSINESS, BUT WE ALSO WANT EVERYONE TO ENJOY THE RIDE.

— ANDREW LATCHFORD, PRESIDENT, CACTUS CLUB CAFE

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WHERE EXCELLENCE AND FUN GO HAND-IN-HAND

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DENISE DEVEAU
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Andrew Latchford, president of Cactus Club Cafe, understands the ins and outs of the company from the ground up — literally. He began his career 27 years ago as a busser and worked his way through all the positions it has to offer. Now he is approaching the one-year anniversary in his role as president.

Founded on Vancouver’s North Shore in 1986, Cactus Club Cafe, a winner in the Canada’s Most Admired Cultures Mid-Market category, has grown to become a recognized hospitality leader and innovator, operating 31 restaurants across Canada and constantly evolving the concept of casual fine dining. Today it has more than 6,000 front-line and head-office employees.

Reflecting on his tenure, above all else Latchford is proud of the celebrated ‘Cactus culture’ that has played an instrumental role in shaping the company’s success. “Our culture has organically developed over time by the people working for us — it’s that simple. Over the past 35 years, the strategy has been to create the space for our culture to grow and evolve.”

Looking to the future, he has solidified four leadership philosophies to continuously grow the Cactus culture and take the company to the next level: trust, transparency and empowerment; fun and excellence can co-exist; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; and egoless team players.

In addition to these philosophies are Cactus’s four core values that define who the company is and what matters most. The first, ‘Above and Beyond’, speaks to “living” service excellence. ‘Attitude Determines Your Altitude’ is second — with Latchford’s tenacious attitude and career trajectory from busser to president embodying this value. The third is ‘Kaizen’ — a philosophy of continuous improvement. At Cactus, “kaizenning” is a verb, which is routinely applied to everything from daily job functions to large-scale organizational change. Number four — ‘It’s Your Business’ — speaks to the pride, ownership and accountability every employee demonstrates in everything they do.

A key to sustaining a successful culture is a relentless focus on being an employer of choice, says Latchford. “Creating an amazing work environment is about hav-



ing great people to work for. People don’t quit companies, they quit people — so we invest heavily to make sure our leaders are very well trained, capable, and caring.”

Cactus’s culture-building efforts are reflected in the fact that since 2010, they have been named one of Canada’s Top Employers for Young People, and has recently been recognized as one of the country’s Best Workplaces for Mental Wellness, Inclusion, Today’s Youth, and the Retail and Hospitality Industry. In 2022 it was also named a Great Place to Work for Women for the fourth time for its initiatives to support women in leadership roles.

There have been critical turning points that have shaped the Cactus culture as it is known today. For example, when the company transitioned from a few restaurants to several, complete with a head office with hundreds of employees, leadership realized the company was no longer just a restaurant culture but an organizational one, says Latchford. “As we scaled the business, communication was becoming more challenging and silos were beginning to form. We started to think about our cultural rituals and how to apply them as we changed from a small business to an enterprise mindset.”

The pandemic was another important transition for Cactus and the industry at large. “When the lockdowns came in March 2020, we had more than 6,000 employees and basically no revenue; that was not a good day at work,” says Latchford.

While they lost many hour-



Top photo: At Cactus, all team members are called Business Partners (BPs) to reflect the company’s core value of “It’s Your Business”. Here, BPs participate in a pre-shift huddle at their Toronto location. Photo above, left: With 68 years at Cactus between them, three members of Cactus’s longstanding executive leadership team celebrate Andrew Latchford’s 25th year with the business at the Cactus Choice Awards. Photo above, right: Having participated in Pride parades for more than a decade, Cactus BPs celebrate at the 2022 Vancouver Pride Parade. CACTUS CLUB CAFE PHOTOGRAPHS

ly employees, they recognized the cultural equity in long-standing team members and made the conscious choice to keep salaried employees intact, he says. “We recognized the challenges of restarting and wanted to hit the ground running with the right people as soon as we could. After the lockdowns, we had to go back to the things we know, creating connections and promoting a good culture. We just knew we had to do it in a different way, and figure out how our culture could be preserved in a different environment.”

An integral part of that was unleashing the power of its people at all levels. “We realized there was more to be gained by sharing our vision rather than keeping trade secrets tight, so we amplified the concepts of trust, transparency and empowerment,” explains Latchford. “We have great people and our executive team doesn’t want to stand in their way. Our goal is to harness the power of the organization by sharing information and resources to em-

power our people to lead the business. That’s the bet we are making.”

He believes a lot of great ideas get lost in larger organizations. “That is why we continuously strive to break down barriers and promote communications and co-operation to make sure all our team members are heard. We consider all employees, from new hires to the senior ranks, as ‘Business Partners’ (BPs), a term that reflects their role as key figures in every area of the organization.”

A picture he often shares to explain their new mindset of empowerment and agility is a school of fish in the shape of a shark. “That is how we envision ourselves. People want to have autonomy in their roles, but also need to learn collective discipline. Like racing cars, the fastest companies need the best brakes.”

Consistency and recognition are key. “We reward and recognize people based on our values all the time,” says Latchford.

Reward initiatives include

the Peak Performer Program, in which managers nominate employees for their exceptional mindset and living the core value of ‘Attitude Determines Your Altitude’. The annual Cactus Choice Awards celebrate top-performers from throughout the company. Further, it holds the We Are Cactus Awards to recognize employees who have reached milestone anniversaries with the company. And the monthly Kitchen Partner (KP) Awards offer financial rewards to kitchen partners whose restaurant met food cost, labour and food sale targets.

As they continue to grow their teams, Cactus’s four core values serve as evaluation metrics in candidate interviews and are instilled in the training from day one, as well as integrated into ongoing employee programs and annual reviews.

Hiring from within, providing mentorship opportunities, and supporting professional development are also fundamental to the company’s cultural strength.

One great example is how the company consistently supports aspiring chefs by funding their Red Seal Certification, currently sponsoring 125 apprentices.

Community support is another key part of the Cactus culture. The company supports partners that resonate with both guests and team members, including Make-A-Wish Foundation and various Pride societies across the country.

“We also encourage individual restaurant teams to support causes of the communities they operate in, and they can apply for head office to match their contributions,” says Latchford.

At the end of the day, there is no magic bullet when it comes to culture, he notes. “You have to dedicate a lot of time and energy into maintaining a culture. At the same time, working in the restaurant industry is meant to be fun. We put a lot of emphasis on that. Yes, we want to scale the business, but we also want everyone to enjoy the ride.”

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